



POLITICAL PROCESS GUIDELINES
FOR PARISHES, SCHOOLS, AND AGENCIES

Archdiocese of St. Louis

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Introduction

In the period of time leading up to major elections, many questions arise about the education of our parishioners and our elementary and secondary students regarding the political process in both religious and civic dimensions. The Archdiocese of St. Louis is providing this guide to our parishes, schools, and agencies in order to engage leadership in local discussion, decision-making, and policy formation.

This guide intends to inform priests, deacons, parishioners, agency administrators and staffs, educational administrators, faculties, and students as to the acceptable standards of Catholic Church involvement in the political process.



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PART ONE

Political Process Guidelines for Parishes, Schools, and Agencies Archdiocese of St. Louis

1.1 What does the Church teach about Catholics as citizens?

The importance of life in society and participation in public life

The Church teaches that human persons need to live in society as a requirement of their human nature and in order to fulfill their human vocation.¹ In order to function, society needs persons in legitimate authority to guide its institutions and its work. The role of legitimate authority in society is to “ensure as far as possible the common good,”² exercising their authority in ways that are not “contrary to the dignity of the human person or the natural law.”³

Catholics are called to participate in promoting the common good and, as far as possible, to take an active part in public life.⁴ Indeed, “by fulfilling their civic duties, guided by a Christian conscience, in conformity with its values, the lay faithful exercise their proper task of infusing the temporal order with Christian values.”⁵ “The consequence of this fundamental teaching of the Second Vatican Council is that the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in public life.”⁶

To fulfill this calling, Catholics must be informed, active, and responsible participants in the political process. They must be knowledgeable about the political process and have a grasp of the moral dimensions of issues facing society. To do so, they need to understand the role of government in society, to be aware of their political rights as citizens, and to know how to influence public policy so that they may work within the political structure to effect change. They need to know about current social issues, to understand the Church’s teachings about their moral dimensions, to form their consciences in light of their faith, and to act out of their moral convictions.

The unity of faith and life in society

Catholics have a duty to be “morally coherent.” There cannot be two “parallel lives,” a spiritual life grounded in Christian values and Church teaching, and a secular life in which decisions in the family, at work, and in social and public life are made on a basis other than these values and teaching.⁷ The Second Vatican Council taught that the “split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1879, 1886.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1897, 1898.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2235.

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1913, 1915.

⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, #36.

⁶ *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, #1.

⁷ *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, #6.

errors of our age.”⁸ We are “citizens of two cities,”⁹ “citizens of heaven and earth,”¹⁰ and this dual citizenship binds us to promote the common good in accordance with Gospel values and Catholic social teaching. This obligation includes choosing leaders at all levels of government who will best serve the common good in accordance with the moral law.¹¹

The fundamental priority of human life

When political activity comes up against moral principles that cannot be compromised, the Catholic commitment becomes more evident and laden with responsibility. What is at stake is the essence of the moral law, which concerns the integral good of the human person.¹²

Among all the concerns and issues facing society, there is an order of priority. Conditions upon which other conditions depend must receive first consideration. Therefore, the first consideration must be given to the protection of human life itself, and within considerations of protection for human life, the protection of the life of innocent, defenseless, weak, and burdened persons must have primacy of place.¹³

“In weighing all of the social conditions which pertain to the common good, we must safeguard, before all else, the good of human life and the good of marriage and the family.”¹⁴ “The direct and intentional destruction of innocent human life from the moment of conception until natural death is always wrong and is not just one issue among many. It must always be opposed.”¹⁵ “The family – based on marriage between a man and a woman – is the first and fundamental unit of society and is a sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children. It should be defended and strengthened, not redefined, or further distorted.”¹⁶

1.2 What is the Church’s role in the political process?

The Church defines herself as a moral teacher whose role is to address the moral dimensions of social issues. When the Church speaks out on moral issues facing society, its intention is not to exercise political power, but rather “it intends – as is its proper function – to instruct and illuminate the consciences of the faithful, particularly those involved in political life, so that their actions may always serve the integral promotion of the human person and the common good.”¹⁷

⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, #43.

⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, #43.

¹⁰ *On Our Civic Responsibility for the Common Good*, #13.

¹¹ *On Our Civic Responsibility for the Common Good*, #18.

¹² *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, #4.

¹³ *On Our Civic Responsibility for the Common Good*, #22.

¹⁴ *On Our Civic Responsibility for the Common Good*, #29

¹⁵ *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, #28.

¹⁶ *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, #46.

¹⁷ *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, #6.

1.3 Can and should the Church and her institutions engage in partisan political activity?

The meaning of “partisan political activity”

Partisan political activity is participation in or intervention in a political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. It involves the endorsement of or opposition to particular candidates or political parties.

“Partisan” political activity focuses on candidates and parties. “Non-partisan” political activity is issue-oriented and focuses on values, principles, and positions.

The meaning of “candidate”

A candidate is any person who offers him/herself, or is proposed by others, as a contestant for any elective public office, whether national, state, or local.¹⁸

The Church and partisan political activity

The Church does not engage in partisan political activity. She has consistently seen her role as participating in the public debate around issues facing society. The Church has a “right and duty to provide a moral judgment on social issues when the dignity of the human person and proper formation of the conscience of the faithful require her to do so.”¹⁹ The Church is “involved in the political process, but not partisan. The Church cannot champion any candidate or party.”²⁰

Internal Revenue Code (IRC) provisions governing tax exempt organizations

The Catholic Church and her constituent entities are tax exempt organizations under Section 501(c)(3) IRC. Section 501(c)(3) prohibits exempt organizations from participating in or intervening in any political campaign on behalf of, or in opposition to, any candidate for public office. The Internal Revenue Service interprets this prohibition as absolute. Accordingly, any violation of the restriction may result in revocation of tax exempt status and the consequent loss of deductible contributions.²¹

Issue-oriented participation in the public debate regarding the values and principles that should guide our public life in society is not prohibited. Therefore, Catholic organizations may support or oppose ballot measures and legislative proposals within the limits on “political lobbying” activities contained in the IRC.²²

1.4 What are some general examples of “partisan political activity”?

Examples of “partisan political activities” include:

- ⊗ making statements, in any medium, of support or opposition to any candidate for public office, political party, or political action committee

¹⁸ *Political Activity Guidelines, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of General Counsel.*

¹⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, #76.

²⁰ *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, #58.

²¹ *Political Activity Guidelines, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of General Counsel*

²² *Political Activity Guidelines, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of General Counsel.*

- ⊗ providing or soliciting financial support to or for any candidate, political party, or political action committee;
- ⊗ providing or soliciting in-kind support to or for any candidate, political party, or political action committee;
- ⊗ distributing voter education materials biased with respect to any candidate, party, or political action committee;
- ⊗ conducting public forums, debates, or lectures biased with respect to any candidate, political party, or political action committee;
- ⊗ conducting voter registration or “get out the vote” drives biased with respect to any candidate, political party, or political action committee.²³

Additional detailed and extensive guidance regarding these and other partisan and non-partisan political activities can be found at: <http://www.usccb.org/about/general-counsel/political-activity-guidelines.cfm>.

1.5 What are some specific situations in which concerns about “partisan political activity” apply?

A. Appearances by politicians at events of parishes, schools, or agencies

Statement of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops

The Bishops of the United States have given clear direction to the Catholic community and Catholic institutions indicating that persons who act in defiance of fundamental moral principles should not be given honors, awards, or other platforms that would suggest support for their actions.²⁴ Therefore, no public figure who espouses positions contrary to Church teaching should be invited or allowed to visit. This includes politicians, whether they are currently candidates or not.

IRC provisions

Specific provisions of the IRC govern the appearance of candidates. Key provisions are listed below. For additional guidance, go to http://www.usccb.org/about/general-counsel/political-activity-guidelines.cfm#church_events.

If candidates for political office appear at events of Catholic organizations, these provisions have the potential for requiring that the Catholic organization be a venue in which positions contrary to Church teaching are expressed.

It is recommended that Catholic organizations avoid inviting or permitting anyone who is a candidate to visit the school once his/her candidacy has been announced or proposed.

Politicians who visit as candidates

If the person is invited or appears as a candidate, these IRC provisions apply:

- all legally qualified candidates are invited to participate;

²³ *Political Activity Guidelines, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of General Counsel.*

²⁴ *Catholics in Political Life.*

- questions are prepared and presented by an independent, non-partisan panel;
- topics discussed cover a broad range of issues of interest to the public;
- each candidate has an equal opportunity to present his/her views on the issues discussed;
- the moderator does not comment on the questions, or otherwise make comments that imply approval or disapproval of any of the candidates;
- candidates are not asked to agree or disagree with positions, agendas, platforms, or statements of the sponsoring organization.

Politicians who visit as public figures

If a person who is a candidate is invited or permitted to appear because he/she is a public figure (e.g., mayor of the municipality in which the Catholic organization is located), or because he/she is an expert on a particular subject (e.g., global warming), these IRC provisions apply:²⁵

The candidate may only speak as an expert or public figure, and the following precautions must be taken:

- the candidate must speak only in the capacity of expert, public figure, or celebrity, not as a candidate;
- no mention may be made of the person's candidacy;
- no campaign activity may occur in connection with the candidate's appearance;
- all publicity and communications regarding the candidate's appearance must identify the non-candidate capacity in which the candidate is appearing and may not mention the candidate;
- a non-partisan atmosphere must be maintained at the event.²⁶

Politicians who attend public events on Church property

A candidate's attendance at a Catholic organization's event which is open to the public such as a parish picnic, school sporting event, choir concert, etc. does not by itself constitute intervention in a public campaign. However, the Catholic organization must ensure that no political campaigning takes place at the event, no campaign literature is distributed, no public recognition is given to the candidate, and a non-partisan atmosphere is maintained.

B. Distribution of campaign materials

Catholic parishes, schools, and agencies are frequently asked by parishioners, parents, and others to distribute materials. Regardless of the source of the request, Catholic organizations should not distribute materials containing information about specific candidates via parish bulletin inserts, school "Friday Folders," newsletters, website postings, social media postings, or any other means.

²⁵ *Political Activity Guidelines for Catholic Organizations, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007.*

²⁶ *Political Activity Guidelines, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of General Counsel*

A Catholic organization should not authorize the distribution of campaign materials or biased voter education materials by others on Church property, or in any other way allow Church resources to be used in the distribution of such materials.

The IRC contains strict guidelines about publications such as “Voters’ Guides.” Ratings of candidates on any criteria are considered violations by the IRS. No “Voters’ Guide” may be distributed unless it has the explicit approval of the archdiocesan attorney after it has been reviewed for conformity with the IRC.

C. Publication of political advertising in parish, school, or agency publications

Catholic organizations may not provide political advertising to a candidate, political party, or political action committee free, at a reduced rate, or on a selective basis. If paid political ads are accepted, the following IRC provisions apply:

- advertising is an ongoing activity, not just conducted for a specific candidate;
- non-political advertising is accepted on the same basis as political advertising;
- the publication expressly states that it does not endorse any candidate;
- advertising is available on an equal basis to all candidates;
- ads are not solicited from one candidate, but merely accepted from other candidates;
- fees charged to candidates are the usual and customary fees.²⁷

D. Voter registration and “get out the vote” drives

Such activities may be sponsored by Catholic organizations provided that the activity is “non-partisan,” i.e., the focus is on the importance of being registered to vote and actually voting. There can be no mention for or against any candidate, political party, or political platform. No materials may be distributed or comments made regarding the Church’s positions in conjunction with the activity. In addition, services and information offered as part of the activity cannot be provided with regard to the voter’s political preference.

1.6 How does the prohibition of partisan political activity apply to individuals who are officials of, members of, or employees of Catholic organizations?

The political campaign activity prohibition applies to Catholic organizations, not to the actions of leaders, members, or employees as individuals, when they are acting in individual capacities, and not on behalf of a Catholic organization, somewhere other than at the Catholic organization’s official functions and/or in the organization’s publications. In such cases, a disclaimer such as “organizational affiliation is shown for identification purposes only; no endorsement by the organization is implied” should be used. Such a disclaimer is not effective, however, if the endorsement occurs in the Catholic organization’s official functions or publications²⁸.

²⁷ *Political Activity Guidelines, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of General Counsel*

²⁸ *Political Activity Guidelines, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of General Counsel*

1.7 When is partisan political activity attributed to a Catholic organization?

The actions of an organization's employees, officials, and members may be attributed to the Catholic organization when there is real or apparent authorization of their actions by the organization.

1.8 Can Church property be used as a polling place?

Catholic organizations, particularly schools, often permit local election authorities to utilize their auditorium and gymnasium facilities to serve as polling places on election day. This activity is a manifestation of civic duty, is non-partisan, and does not, by itself, constitute a violation of the section 501(c)(3) political campaign intervention prohibition. Limited campaign signage or leafleting conducted by local campaign volunteers outside the polling place as permitted under local election rules should not be attributed to the Catholic organization.

1.9 What should a Catholic parish, school, or agency do to promote Faithful Citizenship?

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/> contains a wide array of resources including:

- additional resources on Church teaching
- suggestions for homily content
- pre-written bulletin inserts
- pre-written prayer services
- pre-written discussion questions
- suggestions for parish councils
- suggestions for Youth Ministry activities
- suggestions for Catholic school activities
- suggestions for adult education activities
- suggestions for families.

PART TWO

Additional Political Process Guidelines for Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools Archdiocese of St. Louis

Please see Section 1 for relevant background information applicable to all Catholic organizations regarding Church teaching, definitions of partisan political activity, allowed/disallowed activities, and a link to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for additional resources.

2.1 Should students in Catholic elementary and secondary schools be educated about the political process?

Catholic education is the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort of the Church community to develop in believers the knowledge, skills, and values needed for life in the world as faithful Catholics and as productive members of society. Catholic schools are important settings for children and youth to learn both divine revelation and human knowledge in the depth and breadth appropriate to their age. This learning should include the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for participation in the political process in accordance with the Church's teaching.

Students in Catholic schools are entitled to moral formation that is authentically Catholic and to social studies education that reflects Catholic values and best practices in academic education. Students need to know the Church's moral and social teaching, how to form their consciences in accordance with Church teaching, and to how to apply Church teaching to specific issues facing society today. Students need to understand the fundamental principles of the American form of government, the processes by which our common life in society is governed, and the methods by which individuals and groups exert power and influence in society. Students need to be assisted in seeing the spiritual aspect and the civic aspect of their lives as an integrated whole. Students need to be motivated to act on their beliefs and to fulfill their civic responsibilities.

2.2 How does the prohibition of partisan political activity apply to Catholic schools?

Catholic schools must avoid all involvement in partisan political activity.

2.3 What are some specific partisan political activities about which questions are likely to be raised in the Catholic school setting?

A. Curriculum and instruction

All learning about the political process that occurs under the auspices of the Catholic school must be implemented in a manner consistent with the Church's moral teaching, Catholic social teaching, and the laws governing the Church's tax exempt status. This means teaching about current social issues will be illumined by the light of faith as contained in Catholic moral and social teaching. It also means that instruction will focus on political processes and social issues, rather than political parties or candidates. Any

activity which endorses or opposes any candidate, characterizes any candidate or party as having acceptable or unacceptable platforms, etc., must be avoided.

Current instructional methodologies in all subject areas place significant emphasis on active learning, critical thinking, and application of knowledge to real-life, problem-solving situations. Educating students about the political process is no exception. Learning activities need to go beyond reading a textbook chapter on how a bill becomes a law or how the branches of government balance power.

As major elections draw near, a number of ideas about how to engage students with the political process surface in faculty discussions, publications of Catholic and civic organizations, and advertisements for social studies programs and materials. Frequently, ideas that seem good, have definite positive benefits, and are certainly well-intentioned, reveal the potential for difficulties upon further reflection. All learning activities under consideration need to be evaluated in light of the Church's role as moral teacher and her status as a tax-exempt organization.

Most importantly, educating students about the political process and about Catholic moral and social teaching is not a "one time event" that happens in the fall of years divisible by four. The best education of students is ongoing and incorporated regularly into all appropriate aspects of the curriculum. Prayers regularly focus on the principles of Catholic social teaching. Students periodically research and collect data on a wide variety of issues facing society and explore and evaluate solutions to those issues. Service projects regularly engage students in making a contribution to the common good motivated by both Christian and civic values. Religion, social studies, science, and literature lessons often focus on implications for values along with subject area content.

B. Mock elections

In a general sense, mock elections have all the desirable characteristics mentioned in paragraph 2 under "Curriculum and Instruction" above. Simulations are considered valid and valuable instructional activities which are used with a wide range of students, subjects, and settings.

However, further reflection on mock elections involving current candidates for public office reveals a number of serious difficulties from both the standpoint of moral teaching and the school's tax exempt status. These difficulties include:

- ⊙ There is the potential for students to elect a candidate who favors actions that Church teaching views as intrinsically evil. As the effects of ethical relativism have become more pervasive in our society, many candidates, and at times, even all candidates, including Catholic candidates, espouse positions and platforms contrary to the Church's moral and social teaching, especially the most fundamental teachings regarding human life and family life.
- ⊙ Results of mock elections give the impression that a Catholic school endorses a particular candidate. Media reports covering the results of mock elections in Catholic schools have featured headlines and sound bites such as "School X endorses Candidate Y."

- ⊗ The mock election occurs as part of an official school activity and faculty members are involved in an official capacity.
- ⊗ Mock elections inevitably involve distributing and posting partisan materials on Catholic property.

Therefore, Catholic schools are urged not to hold mock elections using actual candidates, and not to hold them at the time near a major national, state, or local election. If a school wishes to simulate the election process, it is recommended that they do so outside the campaign/election time period, and that they use fictional candidates that are not readily identifiable with any actual or potential candidate, political party, or political action committee. Student Council elections can also be used to demonstrate elements of the political process. If a school decides to conduct a mock election, it is recommended that schools not publish, publicly disclose, or publicly comment on the mock election results.

C. Invitations to or requests from politicians to visit Catholic schools

Personal, firsthand interaction with public figures, including politicians who are candidates, could certainly have positive educational value for students. Politicians, especially candidates, often seek “photo ops” at schools, including Catholic schools. The Bishops of the United States have addressed this issue, and provisions of the IRC address it as well. See Section 1.5.A. above for specific information.

D. Invitations of Catholic school students to attend events at which candidates will speak

It may happen that Catholic students are invited to attend an event at another location at which a candidate will be speaking. The presence of an identifiable Catholic group could be publicly perceived as supporting the candidate. The concepts addressed above regarding the capacity in which the person is speaking and the person’s positions on issues of concern to the Catholic Church also affect the advisability of sending students to attend such events. If a group of Catholic school students does attend, it is recommended that students not wear school uniforms and that “photo ops” with the candidate be avoided.

2.4 What principles should guide school administrators and faculty members in making decisions about the education of their students regarding the political process?

For Catholics, faith cannot be separated from citizenship, and moral convictions cannot be separated from civic decisions. When making any educational decision, Catholic educators need to give primary consideration to the mission of Catholic education and to the best interests of the students entrusted to their care. In particular, curriculum and instruction decisions need to be made with proper consideration of their potential impact on Catholic identity and their pedagogical value.

PART THREE

3.1 Additional Resources

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/>

Political Activity Guidelines

<http://usccb.org/about/general-counsel/political-activity-guidelines.cfm>

Do's and Don'ts Guidelines During Election Season

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/dos-and-donts-guidelines-during-election-season.cfm>

Parish and Schools

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/parishes-and-schools/>

Parish Planning

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/parish-staffs-and-parish-councils-planning-ideas.cfm>

Catholic School Principals and Teachers

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/ideas-for-catholic-school-principals-and-teachers.cfm>