



One Voice for Public Policy

MINNESOTA DISTRICTS

LUTHERAN VOTER INFORMATION GUIDE

Fall 2020

*Prepared by the members of the Minnesota North and South
Districts—LCMS Public Policy Advisory Committee*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
2020 LUTHERAN VOTER INFORMATION GUIDE	4
A Christian way of resolving an age-old dilemma.	4
I. Regarding Life Issues.	6
Abortion	6
Assisted Suicide	6
II. Regarding Marriage, Family, and Sexuality	7
III. Regarding Religious Freedom	8
IV. Regarding Parental Choice in Education	8

INTRODUCTION

This November, we'll again have the opportunity to exercise our citizenship as we cast ballots for various elective offices. In the process, we'll have the opportunity to ask candidates where they stand on the important issues of the day as well as to express to them our opinion on those same issues. Indeed, as Christians who are called to "love our neighbor as ourselves," we have a special responsibility to take an active interest in political matters and, ultimately, to vote for candidates we believe will best serve the common good.

As individual Christian citizens, we have the privilege of holding and expressing opinions on the full spectrum of public policy issues. However, as the institutional Church, we in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), limit our "political speech" to four specific areas of public life:

1. Life issues
2. Issues of marriage, family, and sexuality
3. Issues of religious freedom
4. Issues of parental choice in education

We who serve on the Public Policy Committee of the Minnesota Districts hope that in the weeks ahead, you will take the time necessary to inform yourself about these four areas of public policy as you decide whom you will vote for in November. With that goal in mind, we have developed this resource to serve as a simple, brief description of what the Bible and our church body, the LCMS, have to say concerning these four issue areas and to offer a few simple questions you might consider asking those running for public office.

Asking these or similar questions of the candidates will serve two purposes. First, it will help the candidate understand which issues are most important to you and the viewpoint you hold on those issues. Second, it will allow you to more accurately evaluate which candidate is more likely to reflect your views and better serve the common good. To that end, it will also be helpful for you to familiarize yourself with the political platform of the party with which the candidate affiliates by going to that party's website. For those who would like access to a more traditional voters' guide that has polled and collected the responses of all the candidates for State and Federal office on these and other issues, we would direct you to the website of either the Minnesota Family Council (www.mfc.org) or Minnesota Concerned Citizens for Life (www.mccl.org).

This is not an exhaustive resource intended to cover all the issues or their many complexities. Rather, our goal is simply to give you a tool to help you begin the process of becoming a better, more God-pleasing steward of your citizenship and to help you encourage others to do the same. God's blessings as you put your love of God and neighbor into action this fall.

The Members of the MN South and North Districts

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Prior to examining the four specific public policy areas the Church speaks to, it seems prudent to address a challenge which, though not unique to this election season, is causing our members a significant level of anxiety. That is, it would seem helpful to offer some guidance for those voters who find that the candidate whom they might prefer (or whom they find least objectionable) in terms of personal characteristics is not the candidate who represents the policy positions they believe are best. To that end we offer these words of counsel.

A Christian way of resolving an age-old dilemma

In a constitutional republic such as ours, we are given both the legal privilege and the moral obligation of voting. It is one of the greatest blessings we enjoy as citizens of this nation and one which should be highly valued and regularly exercised. That said, it is not always an easy task.

It is not easy for a variety of reasons. First of all, because it requires us to devote additional time or energy (which may already be in short supply) in trying to understand a wide variety of issues—many of which are foreign to us or simply don't interest us. Secondly, voting isn't easy because we, the voters, are asked to sort through myriad competing public policy solutions offered by the various candidates and their parties, not all of which are laid out in the kind of straightforward and transparent manner we would like. And finally, voting is not easy because it forces us to deal with an age-old dilemma: namely, if one has to choose between a person, a candidate, who is liked personally and the kind of policies that are thought best, which should take higher priority? In other words, if a person has reached the disturbing conclusion that the personal qualities preferred in a candidate and the policies thought best are not found in the same person, which takes precedence?

Of course, there is nothing particularly new in this circumstance. As long as there have been elections, Christian people have been frequently confronted with the reality that the person whom we prefer or find least objectionable to us personally is not the one whose policy views align with our own. In which case, Christians are left with the challenging task of resolving that tension and ultimately casting one vote.

The person or the policy . . . which is more important? How is a person supposed to decide? Here, we'd like to suggest consulting Jesus' words from Mark 12:31 as a means of sorting out which consideration should be of higher or lower priority in the life of a Christian. In that passage, he is asked by one of the teachers of the law, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" To which Jesus replies, "The most important commandment is this: love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . soul . . . and strength. And the second is this: love your neighbor as yourself."

It's hard to imagine Jesus being any clearer than that. When it comes to our relationship both with God and with our neighbor, it is love that must be the controlling factor. To God we owe our complete love and trust, and to our neighbors we owe our best effort in doing whatever is

most loving for them. In short, it is love that should both motivate the baptized child of God to engage in this process called politics in the first place . . . and it is love that should guide our decision-making. Whatever decision reflects the greatest love of our neighbors, whatever results in the greatest benefit to our neighbors, that is what should control our actions—both as we deal with them in daily life and as we enter the voting booth.

So then, for Christians, the question quickly becomes: are my neighbors' interests better served by the candidate I judge to be the better person or by the candidate I judge to have the better policies? This, of course, still requires the making of a decision, but at least it is a decision based on biblical criteria.

Interestingly, Luther himself addressed this question in his commentary on Deuteronomy 1:13-16. Regarding whether it is better to choose a worldly-wise but personally flawed leader or a pious but less worldly-wise leader, he said:

The reasonable question has been [asked] whether it is better to have a good but imprudent ruler or a prudent but personally bad ruler? Moses here certainly calls for both a good and prudent ruler. However, if both qualifications cannot be had, a prudent ruler who is not personally good is better . . . because a [personally] good one rules nothing but is only ruled—and only by the worst of people. Even though a prudent but personally bad ruler may harm good people, he never the less rules the evil ones at the same time, and this is more necessary and proper, for the world is nothing but a mass of evil people.

(Luther's Works, Weimar edition, 14, 5534)

To be sure, Luther did not live in a constitutional democracy as we do. However, much of his counsel does seem applicable since human nature has not changed in the intervening 500 years. So clearly, we would like to have a ruler who is both personally good and likeable and who pursues good and beneficial policies. But, where it appears that a choice must be made between the two—between good character and good, effective policies—Luther would point us in the direction of the latter. Ultimately, he says, this is what shows the greater love for the neighbor.

This is by no means meant to endorse or commend the poor character of any leader, nor is it meant simply as a blanket endorsement of any one party's platform. Nonetheless, in a prevailing two-party system, where governmental power is delineated in a three-branch system of checks and balances, there is the need for conscientious Christian voters to be informed and intentionally exercise a framework of evaluation regarding the candidates for whom they may vote, as well as the policies and principles they would likely enact. The goal of this guide is to provide just such a framework and to urge you to exercise your civic duty to vote.

I. Regarding Life Issues

ABORTION

The LCMS holds (1979 Res. 3-02A) that abortion is contrary to God's Word and is not an acceptable moral option, except to prevent the death of the mother.

Suggested questions to ask candidates:

1. As a candidate for public office, do you believe that abortion, except to save the life of the mother, is wrong and should once again be made illegal? Will you use your elected office to actively pursue that end?
2. Do you believe that Planned Parenthood, the nation's largest abortion provider, should continue to receive either state or federal funds?
3. As a legislator, would you oppose giving pro-abortion organizations special access to students in public schools for purpose of sex education, often called Comprehensive Sex Education, or other worldview indoctrination, such as critical race theory?

ASSISTED SUICIDE

In recent years, many states, including Minnesota, have had legislation introduced that would make it legal for doctors or other medical providers to prescribe medications that intentionally cause the death of their patient. In the LCMS, we strongly oppose this both because of the sanctity of human life (1995, Res. 6-02) and because assisted suicide usurps God's role in determining the number of our days and opens the door to a host of negative effects, including abuse of the elderly and disabled. However, since we are sensitive to the reality of human suffering (emotional, psychological, and physical), we also advocate for the improvement of and access to comfort (palliative) care and strongly encourage our members to be active in providing healing, encouragement, and hope to their neighbors who are experiencing sufferings of various kinds so as to remove the desire to end one's own life.

Suggested questions to ask candidates:

1. As an elected leader, would you vote to allow doctors to legally prescribe medications that will intentionally cause the death of their patients?
2. As an elected leader, will you support legislation that will improve palliative care for all those suffering from emotional, psychological, or physical pain?

II. Regarding Marriage, Family, and Sexuality

In the LCMS, we believe that God created this world and everything in it. We also believe that He has infused a deep order within that world, both in its physical and social dimensions. This is an order that God has revealed to us both through natural law, which is knowable by all people through human reason, and through the revelation of the Bible. We believe that pure reason and revelation are always in ultimate harmony, though we are well aware that our sense of reason is often distorted due to our sinful human nature. Therefore, our view of human sexuality is shaped primarily from the witness of Scripture and secondarily by the application of human reason as tutored by our Christian faith.

So informed, we hold that while all people are equal in dignity and worth, humans were intentionally created to be one of two complementary kinds, namely male and female, and therefore we stand opposed to those who seek to erase or minimize the distinction between male and female persons or make them fluid concepts.

We also hold that marriage is always and only between one man and one woman and therefore we cannot accept the notion that so-called “same-sex marriage” is a part of God’s intended order.

In addition, we oppose any efforts to limit the speech of counselors who are responding to a person’s request to help them resolve issues of bodily acceptance (sexual dysphoria).

And finally, we hold that any form of pornographic use of the human body denigrates both the producer and the consumer of it by objectifying the human body. Indeed, there are now clear scientific links between the increasing consumption of pornography in the culture and the dramatic increase in sex trafficking. Therefore, we urge those in government to take active steps to restrict pornography and its resulting harms.

Suggested questions to ask candidates:

1. Do you personally believe we are created beings and that there is a God-intended social order to which we personally, and as a society, should conform and which the laws of our land should reflect? Or, in your view, is there no such order to be conformed to?
2. Do you think it is proper for the government, at any level, to pressure its citizens into accepting a view of human sexuality that denies God’s good design in the social world by normalizing transgenderism and gender fluidity?
3. If elected to office, will you work to protect the rights of K-12 parents both to easily monitor what is being taught to their children regarding marriage, family, and sexuality and to withdraw their children from such instruction if they feel it necessary?
4. With regard to issues involving transgender persons in school settings, do you understand that while we are called to show respect and have compassion for those who struggle with matters of sexual identity, the governing principle should be one which

sees maleness and femaleness as a natural division in human society and that we should structure our schools accordingly, particularly with respect to matters of personal privacy and bodily safety?

III. Regarding Religious Freedom

In the LCMS, we believe that in the civil realm, each person has the freedom to make decisions about their religious beliefs and practices free from outside coercion, especially by the government. We see this as a freedom consistent with what the Bible teaches and which is specifically stated in the United States Constitution. We understand this religious freedom to guarantee citizens not only the right to believe as they wish, but also the freedom to speak and act according to what they believe, not only in the privacy of their homes and in their churches, but also in the public square and in the course of their daily lives. In fact, we believe that this freedom of religion / conscience serves as the foundation for every other freedom named in the Constitution. Therefore, we believe it improper to elevate any other concerns (such as concerns about non-discrimination) over the fundamental right of religious freedom. We also strongly support the Constitutional provision (Article IV) which would prevent the use of any kind of “religious test” for political / judicial office or government employment.

Suggested questions to ask candidates:

1. How important is religious freedom to you personally?
2. In your view, is our freedom of religion a restricted freedom (that is, limited to our private lives or within a church setting) or is it an expansive freedom (allowing people to fully live out their faith in daily life)?
3. Do you fully support the 1993 (Federal) Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) which currently protects people of faith from having the exercise of their faith unnecessarily restricted by the government?

IV. Regarding Parental Choice in Education

In the LCMS, we understand that providing the monetary resources to educate all children, through taxation, is an important function of the State. In so doing, great benefits accrue, both to the individual being educated and to society as a whole. Providing the monetary resources for education, however, does not mean that the State should be the sole, or even the preferred, provider of educational services. In fact, throughout our history, there have been many different types of schools from which parents have freely chosen and that have provided high quality educational services.

Indeed, all of these are “public schools” in the sense that they all educate for the public good. Some of these schools are non-religious (secular) in nature and some are religious. Because the

State is constitutionally required to show no favoritism, either between religions of various kinds or between religion and non-religion in general, it follows that the State should not be permitted to bias the decision of parents for or against religious schools. And yet, that is what the State of Minnesota currently does. By collecting money for education from everyone (both religious and non-religious people), and redistributing that money only to those children whose parents choose a non-religious (secular) form of education, it clearly biases the decision of parents against the choosing of a religious education and in favor of a non-religious education. This, we contend, is improper under both the First and Fourteenth Amendments.

Indeed, in the Supreme Court's *Trinity Lutheran v. Comer* ruling (2016) and its *Espinoza v. Montana* ruling (2020), it was clearly stated that denying to religious citizens a benefit that is offered to all other citizens is a violation of the federal Constitution. Therefore, we strongly encourage the State of Minnesota to support the educational choices of all parents equally by changing its funding practices to allow funds to follow all students to the school of their parents' choosing, whether that school be religious or non-religious.

Suggested questions to ask candidates:

1. As a candidate for state office, do you think it is right for the government to fund education in a way that makes it financially more difficult for parents to choose a religious school than a non-religious school? Are you willing to support changes to school funding that will honor the educational choices of all parents equally, including the choice of religious schools?

For more information about our public policy efforts, visit mnsdistrict.org/public-policy or email Rev. Fred Hinz at fred.hinz@mnsdistrict.org.

