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GOSPEL VALUES IN AN ELECTION YEAR...AND BEYOND

THE CHALLENGE OF DISCIPLESHIP

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Each opportunity to vote, especially in a presidential election, raises vital questions: *For whom will I vote? What values do and should inform my political choices?*

This year, part of the religious context for these questions is the Church's celebration of the Year of Mercy and the 125th anniversary of The Condition of Labor (*Rerum Novarum*), the papal encyclical generally recognized as the first of Catholic Social Teaching. This election also follows Pope Francis' stirring visit to the United States in September 2015. This *Update* will use these three events to offer guidance for our reflection and action.

Basic Values

Many of us may already be weary of the political campaigns. Yet we recognize that electing a president and other leaders has profound implications for our lives and the very life of the world.

Let's return to that question about the values that inform our political choices since they're key to our voting decisions. Before we vote, we need to consider our values and commitments—and unexamined assumptions. What *really* forms the basis of our voting? Perhaps it's our longstanding commitment to a particular party. Perhaps it's our ethnicity or gender or economic class. Could it also be the gospel?

The gospel?! Indeed, for as disciples of Jesus, we want the good news to be the very center of our lives, enlightening all our choices. Sober realism leads us to acknowledge, however, that some other influences often carry more weight—messages from media, politics, business, and families. Our vision of life



and responses to world events often are based on these values rather than on faith, Scripture, and the Christian tradition.

For this election, then, an essential question to ask is *Will I take seriously my gospel commitment when I vote?* The gospels themselves reveal the heart of Jesus' experience and vision (see, for example, Matthew 5:1—7:29 and Luke 4:14—30, 6:17—49). The long tradition of Catholic Social Teaching has applied Jesus' vision to social, economic, and political issues. Forming and examining our consciences in light of the gospel values helps us to evaluate candidates and platforms.

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