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Pedestrians walk past street signage on the first day of early voting in New York, on Saturday, Oct. 24, 2026. (AP/Heather Khalifa)

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As the November midterm elections approach, Catholics across the United States are preparing to keep vigil — online, in churches and in prayer groups stretching across time zones — asking for peaceful polling places, honest vote-counting, and protection for people exercising their right to vote.

In Detroit, those concerns have already brought faith leaders together. At an interfaith vigil held Oct. 21 at Gesu Catholic Church, Archbishop Edward Weisenburger denounced what he described as efforts to restrict voting, calling them a moral issue rather than simply a political dispute.

"We have seen gerrymandering and voter suppression, especially the closing polling locations in communities of color," the archbishop said. "While some might say, 'Well, that's just politics,' I say, 'It's an affront to God.' Every voter should be able to fully participate in elections as a matter of human dignity and the common good."

The gathering, organized by the Religious Leaders Forum of Metropolitan Detroit, brought together Catholic and other religious leaders to pray for voters, election workers and volunteer poll chaplains. Weisenburger urged Catholics to oppose racism and voter suppression and noted that hundreds had volunteered as peaceful presences near polling sites.

"These poll chaplains might cast different votes for different candidates," he said, "but they stand united against intimidation and for democracy."

Drawing on Pope Leo XIV's encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, the archbishop spoke of Americans being "entrusted to each other" and called for vigilance against misinformation and rhetoric that dehumanizes opponents.

He also cautioned against portraying the time needed to count ballots as proof of wrongdoing: "Remember, a careful, lawful process takes time."

"No matter how inflamed the climate becomes," he said, "we tend the soil and plant the seeds of compassion and hope."

The Detroit gathering is one sign of a broader mobilization of Catholic prayer around the Nov. 3 elections, involving peace organizations, religious sisters, diocesan leaders and parishes. Their devotions vary — such as Eucharistic adoration and

virtual novenas — but organizers interviewed for this story repeatedly described fears about intimidation and political violence in the electoral process.

Pax Christi USA is organizing a nationwide, 24-hour prayer vigil beginning at 3 p.m. Eastern on Nov. 2 and ending at the same hour on Election Day. Participants can reserve half-hour periods and pray wherever they are, creating what the Catholic peace movement hopes will be an uninterrupted chain of prayer.

"Vigils stand as a very powerful and important piece of Christian witness," Michelle Sherman, Pax Christi USA's program director for nonviolence and campus outreach, told NCR.

She connected the practice to the disciples keeping watch with Jesus in Gethsemane and to contemporary vigils outside detention centers and prisons. For Sherman, the observance joins prayer with the movement's ongoing local advocacy and action.

Judy Coode, the organization's communications director, said the goal is "to facilitate a wave of prayer across the country that is consistently taking place." Individuals may pray the rosary, meditate silently or read Scripture. Participants already span the country, she said, from Massachusetts to California.

"Even when it's not their half hour, they'll know that somebody's praying," Coode said.

Both Sherman and Coode said concerns include intimidation at polling stations and the possibility of escalating violence. Coode also pointed to fears that democratic norms might not be respected.

Pax Christi is also co-sponsoring an online Election Eve prayer service with Franciscan Action Network on Nov. 2 at 7:30 p.m. Eastern. Robert Christian, the Franciscan Action Network's director of strategy, emphasized that the service is distinct from Pax Christi's round-the-clock effort, although the groups are working together.

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"We wanted to gather together in prayer for free, fair, peaceful elections," Christian said.

He pointed to anxieties about federal immigration agents being present near voting sites, and to worries about polling places closing early or being moved. Christian said the aim is for people to feel able to exercise their voting rights without fear.

Another virtual initiative will continue beyond Election Day. Catholics in Communion is hosting a nine-night election novena Nov. 1-9 at 7:30 p.m. Eastern, with participation from the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and Network, a Catholic social justice lobby.

Each session will use prayers from the U.S. bishops' Novena for Faithful Citizenship, alongside intercessions, updates and reports from communities holding local vigils. Network says Spanish interpretation will be available and sessions will not be recorded.

St. Joseph Sr. Carol Zinn, executive director of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, told NCR that many sisters and sisters' associates are volunteering to peacefully oversee polling stations and that the prayer gatherings ahead of the elections are "political and not partisan."

"We ask God to please just kind of blanket everyone, everyone, regardless of party, blanket everybody in safety," Zinn said.

She described meeting people who fear going to the polls or doubt their ballots will matter.

"Those are serious, serious wounds to the heart of a democratic process," she said.

Other vigils and gatherings, which do not share a single format or emphasis, have been announced around the country. Some focus on electoral participation and the safety of poll workers while others focus on human life, reconciliation or civic discernment.

In St. Louis, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet will hold a Zoom vigil Oct. 28 focused on unity, hope and a fair election.

That same evening, the Archdiocese of Seattle and its St. James Cathedral are among the co-sponsors of an interfaith vigil for unity and peace at St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral in that city.

In New York City, St. Ignatius Loyola Church has scheduled an outdoor election vigil the same evening, with song, silence and prayers for safe and honest elections.

On Election Day, St. Agnes Parish in San Francisco plans an all-day vigil for peace.

Denver's Archbishop James Golka and Auxiliary Bishop Jorge Rodríguez invited Catholics to pray the U.S. bishops' Novena for Faithful Citizenship beginning Oct. 26, seeking prayers for candidates, voters and elected officials.

In Massachusetts, St. Anna Catholic Parish in Leominster will hold a Patriotic Rosary on Oct. 28, offering prayers for elected officials, residents of every state, and the nation's future.

At Incarnate Word Catholic Church in Chesterfield, Missouri, parishioners will gather for an Election Eve Holy Hour on Nov. 2, with prayers emphasizing protection of human life and guidance for national leaders.

This story appears in the **2026 Midterm Elections** feature series. View the full series.