

Wise voting and the common good

Father John W. Crossin, OSFS/CNS

Love for neighbor is essential to following Jesus. It is essential to Catholic identity. Love for others in the community expresses itself in concern for the common good.

This love is preeminently practical. Each of us is called to act like the Good Samaritan — to try to serve those in need in very concrete ways. Service to the unborn, the hungry, the naked, the imprisoned, the elderly — all those in need — is essential, not optional. In them, we see Christ.

In practice, we must discern our call to serve. Who is God asking me to love in a special way in this phase of my life? How can I use my time and talent for others?

In answering these questions, we make a specific choice to do something to serve someone. One person I know delivers lunch to shut-ins one day a week; another facilitates the work of a Catholic lawyers' organization.

A commitment to Christian love extends beyond our immediate, hands-on service. We try to create a community where love abounds. Thus we concern ourselves with good citizenship.

Good citizenship draws some of us into public service. This is preeminently local. One member of my family serves on her town council. Work on events such as the Independence Day parade or projects such as the repair of local sports fields may not be glamorous, but it is essential for building strong, life-giving communities.

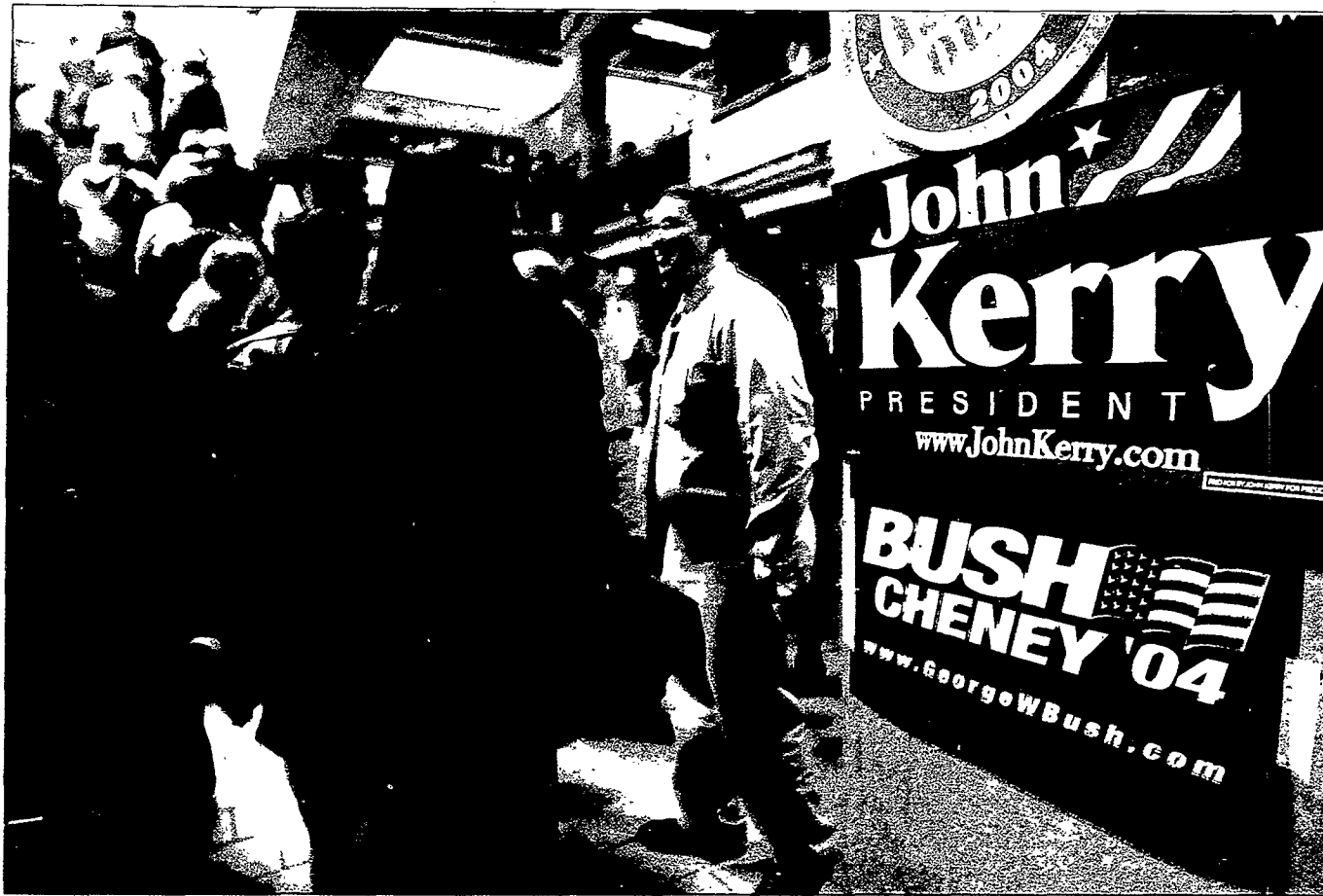
Good citizenship calls all of us to wise voting. Wise voting presents us all with some particular challenges.

Media reports tend to stress the self-interest of voters. The predominant media model is economics. We cannot go for long each day without hearing of the movement of the stock market averages. Voters often are presented as "voting their pocketbooks."

The challenge in the midst of this constant repetition is to remember love of neighbor. The Catholic has an important, but limited, self-concern.

A second challenge is our own emotional life. We may have a strong commitment to one political party or the other. Often this relates to our personal experiences or those of our parents. This affective commitment can slip into voting "my party no matter what." The challenge is to step back, put aside our emotions and try to make a clear judgment about whether voting for a particular person serves the common good.

Getting information to make in-



Nancy Wiehede/CNS

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formed judgments about candidates might be difficult as well. Commercials, presentations and brochures tend to emphasize certain parts of a candidate's record, leaving out others. Sometimes information given does not tell the whole truth. Media presentations may favor one candidate over another.

Thus, we Christian voters need to go to some lengths to inform ourselves about the candidates' stands. Consulting a variety of sources can be helpful.

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In state or national campaigns, getting information about issues and character can be more difficult. We are presented with a jumble of conflicting views. Sorting this out can take time.

If the third challenge is informing ourselves, a fourth is wisely discerning the bearing of Catholic faith on our decisions. Catholic faith requires us to "form our consciences" in the light of church teaching.

Church teaching is deeply rooted

In a Nutshell

God has given us gifts we are expected to use not only for ourselves, but also for others, for the common good.

Love for neighbor in the community expresses itself in concern for the common good.

A commitment to the common good extends to good citizenship and to voters' responsibilities. We are faced with making wise decisions in light of church teaching.

in Scripture and tradition. The community through its leaders takes the riches of this heritage and applies them in the contemporary world. Respect for human life throughout the life cycle and concern for the common good are characteristic of this application. (For more details, see the statement "Faithful Citizenship," published by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, at www.usccb.org.)

Our community is well known for its clear stands on moral issues. To name a few:

- We reverence the life of the child in the womb and oppose the "right to

choose."

- We favor service to the poor, for example in providing health care.

- We favor strengthening international institutions to resolve disputes among nations.

- We advocate strengthening heterosexual marriage and the family.

Since most candidates do not reflect the totality of Catholic views on moral issues, we are faced with making wise decisions.

As noted above, good judgments involve getting the best information possible, re-examining our prejudices, understanding church teaching and seeking to love our neighbor as ourselves.

These judgments also involve:

- Consulting our spiritual friends for their best judgments.

- Praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

We approach the moral decision of voting in a prayerful and deliberate manner. Sometimes we may differ from one another on who is best. We do agree on the importance of loving our neighbor through our personal commitment and as voting citizens.

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