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Editorial: This election season has three winners

by NCR Editorial Staff

Editorial

Even without knowing the outcome of Tuesday's general elections, three groups of Catholics can be counted as winners this election season simply because they made their presence felt, and we should celebrate them.

Nuns on the Bus. In the spring of this year, the U.S. women religious were under a cloud. Censured by the Vatican ostensibly for doctrinal issues, accused of being an aging remnant past their prime and questioned about their loyalty to the institution, the sisters could have retreated into a funk. But they didn't. They couldn't. They knew that this election cycle, there was too much at stake. Under the brilliant leadership of Social Service Sr. Simone Campbell and NETWORK, the sisters dug deep into what they know best, the heart of their ministries among the marginalized, and organized a grassroots demonstration of the values that Catholics hold most dear: compassion for the poor, the struggling and the oppressed.

Through the spring, the U.S. bishops had written letters to Congress protesting budget proposals that would cut aid to nutrition programs, child assistance programs and other issues. In the summer and fall, the sisters breathed life into those issues and gave a voice to people who wanted to stand up for them. The nuns on the buses helped Catholics reclaim our sense of social justice and the full breadth of our social teaching. Win or lose at the ballot box, we at least could vote knowing our issues have been aired.

Our gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender brothers and sisters. We do not yet know the fate of the ballot initiatives in the four states voting on measures related to same-sex marriage. Regardless of the outcomes, one thing is for sure: Our LGBT brothers and sisters are taking their rightful place alongside us as full citizens. It will take more time yet for legislation to fully acknowledge this, but few will dispute that this election season, a tide was turned. We don't yet know the final result, but this community might have helped re-elect a president.

This year, LGBT Catholics have also claimed -- maybe "earned" is the better word -- new respect within the church. To listen to our most public leaders, this may be hard to see, but in the pews across America, it is not. Whether it is citizens signing their names to newspaper ads or brave priests risking censure from their bishops, Catholics are telling our homosexual brothers and sisters that we are glad they stand in the assembly among us. We are family. Like civil laws, it will take time for church structures to formally acknowledge this, but we believe that this year will prove an important step toward achieving equality in the Catholic church.

Latinos. This is another community that may have re-elected a president. Win or lose, Republican strategists have learned they cannot take this community for granted, which gives some hope for immigration reform in the next four years. Catholic Latinos, because they represent such a large demographic within the church, helped Catholic leadership formulate a consistent, humane policy stance on immigration. Latinos are the future of U.S. society and the church, and that future will demand that we embrace economic, racial and cultural diversity.

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