

“...participation in political life is a moral obligation.”

Certain activities generally are appropriate for parishes and other Catholic organizations.

Sharing the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

Parishes and other Catholic organizations are encouraged to share the Church's teaching on the relationships between Christian faith and political life. The Church's teaching on political responsibility, human life, human rights, and justice and peace need to be shared more widely and effectively. Cards summarizing seven key themes of Catholic social teaching that can serve as guidelines for involvement in public life are available from the USCCB (English pub. no. 5-315, Spanish pub. no. 5-815; call 800-235-8722.) The *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* statement, bulletin insert, and DVD are helpful tools for developing educational programs.

Voter Participation

Parishes and other church organizations can encourage members to participate in the electoral process: to register, to vote, to become informed on a broad range of issues, and to become active in the political life of the community. Parishes and other church organizations can also sponsor non-partisan voter registration and "get out the vote" drives. (See "Ideas for Social Concerns and Pro-Life Committees: Tips for Conducting a Non-Partisan Voter Education Campaign and Voter Registration Drive." at www.faithfulcitizenship.org.)

Ballot Measures

Supporting or opposing ballot measures, including referenda, initiatives, constitutional amendments, and similar procedures, is considered "lobbying" activity and not political campaign activity. Parishes and other church organizations can take positions on such measures and work to support or oppose them within the limits of permitted lobbying activity for section 501(c)(3) organizations. Any questions on these limits should be directed to the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, (502) 875-4345.

Voter Education

Parishes and church organizations can and should engage in non-partisan voter education. Only voter education materials published by the 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.

Address the moral and human dimensions of public issues.

Share church teaching on human life, human rights, and justice and peace.

Apply Catholic values to legislation and public issues.

Conduct a non-partisan voter registration drive on church property.

Distribute materials published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or by the Catholic Conference of Kentucky about issues related to human life and dignity, justice, and peace.

The Church is

*involved in the political process, but is not partisan,
engaged in the political process, but should not be used,
and principled, but not ideological.*

Non-Partisanship

Parishes and other section 501(c)(3) church organizations are prohibited from participating in political campaign activity. Thus, certain political activities that are entirely appropriate for individuals may not be undertaken by church organizations or their representatives. The USCCB Office of General Counsel provides detailed guidance on what is allowed and not allowed under the law. This detailed guidance is available at www.usccb.org/ogc.

The Church does not and will not engage in partisan politics. Pastors may wish to publish the following bulletin announcement in the weeks before the election.

We strongly urge all parishioners to register, to become informed on key issues, and to vote. The Church does not support or oppose any candidate, but seeks to focus attention on the moral and human dimensions of issues. We do not authorize the distribution of partisan political materials on parish property.

In order to avoid violating the political campaign activity prohibitions, parishes, other church organizations, and their representatives should remember these guidelines:

- Do not endorse or oppose candidates, political parties, or groups of candidates, or take any action that reasonably could be construed as endorsement or opposition.
- Do not make available the use of church facilities, assets, or members for partisan political purposes.
- Do not authorize distribution of partisan political materials or biased voter education materials (those that support or oppose—or exhibit bias for or against—any candidate or party) on church property, in church publications, or at church activities. Only distribute materials published directly by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or by the Catholic Conference of Kentucky
- Do not invite or permit only selected candidates to address your members. Before inviting candidates, make sure such events are consistent with USCCB and CCK policy. If so, it is important that all candidates be invited.

If you have any questions about what is allowed, call the Catholic Conference of Kentucky at (502) 875-4345. Please remember that the IRS rules against political campaign activity also apply to materials posted on parish or other church organization web sites.

Activities To Avoid! *Do Not:*

Endorse or oppose candidates for political office.

Distribute partisan campaign literature under church auspices.

Arrange for groups to work for a candidate for public office.

Invoke only selected candidates to address your church-sponsored group.

Conduct voter registration slanted toward one party.