

ACTIVITIES THAT ARE ALLOWED AND ENCOURAGED BY THE GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE USCCB

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.

Voter Participation

To avoid violating the political campaign activity 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.

Ballot Measures

Supporting or opposing ballot measures, including referenda, initiatives, constitutional amendments, and similar procedures, is considered "lobbying" activity and not political campaign activity. 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.

Activities to Avoid

In order to avoid violating the political campaign activity prohibitions, 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 activity 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.

Adapted from Do's and Don'ts Guidelines During Election Season from the USCCB

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

GUIDELINES FOR PARISHES DURING ELECTION SEASON

QUICK DO'S AND DON'TS

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 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.
- Distribute a biased candidate survey.

Parishes and other IRS-designated section 501(c)(3) church organizations are prohibited from participating in political campaign activity. Thus, certain political activities that are entirely appropriate for individuals may not be undertaken by church organizations or their representatives.

Parishes are often asked by candidates or political groups for permission to speak or distribute literature. Many parishes choose only to distribute Faithful Citizenship materials distributed by their diocese, their state Catholic conference, or the USCCB.

To avoid violating the political campaign activity 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.

