

Statement of the Bishops of North Dakota Opposing The Legalization of Recreational Marijuana

On Tuesday, November 5, North Dakota voters will be asked to decide a ballot measure to legalize recreational marijuana in our state. If approved, Measure 5 would allow adults 21 years of age or older to grow, process, sell, possess, and use marijuana in North Dakota for recreational purposes. North Dakota voters rejected similar ballot initiatives to legalize recreational marijuana in 2018 and 2022.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that human life and physical health are precious gifts from God that must be cared for (CCC 2288). The Church therefore teaches that “the use of drugs inflicts very grave damage on human health and life. Their use, except on strictly therapeutic grounds, is a grave offense” (CCC 2291). Thus, the political community has a duty to provide for “the protection of security and health [of the family], especially with respect to dangers like drugs” (CCC 2211).

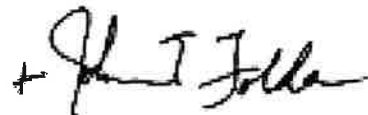
Marijuana is not the harmless drug that some imagine it to be. Rather, there is ample evidence that regular marijuana use impairs brain functioning, stunts brain development, damages the lungs, and is linked to a lowered immune system. Regular marijuana use is also associated with mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and suicide. Significant numbers of users become addicted to marijuana, and it often serves as a gateway to even harder drugs.

Pope Francis recently spoke out against legalizing recreational drugs, calling such policies an “illusion” that only leads to more drug use. Other states that have gone down the road of legalizing recreational marijuana have seen spikes in drug use, mental health problems, crime, DUI’s, emergency-room visits, hospitalizations, and work-place accidents, all associated with marijuana use. Things have gotten so bad in Colorado that Archbishop Samuel Aquila of Denver, the former bishop of Fargo, issued a lengthy pastoral letter last December cataloguing the extensive harms caused by recreational marijuana since its legalization in 2012, characterizing it as “disastrous to our society.” Likewise, just a few months ago, our brother bishops in Minnesota issued a pastoral letter warning of the serious risks of marijuana usage in the wake of its legalization last year. Why would we ever want to go down this same path?

We believe individuals, families, and communities will be significantly harmed if recreational marijuana is legalized in our state. We therefore strongly encourage Catholics and all other people of good will in North Dakota to vote “NO” on Measure 5.



The Most Reverend David D. Kagan
Bishop of Bismarck



The Most Reverend John T. Folda
Bishop of Fargo



Vote NO on Measure 5 Recreational Marijuana

The Catholic bishops of North Dakota urge voters to vote NO on Measure 5 seeking to legalize recreational marijuana in our state. The experience of other states shows that legalizing marijuana does more harm than good, especially when it comes to the health, safety, and well-being of our families and children.

- Marijuana is not safe and not harmless. Today's high-potency marijuana is highly addictive. Studies have shown that up to 30% of users will become addicted.
- Marijuana has been shown to have serious adverse effects on mental health, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Marijuana use has also been linked to serious mental health disorders like psychosis, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia.
- Legalization of recreational marijuana in other states has led to a dramatic increase in marijuana use, both in terms of the number of users and the amounts used.
- Normalization of marijuana increases the likelihood of adolescent use where the consequences of use are more pronounced, including stunted brain development, lower IQ scores, and decreased academic performance.
- States with legal use of recreational marijuana have seen substantial increases in marijuana-related DUIs and traffic fatalities, as well as increased workplace injuries and accidents associated with marijuana use.
- Legalization of recreational marijuana in Colorado saw a spike in marijuana-related hospitalizations, emergency room visits, and poison control calls.
- Other states like Colorado, California, and New York have seen that legalizing marijuana has created a thriving black market that undercuts the legal market. Rather than reducing illegal activity, legalization of marijuana has led to more illegal growing and more marijuana-related crime and only benefits the drug cartels.

These are just some of the reasons the Catholic bishops of North Dakota through the North Dakota Catholic Conference have joined law enforcement, healthcare, and business groups to oppose Measure 5. Please vote NO on Measure 5.

For more information, go to <https://www.yourfaithyourvote.org/measure52024/>

Catholics Care. Catholics Vote.

We vote because we are citizens. But we vote conscientiously because we are people of faith. Our consciences are formed through studying Scripture and the teachings of the Church, examination of the facts, and prayerful reflection.

This brief insert is intended as a starting point to help us respond to our choices in the current political landscape.

Forming
Consciences



for

Faithful
Citizenship

While there are many moral issues before us, every issue is not equal.

- ★ **Issues that directly affect human lives**—such as abortion and euthanasia—are fundamental and demand serious consideration.
- ★ Our Constitution heralds **religious liberty** in the First Amendment, yet increasingly people of faith are having to fight to retain this basic right.
- ★ There is a move in the nation to **redefine marriage**. The marriage of a man and a woman is the foundation of the family and an essential core element of a flourishing society.
- ★ The **growing disparity between rich and poor** means most of the world's resources are in the hands of a small percentage of its people. The federal budget is a moral document and must prioritize the poorest and most vulnerable among us.
- ★ The **millions of undocumented persons** living in the United States deserve our compassion. There is an immigration problem, and we need a humane solution to it.
- ★ War, terror, and **violence** have caused thousands of lost lives. We must work for just solutions to conflict in the Holy Land, throughout the Middle East, and beyond.

Visit **FaithfulCitizenship.org** today.

As Catholic citizens, we should remember three things:

1. Respect for the dignity

of each person is the core of Catholic social and moral teaching. This is our most basic principle.

2. We focus on the

common good, not our own personal interests. We ask, how can we make the world a better place? Not, how can I improve my own personal situation?

3. We have a responsibility—

a true obligation—to form our consciences and participate in the civic life of this nation.

Here are some ways to do that.

- ★ Be true to the **teachings of the Church**. Read Scripture, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, teachings from the Holy See, and the statements of our bishops. Read *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* at faithfulcitizenship.org. We need to be sure that our reasoning and judgments are well-grounded in our faith.
- ★ Stay **well-informed about issues** through judicious and reasoned engagement with the immense world of information in the twenty-first century. Just as all issues are not equal, all sources are not equal. For example, an individual's blog—while potentially very insightful—may not have the same fidelity to factual truth as our media sources that hold themselves to professional standards of journalistic ethics, imperfect though they are.
- ★ Remain in contact **with our representatives** in local, state, and federal government. Our responsibility to form our consciences leads to an obligation to be *active citizens*. We communicate regularly with our leaders—not only during election seasons.
- ★ Engage in **reasoned, compassionate, and loving dialogue** with others—Catholics and non-Catholics alike—about the issues and choices that we are facing as a nation. Remember that we are called first to witness the Gospel, and through that witness, to share our social teaching, to highlight the moral dimensions of issues, and to participate in debate on public policy.
- ★ The dual calling of faith and citizenship lies at the heart of **what it means to be a Catholic in the United States**. We stand on the shoulders of many Catholics who have gone before us, who have helped the United States of America become a better country because of their faith in a loving God.

We care. Therefore, we vote.



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