MCC survey addresses election's 'pivotal issues'

By Maria Wiering

mwiering@catholicreview.org

State redistricting and an early primary election may cause voters to have more questions about the names they find on their ballot April 3. The Maryland Catholic Conference's voter survey seeks to address the queries of Catholics, as it has done each election year for at least two decades.

Candidates for U.S. Congress answered whether they agreed or disagreed with statements on policy issues ranging from conscience protections to foreign poverty aid in a MCC survey, now available online at mdcathcon.org.

"(The surveys are) an important tool for helping voters know who the men and women are that are asking for the privilege of representing them as an elected official," said MCC executive director Mary Ellen Russell. "It's important for voters to know where the candidates stand on a broad range of issues, so they can be educated when they go to the polls."

The survey is one of the more important activities the MCC undertakes, Russell said.

"The responsibility of voting is critically important. Every vote counts, but it's equally important that voters are well informed when they go to the polls, and they understand the positions of whom they're voting for," she said.

The survey's breadth of issues shows how nonpartisan the Catholic Church is, Russell said.

"The issues the candidates are asked to address do not fall neatly in the lines of political parties or allegiances," she said.

In addition to the "agree" or "disagree" responses, candidates were also invited to share why a Catholic should vote for them. Statements ranged from descriptions of

candidates' parish involvement to their political philosophies.

"Catholic voter(s) have placed a high priority on social justice. In Congress, I will focus on these issues to helping created (sic) a more just society for Americans," wrote John LaFerla, a Democrat running for a seat in the House of Representatives in District 1, which includes portions of Baltimore, Carroll and Harford counties. He lives in Kent County on the Eastern Shore.

"As a person of faith, a firm adherent to the Constitution, and a true conservative, I will continue to uphold our Judeo-Christian ethic, and put 'people and principles over party and politics,' " wrote Corrogan Vaughn, a Baltimore-area Republican U.S. Senate candidate, weaving in his campaign slogan.

The MCC often receives calls from voters interested in where a candidate stands on a particular issue, Russell said.

"As the conference, we are not in the position to speak for the candidate, so this gives the opportunity for the candidates to speak for themselves," Russell said.

Each candidate received the survey by e-mail three times and received at least two follow-up phone calls. The survey rate of return – 58 percent – was slightly lower this year than in previous years, which the MCC attributes to an earlier primary election. Still, the MCC is pleased with the response, Russell said.

"A number of the issues that the survey addresses are pivotal during the upcoming elections, and some candidates are very eager to ensure that voters know their position on the issues," she said.

Of the responses received, 21 were from Republicans, and eight were from Democrats.

The MCC encourages voters whose candidates did not respond to the survey to contact the candidates directly to learn about their positions.

"The candidate survey helps voters to do some of the work for them, but it's critically important for voters to do their own research where a candidate does not respond," Russell said.

Early primary voting centers will be open March 24 to 29.

Know your district

Think you know your candidates? Think again – state redistricting may have changed your incumbents and candidates. Visit the Maryland Catholic Conference's webpage at mdcathcon.org, select "Find Your Legislator" on the homepage, and input your address. Voters registered to vote in the primaries whose district has changed should have received a voter registration card in the mail.