



GUIDELINES FOR ADVOCACY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Let Your Faith Be Your Voter's Guide

Every election season, questions arise over what parishes can do to promote civic participation while **avoiding** partisan electioneering. This can sometimes be difficult to answer. Our faith calls us to know, love, and serve God by protecting life, serving the poor and vulnerable, upholding the dignity of the individual, and preserving our religious liberty--all of which sometimes carry political overtones that can be difficult to separate from what may be seen as political action.

The Texas bishops refrain from telling parishioners how to vote or from endorsing candidates. Instead, they call upon for the faithful to consider public issues not through political parties or candidates, but through conscience and thoughtful adherence to Catholic moral and social doctrine. Put simply: we should define our civic actions through our Catholic conscience and not by affiliation to a particular political party or ideology. We should let our faith be our voter's guide.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* which outlined the Church's responsibility to help Catholics understand the moral dimensions of public decisions, and to encourage them to fulfill their civic responsibilities.

"As Catholics we are not single-issue voters. Our cause is the defense of human life and the protection of the weak and vulnerable. Catholic voters should use the framework of Catholic teaching to examine candidates' positions on issues affecting human life and dignity as well as issues of justice and peace, and they should consider candidates' integrity, philosophy, and performance," the bishops wrote in *Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility*.

If we truly want a nation of respect for human life, dignity, justice, and peace, we must make a personal commitment in ourselves, and in our families, businesses, communities, and governments to achieve it. Participation in political life in light of fundamental moral principles is an essential duty for every Catholic and all people of good will. To learn more, go to the Texas Catholic Conference website (www.txcatholic.org) or to the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops website at (www.faithfulcitizenship.org).

TCC GUIDELINES FOR ADVOCACY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Let Your Faith Be Your Voter's Guide

- **Parishes and other institutions may engage in issue-oriented activities and advocacy. As a rule, such advocacy is not a problem, since advocacy would not be a substantial part of a parish's endeavors. Examples of acceptable activity are:**
 - Educational efforts about issues and in support or opposition of specific legislation;
 - Encouraging constituent contact with state or federal officials to comment on legislation;
 - Distributing flyers about an issue that contain contact info for public officials and legislators;
 - Preaching of homilies on the sanctity of life, serving the poor, protecting human dignity, and preserving religious liberty; and,
 - Nonpartisan voter registration and get-out-the-vote campaigns.
- **Civic or issue advocacy materials--including voter's guides, surveys, or polls--MUST emphasize educational objectives, not support/oppose specific candidates or parties, and must be approved by your local bishop.**
- **DO NOT provide evaluations or endorsements of candidates or political parties. Any type of endorsements are not permitted. For example:**
 - Encouraging parishioners to vote for or against a particular candidate or party;
 - Labeling a candidate or party as "pro-school choice" or "anti-life;" such a practice removes objectivity by not allowing readers to evaluate a candidate's position themselves;
 - Rating candidates or using graphic representations (e.g., plus/minus, checks, stars, etc.);
 - Providing marked sample ballots.
- **NO Catholic diocese, parish, or organization should endorse, oppose, support, or raise and/or contribute funds to any political party, political action committee, or candidate for public office.**
- **Pastors and other religious leaders are urged to avoid any personal, even private, endorsements, keeping in mind that people may not be able to recognize that you are not speaking as a representative of the Church.**
- **NO Catholic parish, hall, school, gymnasium, or other facility shall be used for political candidates or partisan campaign events.**
- **Signs or leaflets supporting a particular candidate SHOULD NOT be located/distributed ANYWHERE on parish property or during parish-sponsored events.**
- **DO NOT invite political candidates or their representatives to address parishes, events, or masses.**

Questions or more information on TCC GUIDELINES FOR ADVOCACY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, in English or Spanish, can be addressed to the Texas Catholic Conference at (512) 339-9882 or at www.TXcatholic.org.