

The deaths of Governor Mel Carnahan, his son Randy, and Chris Sifford have given us a tragic week. The Catholic bishops of Missouri issued a public statement of condolence for the families. The bishops admitted that they did not always agree with the governor, but they praised his collaboration with them on issues like children's health insurance and the expansion of the state's Medicaid program to cover the disadvantaged. The bishops also remembered his commutation of the death sentence of Darrell Mease.

Candidates for public office are in full swing now trying to convince voters that they will provide the leadership we need. They try to show they understand our problems and will offer the right solutions. Even so, it is often difficult to choose.

A friend of mine thinks there should be another presidential debate in which Jim Lehrer would give the following introduction: "The candidates have agreed on these rules: I will ask a question. The candidate will ignore the question and deliver rehearsed remarks designed to appeal to undecided women voters. The opponent will then have one minute to respond by trying to frighten senior citizens into voting for him. When a speaker's time has expired, I will whimper softly while he continues to spew incomprehensible statistics for three more minutes." It would make an honest debate.

*The Catholic Key* this weekend is reprinting the pullout they gave us earlier this month. It compares the platforms of the two major political parties with position statements of the United States bishops. For example, in the field of communications, the bishops say that the internet is a marvelous tool for learning and communicating, but it poses a danger by giving easy access to pornographic and violent material. They think something should be done. In the field of education, the bishops want improved services available to private and religious schools as well as public schools. And of course the Catholic position against abortion, assisted suicide, and euthanasia is well known.

For religious people to enter the political sphere, we must understand the issues and vote in ways that demonstrate our values. But we also then stay active with the political process. We must communicate with our leaders once they take office. Democracy is hard work.

It would be easier if we just had knowledgeable and moral leaders. That's how the Letter to the Hebrews today describes Jesus. It compares him to a high priest -- that is, to a religious and political figure -- but one who endured the same kind of sufferings and temptations that we know. Jesus was one of us, and that makes him a good leader for us. Hebrews says, "Let us hold fast to our confession" of faith. Let us confidently approach God "to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help."

Our political leaders face difficult issues and dangerous lifestyles. They deserve our prayers and support. But above all, they deserve communication from us. They need to know how we feel, how we suffer, and how we believe. Above all, they also need to know that we will exercise our citizenship responsibly by voting. We should all spend the next few weeks improving our knowledge of the issues, and on November 7, vote.