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American voters say urgent moral issues are peace, poverty and greed

Catholic voters ultimately turned-off by single issue messaging of conservative Catholic leaders

Washington, D.C. – A new poll released today by Zogby International on the results of last Tuesday’s election shows that American voters think the urgent moral issues facing our country are peace, poverty and greed – and that Catholic voters overwhelmingly think that issues of economic justice are the greatest moral crisis in the United States today.

Dave Robinson, executive director of Pax Christi USA, a national Catholic human rights organization, said that these numbers show that voters, particularly Catholic voters, choose their candidates on a wide range of values, and resist attempts to characterize their political identity in one or two issues.

“Though it’s clear that a portion of the electorate voted solely on issues like abortion and gay marriage, this poll shows that the vast majority of voters, especially Catholic voters, are influenced by a wide range of issues,” said Robinson. “Despite attempts to characterize Catholic political identity in one or two issues, Catholics recognized that there are a broad range of issues that their faith calls them to vote on; issues like economic justice, the war in Iraq, health care and more.”

The Zogby poll shows that when voters were asked to list the moral issue that most affected their vote, the Iraq war topped the list (42%) – more than tripling the number that chose abortion (13%) or gay marriage (9%). Also, when asked to choose the most urgent moral crisis facing the U.S., voters chose ‘greed and materialism’ (33%) and ‘poverty and economic justice’ (31%) twice as often as abortion (16%) and gay marriage (12%).

Catholics also followed this trend. Asked the question of the greatest moral crisis facing our country, 31% of Catholics chose poverty and 31% chose greed, compared to only 20% who chose abortion, and 11% that chose same-sex marriage. Further, more Catholic voters were turned off by messages from conservative leaders trumpeting ‘non-negotiable’ issues, as opposed to Catholic groups who held up a broad range of moral issues. According to Zogby, 25% of voters said that conservative Catholic messages touting ‘non-negotiable’ issues made them more likely to vote for Sen. John Kerry, whereas only 20% said these messages made them more likely to vote for President George W. Bush. Fifty-six percent said these messages had no effect on them at all.

“These numbers show that Catholics do not want to be told who to vote for,” said Bishop Gabino Zavala, Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles and Bishop President of Pax Christi USA. “Rather, our job as church is to help Catholics formulate their political conscience on the broad range of issues that are at the heart of promoting and protecting the common good.”

Zogby’s poll also showed that progressive faith-based groups have started to close the “God Gap” with voters, despite the outcome of the election. Progressive faith-based groups reached 38% of the voters this election, which, although this is about half as many as the religious right reached (71%), it is a major increase over recent years.

“What these numbers mean is that people of faith want candidates who understand that morality is bigger than just one or two isolated issues,” Robinson said. “Voters are hungry for a voice that articulates poverty, health care, war and foreign policy as moral values. Our task now is to continue to bring these issues to the forefront of our church, so that the interest of the common good does not get lost or ignored over the next four years.”

For more information or interviews, please contact Michael Jones at 814-453-4955, ext. 228; mike@paxchristiusa.org, or Johnny Zokovitch at 352-219-8419; johnnypcusa@yahoo.com.

Pax Christi USA is the national Catholic peace movement, reaching more than half a million Catholics in the United States. Our membership includes more than 130 U.S. bishops, 800 parish sponsors, 650 religious communities and 300 local groups. Pax Christi USA is a section of Pax Christi International, the international Catholic peace movement with consultative status at the United Nations.

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