

***Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship:  
A Call to Political Responsibility  
from the Catholic Bishops of the United States***

**DIOCESAN PLANNING SUGGESTIONS**

*Early in January 2008, a new Faithful Citizenship Web site will be launched that will include a wide range of resources for parishes, committees, educational programs, youth and young adult ministries, and other groups. In the meantime, dioceses may want to consider the following ideas to begin developing a plan for sharing the message of Faithful Citizenship.*

*Contact your State Catholic Conference for additional ideas and guidance.*

**DIOCESAN NEWSPAPER**—An *article in the diocesan newspaper* could describe the 2007 *Faithful Citizenship* statement and diocesan plans for sharing it.

Your diocesan newspaper may also want to consider running a *series of articles* on Catholic social teaching and the issues addressed in the statement.

The diocesan bishop may want to write a **column in the diocesan newspaper** about the statement, adding his own message for the local Catholic community.

**DIOCESAN WEB SITE**—Developing a **Web page or link** for *Faithful Citizenship* on the diocesan home page can help local people find the statement and related resources easily. You may want to link to the USCCB Faithful Citizenship Web site ([www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org)).

**OTHER NEWSPAPERS AND PUBLICATIONS**—Develop a press release or adjust the USCCB press release (<http://www.usccb.org/comm/archives/2007/07-187.shtml>) to incorporate a local message and **notify local media** about the *Faithful Citizenship* statement. The diocesan bishop may want to add his own quote.

**LOCAL TELEVISION AND RADIO PROGRAMS**—If you have a diocesan television or radio program, or if you have access to local cable television outlets, consider doing a **program on *Faithful Citizenship***.

**PARISH E-MAILING**—Early in December 2007, USCCB will send an **e-mail message to parishes** notifying them of the *Faithful Citizenship* statement and the Web site. Your diocese was invited several months ago to send USCCB a list of e-mail addresses for parishes, or the e-mail address of a member of the diocesan staff who will forward USCCB e-mail messages to parishes. Periodically through the next year, e-mail updates

will also be sent. Sending a **message from the diocesan bishop to pastors** can help call attention to these *Faithful Citizenship* e-mail messages.

**PARISH MAILING**—In January, USCCB Publishing will send a **promotional mailer** on *Faithful Citizenship* (January 14th) to all parishes and a **sample copy of the statement** (January 21st). Sending a **message from the diocesan bishop to pastors** can help call attention to these Faithful Citizenship mailings.

**DIOCESAN STAFF STRATEGY**—*Faithful Citizenship* has implications for many ministries. Social ministry and pro-life leaders can share this message with their contacts in parishes and others in the diocese. Teachers and religious educators can share the basic message with their students, building a foundation for future “faithful citizens.” Offices for evangelization, Hispanic or Black Catholics, and family life can also share the message with their contacts. Focusing a **diocesan staff meeting** on the statement and developing a plan to share it can be an important part of the overall strategy.

**MEETINGS OF PRIESTS, DEACONS, PASTORAL ASSOCIATES**—These parish leaders often face challenging questions and situations during election years. Those who provide continuing education for priests, deacons, pastoral associates, and others can sponsor sessions to **train these leaders** on how to share *Faithful Citizenship*, highlighting “do’s and don’ts.” The USCCB is developing a speakers’ bureau as well as training and workshop packages that can be used in a wide range of sessions. Contact [www.jphdmail.org](http://www.jphdmail.org) for information.

**OTHER MEETINGS**—Many diocesan offices host regular meetings, ongoing training programs, annual conventions and other gatherings. These represent excellent opportunities to share the political responsibility message with key leaders from parishes and schools. For example, a **gathering of principals, DRE’s, or a *Theology on Tap* session** can be focused on *Faithful Citizenship*. The USCCB is developing a speakers’ bureau as well as training and workshop packages that can be used in a wide range of sessions. Contact [www.jphdmail.org](http://www.jphdmail.org) for information.

**CANDIDATE FORUMS AND VOTER REGISTRATION**--Hosting a **nonpartisan candidate forum** and sponsoring **nonpartisan parish voter registration** efforts are two valuable ways of encouraging civic participation and helping voters learn about the candidates and the issues. In the past, many dioceses have been able to host these events in a manner that provided an important service to the community while easily meeting all legal requirements. For ideas and suggestions, visit this Web site early in January.

**VOTER EDUCATION DAYS**—Consider urging parishes to hold a “Voter Education Day,” a Sunday when they **distribute the *Faithful Citizenship* bulletin insert** and provide parishioners with information on the issues and the *Faithful Citizenship* Web site.

## **Political Activity Guidelines**

Parishes and other Catholic organizations that are tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code are prohibited from intervening in political campaigns. As a result, certain political activities that would be appropriate for individuals should not be undertaken by Catholic organizations or their representatives. The USCCB Office of General Counsel provides detailed guidance for Catholic organizations on what constitutes political campaign intervention under the Internal Revenue Code. This guidance is available at [www.usccb.org/ogc](http://www.usccb.org/ogc). In addition, many dioceses and state Catholic conferences also provide resources for use by parishes and other Catholic organizations.

Parishes are often asked by candidates or political groups for permission to speak or distribute literature. Many parishes choose to distribute only *Faithful Citizenship*, materials distributed by their diocese, their state Catholic conference, or the USCCB. To avoid violating the political campaign intervention prohibition, you should seek the advice of your diocesan attorney or state Catholic conference before giving permission for the distribution of literature or providing the opportunity for candidates to speak. The items in this packet, along with other USCCB resources and the advice and materials provided by your diocese and your state Catholic conference, can help you remain non-partisan and maintain consistency with Catholic teaching.

### **Activities That are Allowed and Encouraged**

According to the USCCB Office of General Counsel, 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 *Faithful Citizenship* statement and brochure included in this packet, along with the *Faithful Citizenship* video and the other resources listed on the enclosed order form, 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 the enclosed resource "Ideas for Social Concerns and Pro-Life Committees: Tips for Conducting a Non-Partisan Voter Education Campaign and Voter Registration Drive.")

***Ballot Measures:*** Supporting or opposing ballot measures, including referenda, initiatives, constitutional amendments, and similar procedures, is considered "lobbying" activity and not political campaign intervention. 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 your diocesan attorney or state Catholic conference.

**Voter Education:** Parishes and Church organizations can and should engage in non-partisan voter education. This may include distributing the results of candidate polls or surveys, so long as these materials have been approved by your diocesan attorney or state Catholic conference. Voter education materials should (1) be consistent with Church teaching on political responsibility; (2) cover a wide range of issues important to voters; and (3) exhibit no bias for or against any candidate or party.

**Non-Partisanship:** 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.

**Bulletin Announcement:**

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.

**Activities to Avoid**

In order to avoid violating the political campaign intervention prohibition, 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. Authorization should be given only after materials have been approved by your diocesan attorney.
- \* **Do not invite or permit only selected candidates to address your members.** Before inviting candidates, make sure such events are consistent with diocesan policy. If so, it is important that all candidates be invited.

If you have any questions about what is allowed, call your diocesan attorney. Please remember that the IRS rules against political campaign intervention also apply to materials posted on parish or other Church organization web sites.

While it is important to be clear about what we can't do, the most important thing to focus on is what we can do. In a democracy, loving our neighbor and caring for the least among us means supporting leaders and policies that promote the common good and protect society's most vulnerable members. Helping Catholics to recognize and act on this dimension of their faith is an essential task for parish leaders.

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## **DO'S AND DON'TS FOR PARISHES**

### **DO:**

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 unbiased candidate questionnaires covering issues of human life, justice, and peace that have been reviewed and approved by your diocesan attorney.

Check with your diocesan attorney if you have any questions about what is appropriate.

### **DON'T:**

Endorse or oppose candidates for political office.

Distribute partisan campaign literature or biased voter guides under Church auspices.

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

Invite only selected candidates to address your Church-sponsored group.

Conduct voter registration slanted toward one party.