

A note on the European elections – June 2009

“Am I my brother's guardian?” Gen. 4:9

On June 4th 2009 we will have the opportunity of voting in the elections for the European Parliament.

The European Parliament in Brussels can seem far away from our every day concerns, not least at this time when many of us are feeling the effects of the financial crisis. We are, however, according to the teaching of the Gospel, responsible for the common good of all people. We not only look to our own good but to that of all our brothers and sisters. More and more we are becoming inter-dependent and what happens in another part of our world can affect us as well.

Legislation which our MEPs are typically considering at the moment is the stopping and protection of trafficked women and the abuse of children; how to manage one of the largest foreign aid budgets in the world; a proposed law on equality which may have implications for Catholic education and for the freedom to express religious beliefs. Large areas of European legislation are now decided by “co-decision” (where the European Commission and the European Parliament shape legislation together) which means that MEPs have real influence over legislation. The majority of the legislation in the United Kingdom is now discussed, and the framework set, in Brussels

As we consider whom we should vote for on June 4th some of the issues we might want to consider, or ask candidates about, could be immigration, globalisation, climate change or the whole area of bio-ethics.

In many of our parishes we know people who are under threat of being sent back to other parts of the world even though they may be sent to a life of poverty and suffering. There are many millions of irregular immigrants all over the EU. We need to know what our politicians are going to do about this, taking into account the common good of us all.

We are told by our newspapers that the present financial crisis is “global”. We are all well aware that we as a single country cannot solve this problem, and many others to do with our European and global economy. Again we need to know the ideas of our MEPs as they approach these problems taking care of the welfare of us all, particularly that of the poorest.

We are more and more aware of the effects of climate change. We need action on a higher level than the national if they are to have any effect. Once more we should be asking our representatives in Brussels what they intend doing about this, but making sure that those least able to bear the cost of the necessary changes are protected.

It is individual countries which are responsible for many of the policies pursued in the field of bio-ethics. The EU, however, gives funding for various areas of research and we need to ask if we know the opinions of the candidates we vote for on these matters, matters which are about life itself.

Whatever our political leanings and whatever we think about the above issues and many others, we do need to make our opinions known and to vote on June 4th. In the system of proportional representation which is used in the European election every vote counts.

There are no lost votes. We need to vote to make sure that extremist parties, such as the BNP, do not win places in the European Parliament. By voting we will care for the common good of all and particularly of the poor. Cain's question "Am I my brother's guardian?" still needs to be answered today. The Lord is still asking us, as he asked Cain, "Where is your brother?". We can at least make a contribution to this by trying to understand some of the issues; and, because we care for one another, to vote on June 4th.

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