2026 CATHOLIC VOTER GUIDE · NEW YORK · LETTERS FROM LEO

U.S. House, District 7

Open seat (Nydia Velázquez, D, retiring).



Melvin Rivera

REPUBLICAN · OPEN SEAT

Republican nominee, also on the Conservative line.



Claire Valdez

DEMOCRAT · OPEN SEAT

New York State Assembly member since 2025 and former union organizer; also on the Working Families line.

Where the candidates stand on the issues Pope Leo XIV has raised, in their own words and votes. Bracketed numbers link to sources. We do not rate, score, or endorse candidates.

WAR & PEACE

POPE LEO XIV *Leo invited citizens of every country involved in the war with Iran to contact their leaders and members of Congress "to work for peace and to reject war and violence."* Remarks at Castel Gandolfo, Apr. 7, 2026 (Vatican News via The Good Newsroom)

MELVIN RIVERA

No public position found.

CLAIRE VALDEZ

Calls the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran "illegal" and says Trump "sent billions to fund genocide in Palestine."

[1] Ballotpedia: Claire Valdez

AI & THE DIGNITY OF WORK

POPE LEO XIV *"No one can be reduced to productivity, to cognitive performance, or to mere data."* Magnifica Humanitas presentation, May 25, 2026

MELVIN RIVERA

No public position found.

CLAIRE VALDEZ

Supports the PRO Act, saying "Unions are how we build power and expand democracy."

[1] Ballotpedia: Claire Valdez

THE POOR & THE SAFETY NET

POPE LEO XIV *The preferential choice for the poor is "a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society."* Dilexi Te, Oct. 4, 2025

MELVIN RIVERA

No public position found.

CLAIRE VALDEZ

Would sponsor Medicare for All "on Day One," calling health care "a human right."

[1] Ballotpedia: Claire Valdez

ELECTIONS & CIVIC LIFE

POPE LEO XIV *Authentic democracy, "far from being a mere procedure," "recognizes the dignity of every person and calls each citizen to participate responsibly in the pursuit of the common good."* Message to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Apr. 9, 2026

MELVIN RIVERA

No public position found.

CLAIRE VALDEZ

No public position found.

LIFE OF THE UNBORN

POPE LEO XIV *Abortion "cuts short a growing life and refuses to welcome the gift of life."* Address to the Diplomatic Corps, Jan. 9, 2026

MELVIN RIVERA

No public position found.

CLAIRE VALDEZ

No public position found.

THE DEATH PENALTY

POPE LEO XIV *Someone who opposes abortion but favors the death penalty "is not really pro-life."* AP via PBS NewsHour, Sept. 30, 2025

MELVIN RIVERA

No public position found.

CLAIRE VALDEZ

No public position found.

IMMIGRANTS & REFUGEES

POPE LEO XIV *"Defending human life also includes welcoming, protecting and assisting immigrants."* Letter on the 250th Anniversary of the United States, June 25, 2026

MELVIN RIVERA

No public position found.

CLAIRE VALDEZ

Would "dismantle and abolish ICE" and push to legalize the status of millions of immigrants.

[1] Ballotpedia: Claire Valdez

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY & EDUCATION

POPE LEO XIV *Religious freedom is "the right of every person to worship according to conscience."* Letter on the 250th Anniversary of the United States, June 25, 2026

MELVIN RIVERA

No public position found.

CLAIRE VALDEZ

No public position found.

CARE FOR CREATION

POPE LEO XIV *"We cannot love God, whom we cannot see, while despising his creatures."* AP, Oct. 1, 2025

MELVIN RIVERA

No public position found.

CLAIRE VALDEZ

Backs a Green New Deal and "a moratorium on new AI data centers" until clear rules exist.

[1] Ballotpedia: Claire Valdez

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