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August 7, 2006

RE: CCK Policies on Political Activity

Dear Pastor/Pastoral Director,

Catholics are called by faithful citizenship “to become an informed, active and responsible participant in the political process.” (*Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* (2003)). Pope John Paul II has emphasized this responsibility. “Democracy needs wisdom, democracy needs virtue. Democracy serves what is true and right when it safeguards the dignity of every human person, when it respects inviolable and inalienable human rights, and when it makes the common good the end criterion regulating all public social life.” (Pope John Paul II, October 8, 1995). Civic involvement in our democracy on the part of Catholics is integral to our responsible presence in the public square. It is not limited to just elections.

With our encouragement of faithful citizenship, prudence demands that we review the guidelines involving political activity which apply to Catholic organizations. Individuals acting in their individual capacity and not in any Church capacity are free to engage in partisan political activity. However, Churches and individuals representing churches in their official capacities are prohibited from partisan political activity. The Church cannot endorse or oppose candidates for election to public office, including nonpartisan candidates, such as judicial candidates. These guidelines are rooted in theological as well as legal reasons.

The Second Vatican Council’s *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World* clarified the relationship between the Church and the political order. “The Church, by reason of her role and competence, is not identified in any way with the political community nor bound to any political system. She is at once a sign and safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person.” (*The Church in the Modern World* (1965), No. 76). Pope Benedict XVI’s first encyclical spelled out important distinctions concerning the role of the Church and politics. The Church is “duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically.... The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society, on the other hand, is proper to the lay faithful. As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity.” (*Deus Caritas Est* (2005) Nos. 28, 29). It is the responsibility of the Church to “stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice,” and it is the responsibility of the laity to work for a just society.

In addition to these theological reasons, there are appropriate legal limitations on the Church’s political activity. In order for Catholic organizations to maintain their tax exemption, they must comply with section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code (IRC) which contains an absolute prohibition “against participation or intervention in a political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate....”

We restate our long-standing Catholic Conference of Kentucky policy that only voting guide materials published directly by United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (*e.g., Faithful Citizenship*) or by the Catholic Conference of Kentucky may be distributed in parishes. Other materials, even if they are published by a Catholic organization and seem non-partisan, shall not be distributed.

As Bishops of the Commonwealth, we established this current policy in 1995 because of concerns expressed to us. Among other concerns, the issues covered in outside voter education materials typically do not illustrate the wide range of issues of importance to the Church, but rather reflect the issue advocacy of the preparing organization, often clearly partisan. In addition, their preparation, content, format and presentation may not satisfy the requirements of section 501(c)(3) applicable to Catholic organizations. Often, the organizations preparing these voter education materials are not section 501(c)(3) organizations, and thus are not subject to the political campaign activity prohibition. The fact that it may be permissible for the preparing organization to distribute a voter guide does not make it appropriate for Catholic organizations to do so.

The dissemination of any campaign materials, including, but not limited to, campaign signs, candidate or party literature, is not permitted. Nothing prevents a candidate from attending a church picnic that is open to the public. However, the distribution of campaign material by that candidate is not permitted under Internal Revenue Code regulations that apply to political activity by tax exempt organizations.

The distribution of voters' guides, unless published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, is prohibited.

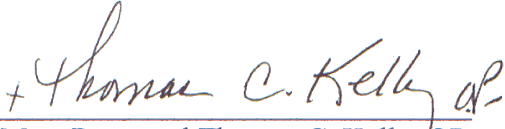
The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Office of General Counsel has produced *Political Activity Guidelines for Catholic Organizations* (March 2004). This document sets out practical explanations and illustrations for various situations encountered. Please read it in its entirety. It is found at: <http://www.usccb.org/ogc/guidelines.shtml>.

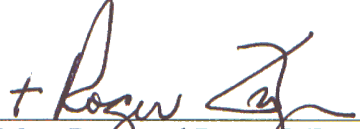
Our manner of conduct in the public square is of critical importance. The Church's role in the public order entails being principled but not ideological and clear but also civil. The Church must never be co-opted by partisan agendas.

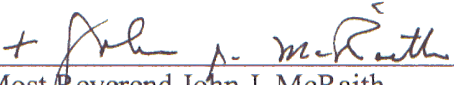
Faithful Citizenship reminds us that one of our "greatest blessings in the United States is our right and responsibility to participate in civic life." We appreciate your encouraging Catholics to bring our faith's moral convictions to public life. At the same time, we are grateful for your scrupulously adhering to our CCK policies and USCCB's *Political Activity Guidelines for Catholic Organizations*.


Please direct any questions regarding this matter to the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, 502-875-4345.

Devotedly yours in Christ,


+ Most Reverend Thomas C. Kelly, O.P.
Archbishop of Louisville


+ Most Reverend Roger J. Foys
Bishop of Covington


+ Most Reverend John J. McRaith
Bishop of Owensboro


+ Most Reverend Ronald W. Gainer
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