News



Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory of Washington speaks to Catholic News Service at the North American College in Rome Oct. 15, 2024, while attending the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican. (CNS/Robert Duncan)

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Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington said he hopes U.S. voters who are as concerned as he is about the "anger and vitriol" of the current election cycle will take time away from the media to think and pray about the values important to them as Catholics.

"Pray. Reflect. Decide." Those are the steps Pope Francis once recommended to voters in Argentina, and Gregory said they are the best approach.

"Those who are running for public office probably will not satisfy each and every issue that lies before you," so Catholics must decide which issues are most important to them and then "rank them, learn about them, pray about them, make a conscientious decision," the cardinal said.

Gregory spoke to Catholic News Service Oct. 15 while at the Vatican for the meeting of the Synod of Bishops.

Other members of the synod from around the globe have mentioned the election to him, he said. "They know that I'm the archbishop of our nation's capital. They suspect that some of these issues that are on the national horizon are things that have touched my own life and my own ministry. But you know they, too, are somewhat perplexed by the anger, the vitriol, the rhetoric."

Some of them are annoyed by what they see on the news and on social media, others are confused and still others are frightened, he said, because of the role the United States plays in the international community.

In the Oct. 3 issue of the Catholic Standard, his archdiocesan newspaper, Gregory wrote a column on "Approaching Election Day as citizens and people of faith," pointing to the U.S. bishops' document, "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," and to the statement he and the other bishops of Maryland wrote urging voters to reject Question 1, which if passed would declare "reproductive freedom," including abortion, a fundamental right.

Abortion is a "fundamental" issue, but not the only one, he told CNS.

Abortion falls under the "umbrella" of "the reverence and the respect that is due human life," the cardinal said. "And that umbrella is wide enough to also include the dignity of people who are seeking entry into our country as immigrants," the use of capital punishment and the need for jobs that pay enough so that people can support their families.

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As for the synod, Gregory said what he has benefited from most is the opportunity to listen to bishops, priests, religious and laypeople from around the world describe their realities, obstacles and dreams for the church.

While it is true that most U.S. dioceses and parishes have had pastoral councils for years, the listening sessions held on a local, diocesan and continental level showed many Catholics felt no one had listened to them previously.

"One of the things I hope that this whole synodal process has accomplished is that it has upped the communications," the cardinal said. "Yes, most dioceses do have pastoral councils, but an awful lot of people don't know when the pastoral council meets. They don't know how the agenda is set. They don't know how delegates are chosen."

The listening sessions around the world raised questions including about the possibility of greater ministerial and decision-making roles for women, greater inclusion of people who identify as LGBTQ, the need for improved seminary training so priests learn to listen and other issues that Francis assigned to study groups and not the synod itself.

Many synod members insisted there be time to discuss the issues, bring their concerns to the study groups and expand the groups' participants, especially the group on women and ministry.

Gregory said that in setting up the study groups, "I suspect he (the pope) was hoping to avoid the quagmire that happens when you have issues of that significance and that complexity and try to articulate it in group speech. I think he wanted to make sure that those issues got proper attention and that people who

were informed and people who had experience and people who had interests could do a synopsis of those matters."

Asked about the objections some synod members raised to the issues being assigned to study groups, the cardinal said, "Isn't that a grace of the synod that all of a sudden the people who are participants in the synod had a chance to voice their questions, their opinions, their disagreements?"

"The one thing that I think is critically important in the ministry of Pope Francis is that he is not afraid to hear criticism," the cardinal said, "and he hears a lot of it."

This story appears in the **Election 2024** feature series. View the full series.