Voting Justly, With Mercy and Humbly.

November 2020

As a Christ-centered, immigrant-led social ministry of a predominantly Latino Urban church, we deeply believe Agencia ALPHA has been called to speak boldly and to practice what the Lord requires of us, “to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.” Micah 6:8.

Agencia ALPHA was established in 2002 because we believe that one way to share God’s love is by serving and empowering others through our services and advocacy work. Our mission has been to improve the quality of life of immigrants in Massachusetts by empowering our constituents to become leaders, overcome legal challenges, and fight systemic injustices. As an immigrant-led, grassroots organization, we focus on community organizing, legalization, & citizenship work.

For the past 18 years, ALPHA has had the privilege of working alongside people from all walks of life, including many who hold different philosophical and religious points of view. We treasure these friendships and working relationships and have the utmost respect for our community peers. We have learned that there is more that unite us than what we may not have in common. Together we have work tirelessly on behalf of better immigration policies, health care reform, driver licenses, Census and Safe Communities Act. Since the beginning of the COVID19 pandemic, ALPHA and the COPAHNI churches have been working together on relief efforts providing cash and weekly food assistance to thousands of people from every corner of Massachusetts. We are grateful that for almost two decades, we have been able to assist thousands of immigrants from over 64 countries with their legal and citizenship aspirations. We are convinced that our faith in Jesus has been our guiding compass as we carry out our social justice work.

In Agencia ALPHA, we have learned that to fight and defend our Christian values it ought to be a 365-day commitment, not just once every four years.

The ethical and moral beliefs that guide us and provide the lenses through which we interact with society are only our human interpretation of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. And because we are imperfect people (but with good intentions), we must
constantly turn to Scripture to seek wisdom and understanding of what Jesus would want our lives to reflect. For example, Matthew 22:37-39 reminds us that the two greatest commands are to “love God with all of our heart….and to “love your neighbor as yourself”. But to love my neighbor as myself, I must first recognize that my neighbor may be experiencing racial discrimination, economic inequality, poverty, immigrant/refugee crisis, hunger or food insecurity. Therefore, being aware, calling out and taking a moral stance against these social injustices is voting for one’s Christian values.

Would Jesus not desire for us to take a holistic approach when it comes to loving our neighbor? But what does it really mean to “love your neighbor as yourself”? The best way to describe it was to place Himself in the shoes of the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalized:

“For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me…..And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’” Matthew 25:35-40

To vote using the lens of our Christian values also means recognizing that neither of the two major political parties in the United States align perfectly with the Christian voters. Although we find some alignment with certain principles from both platforms, we have always believed that all political parties – including the Democratic and Republican parties are flawed and do not always represent our communities’ best interests. There are many economic, social and moral topics, but let’s take immigration for example. Both parties are guilty of enforcing immigration laws that not only have caused a great deal of suffering but also are in stark contrast to Biblical principles by separating innocent children from their parents, deporting millions of hardworking undocumented immigrants and putting innocent children in cages.
What is even more troubling is that the party that professes to align and defend Christian values dismisses the fact that their leader’s character is toxic by anyone’s standards.

In the words of the prominent conservative evangelical writer, John Piper, the president of the United States is known for his “flagrant boastfulness, vulgarity, immorality, and factiousness” that are not only “self-incriminating, but also… nation-corrupting”. Piper goes on to say that the President’s actions and words influence and shape the character of that nation’s people:

“There is a character connection between rulers and subjects. When the Bible describes a king by saying, “He sinned and made Israel to sin” (1 Kings 14:16), it does not mean he twisted their arm. It means his influence shaped the people. That’s the calling of a leader. Take the lead in giving shape to the character of your people. So, it happens. For good or for ill.”

We know that racism and xenophobia has existed before Donald Trump. But, the fact that his political agenda is based on racial and xenophobic sentiments is alarming and a matter of grave concern for those of us who work with immigrants and people of color. We forget how much pain Trump has inflicted when he attempted to separate families by imposing Muslim bans at the beginning of his presidency. Or when he ordered children at the border to be taken from their parents and be caged like animals. Or when he on national television insulted people of color calling Haiti and African countries “sh..hole countries”. Or when he announced adding a citizenship question to the Census causing fear and concern in our immigrant communities. His lack of interest to denounce white supremacy groups has only strengthened their presence and motivated them to further inflict more anxiety in communities of color – regardless of their immigration status. How can the Church reconcile his mean-spirited policies against the immigrant, the poor, and people of color with what the Lord requires of us “to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?”
If there was a call from the pulpit to support Joe Biden and the democratic party, certainly a reflection and analysis both from a Biblical and social stance ought to be conducted. Agencia ALPHA has never endorsed a political party and reserves the right to point out both the good and the bad of each party as it impacts our immigrant communities.

We believe that the Church has the right to voice its concerns over policies and agendas that affect their congregants. But if the Church is going to take a political position, it must carefully consider speaking up on all issues such as immigration, health care, economic inequality, racism, violence against women etc. Most Latino churches are complex and diverse, and to focus on a few issues over others, it opens the door for politicians and groups to be opportunistic and manipulative while causing divisions in the Church.

In conclusion, for these reasons we categorically reject the notion that to defend one’s Christian values one must vote for Donald Trump. In the eyes of some, he is doing grand things for the Church, but let us not forget that being pro-life means more than just allowing a baby to be born. In the words of Catholic nun, Joan Chittister describe this very well:

“Your morality is deeply lacking if all you want is a child born but not a child fed, not a child educated, not a child housed. That’s not pro-life. That’s pro-birth.”

In good conscience, Agencia ALPHA cannot participate in this line of thinking even if it comes from well-intentioned mentors, friends or spiritual leaders we have grown to love and respect. Agencia ALPHA remains committed to working with the faith-based communities, particularly with the Latino evangelical churches of New England, agreeing to disagree on the approach to defending our Christian values as it relates to these presidential elections.

Remembering the words of the prominent Reverend Samuel Rodriguez, author of the book, “The Lamb’s Agenda: why Jesus is calling you to a life of righteous and justice”, he says that the cross is both vertical and horizontal, vertically we stay connected with God and His spiritual truths; and horizontally, we are in fellowship and attentive to the needs of my neighbor. “The nexus is the strongest part of the cross, the intersection of righteousness and justice.” This is how Agencia ALPHA chooses to honor our Christian principles.
Lastly, we encourage our members, students, clients and friends to take the privilege and responsibility of voting during these elections based on what their own conscience dictates and motivate them to keep their votes alive after elections. Regardless of who wins the White House, our work to find social justice will always be an uphill battle and we need to keep our elected leaders accountable for it. At the end of the day, voting is only a small step, it is not everything. Acting every day of our lives in the search for a better society, for better systems, standing on behalf of the oppressed and marginalized when it is needed is what will create change. In ALPHA we hope our community votes to be more involved in finding solutions that are so much needed, to be more active in requesting our legislators to change the laws and systems, to be willing to hear the different experiences our diverse community lives, and to always stand against hate and phobia.

Patricia Sobalvarro, Damaris Velasquez, Vilma Galvez