

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

**PLANNING IDEAS FOR PARISH STAFFS AND PARISH
COUNCILS***

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, parishes may want to consider the following ideas to begin developing a plan for sharing the message of Faithful Citizenship.

From Simple to Sophisticated: Parish involvement in faithful citizenship efforts can range from simple bulletin or pulpit announcements to full voter registration campaigns and extensive distribution of voter education materials. The best efforts will be those integrated into ongoing parish activities and resources such as Sunday worship, school and religious education programs, weekly bulletins, and meetings of parish organizations.

First Steps: Whatever level of involvement you choose, it is important to discuss this effort with the parish council and/or parish staff. You may want to use the video *Faithful Citizenship* to introduce the bishops' statement. Then discuss how you might best share this message in your parish. Who should be in charge of the effort—The pastor? The parish council? The social concerns committee? A special committee? A designated member of the parish? That person or group can develop a plan for parish faithful citizenship activities and identify how the plan fits the civic responsibility guidelines outlined below. If developed by a designated parishioner or committee, the plan can then be brought to the pastor and the parish council for review and approval. Diocesan social action offices and other diocesan offices can be helpful as you develop your plan and can provide local resources and advice.

Efforts you may want to consider include the following:

- **Download and distribute the resources** that will be available on the *Faithful Citizenship* Web site* to the appropriate parish leaders and urge them to integrate the message of *Faithful Citizenship* into parish activities.
- **Choose a week** early in 2008 during which *The Challenge of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* bulletin inserts can be distributed at all Masses and parish gatherings.
- Periodically include in your **bulletin** short excerpts from *Faithful Citizenship* (see the Bulletin Quotes that will be available on the *Faithful Citizenship* Web site).

- **Invite your diocesan social action director** or other diocesan leaders to a special adult education session to give a presentation on Catholic teaching about participation in public life (see the resources for religious education programs that will be available on the *Faithful Citizenship* Web site*).
- **Offer a training session for catechists** on how they can incorporate the message of *Faithful Citizenship* into their lesson plans (see the resources for religious education programs that will be available on the *Faithful Citizenship* Web site*).
- **Focus an in-service day or faculty meeting** for parish school teachers on the message of *Faithful Citizenship* and how it can be woven into school activities (see the resources for Catholic schools that will be available on the *Faithful Citizenship* Web site*).
- **Preach** on the importance of be “faithful citizens” (see the resources with ideas for liturgists and prayer leaders and the suggestions for homilists that will be available on the *Faithful Citizenship* Web site*).
- **Conduct non-partisan voter registration drives** after Masses on one or more Sundays (see the tips for conducting a non-partisan parish voter registration drive and voter education campaign that will be available on the *Faithful Citizenship* Web site*).
- Periodically include in the **general intercessions** prayers for those elected and for all who exercise their rights and duties as citizens (see the resources with ideas for liturgists and prayer leaders that will be available on the *Faithful Citizenship* Web site*).
- Conduct a **sign-up for a diocesan or state legislative network** and encourage parishioners to participate in advocacy efforts (contact your diocesan social action office or state Catholic conference for information).
- Distribute **non-partisan candidate surveys** if they are made available by your diocese or state Catholic conference.
- Organize **non-partisan candidate forums** (see the tips for conducting a non-partisan parish voter registration drive and voter education campaign that will be available on 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. 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.

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.

**This resource refers to other resources that will be put up on this Web site early in January 2008.*