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U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar speaks with attendees at the Presidential Gun Sense Forum hosted by Everytown for Gun Safety and Moms Demand Action at the Iowa Events Center in Des Moines, Iowa, Aug. 10, 2019. (Gage Skidmore/Wikimedia Commons)



by Judith Koll Healey

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Editor's note: *This is the third of a series of essays written by supporters of the five Democratic presidential candidates with the best showing in Monday's Iowa caucuses, published alphabetically: Joe Biden, Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. The assignment: Write a Catholic case for your candidate focused on how Catholic social teaching/traditions — and/or your own conscience — have informed your choice.*

These are not ordinary times in politics. Extraordinary times call for extraordinary political thinking. Instead, as The New York Times pointed out in an editorial Feb. 5, we have a president who uses the State of the Union message to vilify immigrants as criminals, rewrite the history of his assaults on health care and inflate the numbers for jobs coming from his new trade bill.

What's a Catholic to do? I want my country back. I am tired of the corrosive effects of anger and division among us, stoked by the current leadership in Washington. Where do I turn?

In ordinary times, I would look to the Democratic Party and find other souls who are interested in eradicating poverty, educating all people, welcoming immigrants and healing the sick. These are the traditional values embodied in the New Testament and the example of Jesus Christ, who preached charity and justice and whose teachings form the basis for current Christian communities.

But when I turn to my own party, there also I find division and squabbling among the leading candidates, those who put forth ideas that ordinarily I would agree with. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren are passionate for health care for all! What's not to like? Except, how exactly would you do it in this climate of division? Pete Buttigieg is articulate. Joe Biden is experienced and dependable. And yet they're still preaching to their base in their public presentations. Where is the message to unify and take action on our most pressing issues?

The chief task of the new president will be to stand for justice, unite the country and move it forward for the benefit of all citizens. The best candidate to accomplish that

is Amy Klobuchar.

The actions described by Jesus in the Gospels — feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty — line up with political actions that are needed in this country today. They also line up with Catholic social teaching and with the positions that Klobuchar has stood up for as a senator and champions as a candidate.



Sen. Amy Klobuchar makes her announcement to run for president in 2020 on a snowy Sunday, Feb. 10, 2019, at Boom Island Park in Minneapolis, Minnesota. (Lorie

Shaull/Wikimedia Commons)

I came to politics in the 1970s, when the Catholic Church was on the forefront of developing a "politics of social justice." Msgr. Jack Egan, a good friend until his death in 2001, had moved from the Chicago Archdiocese to the University of Notre Dame. There he gathered about him a group of like-minded people working in social justice around the country: diocesan social justice ministers, priests and nuns working in the inner cities across America, some of us who were involved in politics locally.

These were people who lived the Gospel in the modern world through their work. At that time, I was the executive director of an inter-faith social justice lobby group called the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition (JRLC), a group of Catholics, Protestants and Jews working on legislation that served justice and charity.

The group that Jack convened at Notre Dame — including hundreds of people who gathered for summer meetings from cities around the country — built on our tradition of Catholic social responsibility. We did our best to inject that social justice agenda into the political landscapes we worked in back home.

It's the kind of work that I've observed Amy Klobuchar carry on as my U.S. senator since 2007, all the while displaying the sort of attributes that prepare her for the highest leadership in the land:

- Competence and experience, both in the Senate and as Hennepin County Attorney before that. *(Social justice efforts are of no value if they cannot be moved forward. Klobuchar knows how to do this.)*
- She is informed, intelligent and cool under fire, as was evident in the Justice Brett Kavanaugh hearings. Kavanaugh attacked the senator in an electric exchange, sarcastically asking whether she had ever had too much to drink. She replied by citing her father's struggle with alcoholism. *(Klobuchar would not be distracted by trolls or hecklers as she implements her programs*.)
- Klobuchar is moderate and, of all the current candidates, has the best chance of attracting moderates to her candidacy and leadership. While I tend to like the fire of Sanders and the "plans" of Warren, Klobuchar shows the most promise for governing in a diverse time. *(Ideas are great, but the practicality of actually getting things done … for immigrants, for the poor, for children at risk of massacre, are only as good as the actions that are possible.)*

- Klobuchar has a sense of humor. I remember Jack Egan saying once about someone, with approval: "She doesn't take herself too seriously." When a remark was made about Klobuchar's bangs after one of the debates, she had a light rejoinder that indicated amusement, not irritation. *(Maintaining "cool" requires a certain amount of humility. Amy provides evidence of that attribute.)*

Finally, the most important quality in a president is **integrity**. Klobuchar is a straight shooter. There has never been any question about her honesty, and her candor with the public is refreshing. She walks her talk and that "walk and talk" runs in tandem with Catholic social teachings, from Dorothy Day and Ivan Ilych to the present.

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Klobuchar is pro-choice, but that is not a problem for me. I, too, am pro-choice, although I have been a Catholic for 81 years (and a product of Catholic schools for the first 14 years of my education). When I ran for our state legislature many decades ago, I was asked about my position on this issue. After some profound soul-searching, I decided that my personal moral choices need not be forced on others, just as their personal moral choices should not be forced on me.

Klobuchar reports membership in the United Church of Christ in her public profile. When I was the director of JRLC, the United Church of Christ was among the most progressive — if not the most progressive — of the National Council of Churches members on social justice issues.

Klobuchar's work in the Senate, including the legislation she has introduced, reflect the progressive nature of her church affiliation. She has introduced, or supported, major legislation in such areas as:

- Securing American elections from foreign interference
- Increasing gun safety
- Addressing domestic violence
- Reducing prescription drug costs

Each of these areas is crucially important right now. These are issues that align with the social justice concerns that Catholic social thought has long championed. And Amy Klobuchar has the deliberative personality that gets things done. She is our best choice for president.

[Judith Koll Healey is a Minneapolis-based author and consultant and the former executive director of the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition.]

This story appears in the **Catholic Eye on Candidates** feature series. View the full series.