

CHEVERUS

October 7, 2020

Dear Cheverus Students and Parents,

What does it mean to be a Cheverus student during the time of an election? What is expected of a student in a Jesuit, Catholic school at this important time in our history? I know many of you are feeling a bit overwhelmed by the complexities and challenges of engaging your classmates and teachers in political conversations as we approach the presidential election on November 3rd. Each national debate, newspaper headline, and social media post can feel like it has the ability to disrupt our classrooms, our teams and practices, and our hallways. How do we balance our personal beliefs with respect for the beliefs of others? And at the most base level, what am I allowed to say and not say?

First, we want students to know that in the spirit of the First Amendment, members of our academic community are free to express their thoughts and opinions without fear of restraint (subject, of course, to reasonable restrictions of time, place, and manner). We want our students to be forming opinions about social and political issues, and they will learn that our school and our Church have their stances toward social issues as well (more on that below).

However, our most important goal for students in the time of an election is to learn HOW to have respectful and productive political discussions. How do we engage in dialogue when someone doesn't agree with our opinions? Do we enter these conversations with open hearts and minds as opposed to a competitive spirit, trying to change others' minds? Can we hear the opinions of those we disagree with in a manner that is respectful and kind? These are critical skills for living in a democratic country, and unfortunately our society seems to have fewer and fewer examples of how to do this in our daily lives. As a mission of the Catholic Church, Jesuit schools have a stance on social justice issues. The Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus prioritize the Spiritual Exercises, walking with the poor and excluded, accompanying young people in the creation of a hope-filled future, and collaborating to care for our common home. We believe these principles help us work towards the creation of a better world in a manner that is both passionate and respectful.

I would encourage our students and families to learn more about the Church's stance on issues such as the protection of human life, the environment, systemic racism, immigration, and economic justice just to name a few. I would recommend seeking that guidance from the Jesuit Conference of the United States and Canada and from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops as opposed to outside media outlets. Catholics and those who attend Catholic schools are called to educate themselves about the issues that are important to the Church and then to form our own consciences based on this discernment.

The Catholic Church - and by extension Cheverus - does not endorse any single candidate or party, and as students you represent Cheverus when you wear our uniform, use our name, or post on social media in such a manner that it is clear you are a Cheverus student. Therefore, in such situations you cannot endorse any single candidate or party either.

Your teachers, coaches, administrators and staff have chosen to work at Cheverus just as you have chosen to attend. In doing so, we all enter into a community that has a culture and a stance of its own. This does not isolate us from the larger context of Portland, Maine, nor the United States; indeed we are called as Cheverians to engage in the larger political world. Being Cheverians shapes HOW we engage with our world. We are people of faith, we care about one another as people, and we are respectful of each other. We are called to be models of political engagement in the modern world. AMDG.

Peace,

Dr. John Moran

Principal