

# Guidelines for Pastors and Parishes on Advocacy and Political Action

***“Education and upbringing, concern for others, a well-integrated view of life and spiritual growth: all these are essential for quality human relationships and enabling society to react against injustices, aberrations and abuses of economic, technological, political and media power.” (Fratelli Tutti, 167)***

The California Catholic Conference of Bishops offers guidance on political advocacy for Catholic clergy and parishioners, emphasizing the importance of engaging in politics with a foundation in Catholic social teaching and ethical principles.

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## Pope Francis on Political Engagement

Pope Francis, in his 2013 reflection "Pray for Politicians that They Govern Us Well," encourages Catholics to engage in politics for the common good:

“We need to participate for the common good. Sometimes we hear ‘a good Catholic is not interested in politics.’ This is not true: good Catholics immerse themselves in politics by offering the best of themselves so that the leader[s] can govern.”

As disciples of Christ, we are called to share our faith in the public arena. Pope Francis further states in "Gaudete et Exsultate":

“Your identification with Christ and his will involves a commitment to build with him that kingdom of love, justice and universal peace. . . . You cannot grow in holiness without committing yourself, body and soul, to giving your best to this endeavor.”



# Principles of Catholic Social Teaching



Catholic social teaching provides a moral framework for addressing political issues. Key principles include:

- **Human Dignity** - the prime principle of Catholic social teaching. It recognizes that man is made in God's image and likeness. It is this that makes every human life sacred.
- **Solidarity** - flows from human dignity in that it "consists in the very fact that in God and with God I love even persons I do not like or even know." (Pope Benedict XVI, 18).
- **Subsidiarity** - flows from human dignity in that it recognizes "in the person a subject who is always capable of giving something to others." (Pope Benedict XVI, 16).

## Guidelines for Advocacy and Political Action

Participation in public life by religious individuals and groups can be complex. Here are practical guidelines for clergy and parishioners:

### 1. Individual Participation

- **Voting and Political Engagement:**
  - Catholics are encouraged to vote and are welcome to engage in partisan politics. When voting, consider candidates' positions on a range of issues as well as their personal integrity as leaders. Catholics should recognize that no candidate or party authentically embraces the totality of Catholic Social Teaching and take every opportunity to encourage candidates and parties to work toward the fundamental right to life for all and the common good.

# Guidelines for Advocacy and Political Action



- **Role of Religious Leaders:**

- Religious leaders should never make public endorsements of candidates or political parties to maintain their role as impartial spiritual guides. Practically speaking, no candidate or party authentically embraces the totality of Catholic Social Teaching.
- Pastors, deacons, and other parish leaders play an important role in helping Catholics form their consciences. It is important to share Catholic Social Teaching and discuss the moral and social dimensions of policies, initiatives and measures.
- Before offering guidance to support or oppose a piece of legislation or a ballot initiative, parish leaders should connect with the California Catholic Conference or their local diocese.

## 2. Institutional Restrictions

- **Partisan Politics:**

- Churches and tax-exempt organizations must not engage in partisan politics, including endorsing or opposing candidates.
- Voter education should remain neutral and non-partisan, avoiding any appearance of supporting specific candidates or parties.

- **Educational Initiatives:**

- Parish leaders are encouraged to offer education around important moral and social issues, even those that are contentious. When offering education based in Catholic Social Teaching, it is important to focus on the teaching itself, and the application of our social doctrine to real-life examples, without reverting to partisan politics or political slogans.
- If parishes would like to hold Town Hall meetings or Candidate Forums, they are welcome to do so only if all candidates running for a particular position are invited to attend.

# Guidelines for Advocacy and Political Action



## 3. Issue-Oriented Activities

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  - If parishes would like to hold Town Hall meetings or Candidate Forums, they are welcome to do so only if all candidates running for a particular position are invited to attend.
- **Advocacy and Legislation:**
  - Distribute informational fliers about legislative issues, including contact details for elected representatives.
  - Encourage parishioners to contact their legislators to support or oppose legislation based on Catholic social teachings. Always check with the California Catholic Conference or your local diocese.

## 4. Prohibited Activities

- **Political Endorsements:**
  - No diocesan or parish entity should endorse or oppose any political candidate or party.
  - Avoid urging parishioners to vote for specific candidates or labeling candidates with biased terms.

# Guidelines for Advocacy and Political Action



- **Objective Representation:**

- Do not use symbols like plus (+) and minus (-) signs or ratings to evaluate candidates.
- Distribute non-partisan voter education materials without bias.

## 5. Use of Church Property

- **Distribution of Partisan Materials:**

- Church property, including parking lots, should not be used for distributing partisan materials.
- Parish leaders should prevent any partisan activities to avoid the appearance of endorsement.

## 6. Ballot Initiatives and Referenda

- **Review and Consultation:**

- The California Catholic Conference reviews statewide ballot measures. Bishops may support, oppose, or take no position on these measures.
- Parishes should consult the California Catholic Conference or their bishop before taking any public position on a measure if the diocese has taken no official stance.

- **Facility Use:**

- Church facilities should only be used for signature gathering initiatives with approval of the pastor and direct instruction from their local bishop and the California Catholic Conference.