

Part Two



Discussion Guide and Prayer Resources For Parish Leaders

Permission is granted for duplication of this guide in order to foster discussion of Catholic Social Teaching and its place in political decision-making.

**Suggestions for Using the Discussion Guide for
*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship:
A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States***

Why use this guide?

The bishops' statement on political responsibility, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, offers Catholics a reminder that election decisions should be made on gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching. It is a matter of formed and informed consciences as well as prudence since there are no clear-cut choices. As a Church, we can articulate our values, but cannot promote specific candidates. This guide is designed to help people prioritize values and apply them to the decision-making process. Considering the necessity of considering the common good and being prudent about our voting, the principle of subsidiarity is included in the discussion. This comes from our tradition of Catholic Social Teaching and states that solutions and laws should be at the level closest to those affected and where they can make the most impact.

Who can use this guide? How do I use this guide?

Anyone can use this guide. It can be used during a social concerns committee meeting, a parish council general session, or any other existing meeting. Special groups or special meetings can be called to study the bishops' statement using this guide. It may also be passed out to individuals to be used on their own or with family and friends. In other words, anyone can use this guide as a means of exploring what the bishops have said about political responsibility. It also promotes good political thinking beyond the election, since our work goes well beyond the elections.

Of what does the guide consist?

The guide includes a prayer service with additional options, a shorter prayer option, questions for private reflection or as a guide to reading *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, questions for discussion, and a closing prayer. Timing and discussion hints are included. We have tried to make this a flexible tool to be used by individuals and groups. Please feel free to adapt the guide to your needs.

How do I obtain copies of *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*?

To order this resource or to obtain a catalog of other United States Catholic Conference titles, call toll free 800 235-8722. You can also download this document as well as other supporting materials at www.faithfulcitizenship.org. The statement is also available in Spanish.

How do I obtain more information on Catholic positions on the issues?

Information can be obtained on a national level, a state level, and a local level.

US Catholic Conference www.usccb.org
Washington, DC

The Catholic Conference of Ohio www.ohiocathconf.org
Columbus, Ohio

Diocesan Social Action Office www.catholic-action.org
St. Augustine Towers
7800 Detroit Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44102
216 939-3851 or 1-888-620-5280

Diocesan Education and Training Center for Social Justice, Karen Leith
P.O.Box 434
Akron, Ohio 44309
330 535-2787 or 1-888-620-5280

Commission on Catholic Community Action, Cleveland, Len Calabrese
216-939-3839 or e-mail lmcalabrese@clevelandcatholiccharities.org

Catholic Commission of Summit County, Tom Allio
330- 535-2787 or e-mail tallio@aol.com

Catholic Action Commission of Lorain County, Sharon Kleppel
440-244-6037 or e-mail smkleppel@clevelandcatholiccharities.org

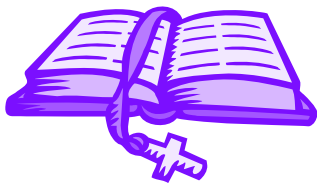
Catholic Commission of Lake and Geauga Counties, Jerome Walcott
440-943-7608 or e-mail jwalcott@clevelandcatholiccharities.org

Catholic Commission of Wayne, Ashland and Medina, Pat O'Bryan
330-263-6176 or e-mail pjobryan@clevelandcatholiccharities.org

Seven Proposals for Dialogue

Let's not label positions, "peace position" or "just war position" or any other title. Peace is not a position. Peace is a way of traveling through life.. It is a journey we choose to take, called by the peace of Jesus. On a journey, we can invite others to walk with us. It is not standing still and defending a position. Companions on the journey challenge one another to move toward truth.

Seven points to consider on this journey:



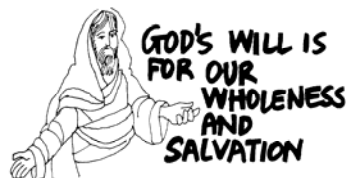
1. Let's immerse ourselves in the whole story of scripture. The Bible has no chapter and verse to tell us how to respond to international terrorism. But we will find reliable guidance as we become familiar with the God of the Bible. We can look at individual quotes on peace (and there are some in this packet), but they are part of a whole.

2. Let's cling to belief in a God whose heart is for all God's children. God has a deep and abiding affection for all human beings, and wants all people to be reconciled—to God and to each other. Every person on the face of this earth is God's creation. God desires reconciliation with all of us. So, let's agree not to take God's job away from God. God is the only Creator and Sustainer of life. Yet we presume to be able to determine which human life is worth saving, and which is expendable.



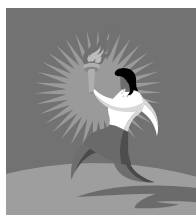
3. Let's be committed to make Jesus the center of our lives, and follow his example in life. "What would Jesus do?" is not a bad place to start. Simplistic? Maybe, and it doesn't answer every question. They did confront the powers, but with radically different methods. We have to take Jesus' life seriously.

4. Let's agree to always walk toward, not away from, those with whom we disagree. All of our opinions have points that can be challenged. We literally need each other in the church. **We need diversity of perspectives to find the truth. Let's always spend more time listening than formulating responses.** We have to be quiet long enough to hear what the Spirit is saying.



5. **Let's commit ourselves to work for peace with justice.** The biblical picture is one of "justice and peace kissing each other" ([Ps. 85:10](#)). There is no peace without justice. Let's not short-circuit justice in the present crisis. It is right that those responsible for these massive acts of inhumanity are called to account. But there is more than one way for that to happen.

6. **Let's always listen to the wisdom of the church.** We can disagree, but we must bend over backwards to listen. You might study our tradition thoroughly, and still find things to take issue with. But do listen to the wisdom of our community of faith.



7. **Let's never stop proclaiming hope.** That's something important we have to offer the world in times like these. Our theology of resurrection is a theology of hope. It is one of life out of death, order out of chaos. It is peace.



I. Reflective Prayer: Short Form
Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship:
A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States

Leader: Let us take a moment of silence to recognize the Lord who is present as we gather in the name of God. *Moment of silence.*

Lord God, be with us at this time. We come together in your name to discuss gospel values in our world. Guide us. Open our minds and hearts to you and each other. We ask this in the name of Jesus, the Way, the truth, and the Life. Amen.

Reading: 1 Corinthians 2:1-10,12-13

A reading from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, proclaiming the mystery of god, I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling, and my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of spirit and power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Yet we do speak a wisdom to those who are mature, but not a wisdom of this age, nor of rulers of this age who are passing away. Rather, we speak of God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory, and which none of the rulers of this age knew for, if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written:

What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard,
And what has not entered the human heart,
What God has prepared for those who love him,
This God has revealed to us through the Spirit. ..

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the things freely given us by God. And we speak of them not with words taught by human wisdom, but with words taught by the Spirit.

The Word of the Lord.

Reading:

A Reading from Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States

As the Holy Father also taught in *Deus Caritas Est*, "the direct duty to work for a just ordering of society is proper to the lay faithful" (no. 29). This duty is more critical than ever in today's political environment, where Catholics may feel politically disenfranchised, sensing that

no party and too few candidates fully share the Church's comprehensive commitment to the life and dignity of every human being from conception to natural death. Yet this is not a time for

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retreat or discouragement; rather, it is a time for renewed engagement. Forming their consciences in accord with Catholic teaching, Catholic lay women and men can become actively involved: running for office; working within political parties; communicating their concerns and positions to elected officials; and joining diocesan social mission or advocacy networks, state Catholic conference initiatives, community organizations, and other efforts to apply authentic moral teaching in the public square. Even those who cannot vote have the right to have their voices heard on issues that affect their lives and the common good. (par. 16)

Reflection:

Use active listening (allowing each person to speak without comments from others) and go around the group with these questions. Have each person speak directly to moderator.

In what way are you being called to “speak out” like Paul?

What might the Bishops mean in pointing out that “some Catholics may feel politically homeless”?

Leader:

We are called to reflect on the wisdom of God and gospel values in our world, by using the bishops’ statement on political responsibility, *Faithful Citizenship*. Let us now pray together that we might be enlightened by not only the words of the document but also by our reflection on those words. May we vote from informed consciences and with great prudence.

All:

God, our Creator,

Complete the works you have begun in us.

Keep active in our hearts the gifts of your Holy Spirit:

The spirit of wisdom and understanding,

The spirit of right judgment and courage,

The spirit of knowledge and reverence,

The spirit of awe and wonder in your presence.

Help us to live the gospel of Christ.

Guide us in doing your will.

Inspire us and give us the courage to work for the common good.

May we never be ashamed to proclaim to all Christ crucified and resurrected,

Living and reigning forever. Amen.

II. Prayer and Discussion: Long Form
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We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the things freely given us by God. And we speak of them not with words taught by human wisdom, but with words taught by the Spirit.

The Word of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, O Lord Jesus Christ.

Shared reflection: *The prayer leader facilitates a short reflection on the reading. Use active listening (allowing each person to speak without comment from others except for questions of clarification) and go around the group with these questions:*

1. What one word or phrase struck you as you listened to the reading? (Have each say the word or phrase without explanation.)
2. In what ways are we still in an age whose wisdom is not that of God's?
3. In what ways is the Spirit still revealing God's wisdom and teaching the words of that wisdom?
4. In what ways are the Bishops like St. Paul in this reading?

Reading: A Reading from *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*

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The spirit of knowledge and reverence,

The spirit of awe and wonder in your presence.

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Guide us in doing your will.

Inspire us and give us the courage to work for the common good.

May we never be ashamed to proclaim to all Christ crucified and resurrected,

Living and reigning forever. Amen.

III. Full Discussion Session

Leader's Guide and Worksheet for
Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship:
A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States

Agenda:

- Prayer
- Introduction of Call for Civil Discourse and Pledge
- Guidelines for good discussion
- Personal reflection
- Group discussion
- Closing prayer

I. and II. are versions to begin other parish meetings other than sessions dedicated to discussion of the document (20-30 min.)

Use the short form of the prayer/reflection for a 20 minute session or the longer form for a 30 minute session. The reflection questions help initiate thinking about the document and the need to look at political activity and the common good. **Do pass out the Call for Civil Dialogue and the Pledge as well as a short form of the document.**

This section describes the conducting of a full meeting dedicated to a discussion of the document.

Shorter Version for Session Dedicated to Discussion of Document and its Implications (1 ½ hours)

Gathering time	10 min.
Prayer	5 min.
Pledge for Civil Discourse	5 min.
Personal Reflection	10 min.
Break/social	15 min.
Group Discussion	30 min.
Summary	10min.
Closing Prayer	5 min.

If you need to contain the session to 1 hour, eliminate the break, have an optional social time at the end of the meeting, and eliminate the gathering time at the beginning.

Longer Version for Session Dedicated to Discussion of Document and its Implications (2 hours)

Gathering time	10 min.
Prayer	15 min.
Pledge for Civil Discourse	5 min.
Personal Reflection	15 min.
Break/social	15 min.

Group Discussion	45 min.
Summary	10min.
Closing Prayer	5 min.

In all cases, reflection/discussion groups should not be larger than 5 people.

Handouts needed:

Participant discussion guide (at end of this part)

Pledge for Civil Discourse (in appendix)

Bulletin insert on Catholic Social Teaching (in May section of Part One)

Bishops on issues (in October section of Part One)

Prayer for meetings

For the shorter version, use a modified version of the short prayer form Section I. We are well aware of time constraints and the need for efficient meetings, but beginning with a reflection on Scripture is important. To use less time, have people talk in pairs rather than to the whole group. It is important to combine a prayerful spirituality with action. The scripture verse chosen is to stimulate thought on the relation of religion and politics.

For the longer version of the discussion, Section II., the longer prayer form, will get to the issues of why the bishops speak out on such issues if you can use it. It allows for prayerful reflection on the tension between the world's values and gospel values. As Christians, we are called to live gospel values even when the world is hostile. When we recognize that we are part of the community of god, we have greater confidence and strength in living as Christians.

For reflection and/or discussion (All questions are on the participant handout at the end of this guide. You need only duplicate that page.)

*For the shorter version, ask participants to reflect on questions 1, 3, and 4. At the beginning of the sharing/discussion time, have participants state **in one sentence** some insight from their reflective time. Stress that each is to only state that one sentence without any long explanations. Stress listening to one another without comment. Once everyone has shared, you might summarize what was said in two sentences – a concise statement of the wisdom of the group. Then, move on to the next part.*

1. Why is the shift from social action and private charity to social justice and advocacy so uncomfortable for most people? Where are you in this shift? What about your comfort level?
2. What factors contribute to the low profile of Catholic Social Teaching? How would the church be different if it were not “our best kept secret”?
3. Have you ever felt a tension between being a citizen and a disciple? When? Why?
4. What might the gospel have to do with civic responsibility?
5. What assets does the Catholic church bring to the public square? Why are these important?

6. What do these moral priorities mean to you: protecting all human life and dignity, promoting family life, pursuing social justice, practicing global solidarity, and caring for all God’s creation? How, with the virtue of prudence, do you use these moral imperatives to evaluate the issues before us and determine what is in the common good?

Fill in the information as your group brainstorms

7. What are the major issues that confront us as we enter this election time?

The facilitator should stress that this is a brainstorming session of no more than 5 minutes. We are naming all the issues as perceived by those present. There is no debate and no necessity for long explanations. The idea is to just name the issues. Give enough time so that all the issues are listed. At this point, it doesn’t matter if it is a small or large issues. It doesn’t matter if it is a local or a national issue. Any issues at any level of government are to be listed.

8. Prioritize Gospel values as they are stated in the principles of Catholic Social Teaching in the way you want them to impact the way you look at the election and evaluate candidates. (*The bulletin insert from May in Part One of this resource is a good handout for this.*) Would you prioritize them differently for each level of government? Why or Why not?

First, have the group list the values from the gospel or from Catholic Social Teaching. Then, prioritize those values. By listing them in order of importance, people can start seeing a criteria for evaluating both candidates and stands on issues. Again, try not to get into lengthy debates or long discussions. Stress agreements and seek consensus. If the order isn’t acceptable to the whole group, list two or three orders of priority. Human life and dignity is the foundational value. After that, no one has to agree completely. What we are seeking is the use of gospel values.

9. Given the principle found in Catholic Social Teaching of subsidiarity (refers to the various ways society should relate to each other; reliance on solutions that are closest to the people affected and which employ the smallest groupings and mechanisms that are still effective) at which levels should the issues named above or aspects of those issues most influence your choice of candidates and elected officials? Why?

Local	County	State	National
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Use the list of issues from question 7. Remind participants that we are just talking about this election. The process we are using is to be done each time we face such decisions.

Issues should be placed in column where they would best be addressed at this time. Issues should be in no more than two columns. When done, the issues should be put in order of priority

from most important to least important, recognizing that they are all important. The common good and the need to act promptly should also come into the decision. The bishops tell us that we cannot make decisions on one issue alone. It is in considering all the issues named as evil, abortion, racism, killing of noncombatants in war, poverty issues in that life is not being sustained, etc. that we discover the common good.

10. How does your list compare with the list of concerns the bishops have highlighted in their document about faithful citizenship? (Here it is good to look at the bulletin insert from October found in Part One. It summarizes the concerns of the bishops.) What questions do you need to ask of candidates?

Look over the concerns. Discussion could be around how to ask important questions of candidates and how to evaluate their answers and positions. You could also discuss the interrelatedness of issues. How can voters look at all the issues and prioritize them? How do we determine the common good?

11. How can we as a group promote political responsibility and prudent voting based on ***Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States?***

This questions help extend the process beyond the particular group gathered. Hopefully, there will be a desire to involve other groups in your parish or institution.

12. How can you as an individual promote the document and the political responsibility, search for the common good, and prudent voting to which the document calls us?

By asking the question, we are at least suggesting that there is a responsibility for each person to go beyond themselves in promoting gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching as a means for decision-making in elections.

Participants Reflection/Discussion Guide
Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship:
A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States

For Reflection and/or Discussion

1. Why is the shift from social action and private charity to social justice and advocacy so uncomfortable for most people? Where are you in this shift? What about your comfort level?
2. What factors contribute to the low profile of Catholic Social Teaching? How would the church be different if it were not “our best kept secret”?
3. Have you ever felt a tension between being a citizen and a disciple? When? Why?
4. What might the gospel have to do with civic responsibility?
5. What assets does the Catholic church bring to the public square? Why are these important?
6. What do these moral priorities mean to you: protecting all human life and dignity, promoting family life, pursuing social justice, practicing global solidarity, and caring for all God’s creation? How, with the virtue of prudence, do you use these moral imperatives to evaluate the issues before us and determine what is in the common good?

How can you summarize or what struck you the most as you reflected on the above questions? Your one sentence insight on having reflected on these questions:

Fill in the information as your group brainstorms:

7. What are the major issues that confront us as we enter this election time?

8. Prioritize Gospel values as they are stated in the principles of Catholic Social Teaching in the way you want them to impact the way you look at the election and evaluate candidates. (*The bulletin insert from May in Part One of this resource is a good handout for this.*) Would you prioritize them differently for each level of government? Why or Why not?

9. Given the principle found in Catholic Social Teaching of subsidiarity (refers to the various ways society should relate to each other; reliance on solutions that are closest to the people affected and which employ the smallest groupings and mechanisms that are still effective) at which levels should the issues named above or aspects of those issues most influence your choice of candidates and elected officials? Why?

Local

County

State

National

10. How does your list compare with the list of concerns the bishops have highlighted in their document about faithful citizenship? (Here it is good to look at the bulletin insert from October found in Part One. It summarizes the concerns of the bishops.) What questions do you need to ask of candidates?

11. How can we as a group promote political responsibility and prudent voting based on *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*?

12. How can you as an individual promote the document and the political responsibility, search for the common good, and prudent voting to which the document calls us?

Guidelines for Good Discussions

We offer these brief suggestions for useful discussions about social and political issues, especially in a religious context. These are based on the art of conversation. Effective communication, whether with close friends or casual acquaintances or strangers, requires that you respect others and take their ideas seriously, even when you think they are wrong. Our Pledge for Civil Discourse tries to call and commit people to just that. But, in discussion groups, we all need many reminders when people are passionate about their concerns.

Speaking about issues that are near and dear to our hearts does bring out strong emotions. Our beliefs identify us. We can respect another's feelings without necessarily agreeing with the conclusions that they have reached. In such discussions, the role of the facilitator is very important.

- Listen carefully to others. Try to really understand what they are saying. Ask clarifying questions without interjecting your opinion, especially when their ideas differ from your own. We are about human dignity, and this falls under that basic value.
- Make comments to the facilitator and to the whole group. Do not get into one-on-one debates. Balance pro and con arguments or thoughts from the group.
- Think together about what you want to get out of your conversation. Look for issues of the common good.
- Be open to changing your mind. This really helps in listening to others and understand their context.
- When disagreement occurs, keep talking. Explore the disagreement. Try to find some common ground that lies beneath the surface. Sometimes you will have to agree to disagree.
- Value one another's experiences and think about how they contribute to the way one thinks about the issue.
- Don't argue about points of fact. Move on and check points of fact later. Many times arguing over points of facts misses the real point of discussion.
- Speak your mind freely, but don't monopolize the conversation.

ADDITIONAL PRAYERS AT ELECTION TIME

O God of justice and compassion,
You have called us to use our gifts to your glory.
You challenge us to claim Your power and presence in us.
Today we lift up the gift of citizenship that we have been given in the United States. We give thanks for the opportunity to participate in this democracy.
We know that You expect us to use the gifts You have given us.
We will step forth in faith.
We will become faithful citizens.
We will use our gifts.
We will study the issues.
We will study Your word and the guidance You have given us.
We will pray for our democracy, our current elected leaders, and our future leaders.
We will seek to support the candidates that we think best reflect our values.
We will use our power.
We will claim our gifts.
We will vote on Tuesday, *March 5*. And when the elections are over, we will pledge to support those elected through prayer and regular communication of our concerns to them.
Thank you God for your gifts and the opportunities you see before us. Amen

- National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice

Loving and Gracious God, we remember that your plan for us is fullness of life lived with love, justice and mercy.

Be with us and our whole nation this year as we work together in selecting political leaders of our society. Help us to keep the common good before us.

Strengthen our gifts of wisdom, courage and respect for the views of others.

Deepen in us the willingness to act in solidarity with people who are economically poor and with women seeking fullness of life in society.

Help us be persistent in testing political remedies against what they will do for people, to people, with people, and what they will mean for the health of our earth home.

Help us to support one another in exercising our precious responsibilities as citizens in a representative democracy.

After the elections, strengthen us to continue to work with our leaders, seeking an ever more just society that acts in harmony and interdependence with all creation.

We ask this in the name of Jesus in union with Your Spirit. Amen

-Prayer at Election Time from Sisters of Mercy Mid-Atlantic Justice Office

Litany

Gracious God, you are the source of all blessing. Among the many gifts that you have given us, we in this nation are blessed with the ability to have a voice in our government.

Let us be good stewards of our citizenship, and use it for the common good.

God of steadfast love, wherever your people have gone astray, you have sent your prophets to call us back to the way of Justice and righteousness.

Let your church be a choice for justice in public life.

Almighty God, you are the source of all power and authority. All of our earthly differences melt away in your presence.

Let us be bound together in your name alone, making a place at the table for all your people.

God of wisdom, you have raised up citizens to be leaders of cities, states and nations. Guide our candidates for public office and all officials to be faithful and courageous leaders, and give them the strength to do not what is expedient but what is right.

Let us bring our moral convictions to public life, encouraging our representatives to work for the common good.

Holy God, it is our privilege to participate in your work in the world. Free us from the cynicism that makes us despair of ever seeing justice and lets us serve only our own narrow interest. Encourage us with the knowledge that what we are engaged in is larger than ourselves.

Let us join together to exercise faithful citizenship in the service of your mission.

God of unquenchable hope, you are with us in times of plenty and in times of need. Continue to uphold your people who lack basic resources now, and use our lives as a witness to your love for them, seeking shalom and justice for all.

Let us be your vessels to bring blessing to people who are hungry and poor.

Prayer for our Nation's Leaders

Almighty God, you alone reign over all the peoples of Earth. Guide us, we pray, in selecting leaders who will serve with courage, integrity and humility. Bless our leaders with a vision of, and commitment to, the common good. Give us the persistence as citizens to speak out for justice until all your people have a place at the table. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

-Bread for the World

Prayer for Leadership

Give us, O God,
leaders whose hearts are large enough
to match the breadth of our own souls
and give us souls strong enough
to follow leaders of vision and wisdom.

In seeking a leader, let us seek
more than development for ourselves –
 though development we hope for—
more than security for our own land –
 though security we need –
more than satisfaction for our wants –
 though many things we desire.

Give us the hearts to choose the leader
who will work with other leaders
to bring safety to the whole world.

Give us leaders
who lead this nation to virtue
without seeking to impose our kind of virtue on the virtue
of others.

Give us a government
that provides for the advancement of this country
without taking resources from others to achieve it.

Give us insight enough ourselves
to choose as leaders those who can tell
strength from power,
growth from greed,
leadership from dominance,
and real greatness from the trappings of grandiosity.

We trust you, Great God,
to open our hearts to learn from those
to whom you speak in different tongues
and to respect the life and words
of those to whom you entrusted
the good of other parts of this globe.

We beg you, Great God,
give us the vision as a people
to know where global leadership truly lies,
to pursue it diligently, to require it to protect human
rights
for everyone everywhere.

We ask these things, Great God,
with minds open to your word
and hearts that trust in your eternal care. Amen.

-Joan Chittister, OSB