



Diocesan Social Action Office

Election Time Guidelines for Churches and Non-Profit Agencies and Organizations

Catholics are called to become involved in public life and to use the values of faith to shape their political choices. People of faith run for office, participate in political parties and campaigns, and vote for candidates of their choice. Individuals can be part of legislative networks and a wide variety of community organizations and advocacy groups. **The church and church-related organizations have an important, but limited role in the political process, as outlined here.**

As tax-exempt organizations, the church and church-related agencies and organizations are not permitted to engage in partisan activities, supporting or opposing individual candidates and political parties. The following is a brief outline of the “dos” and “don’ts” for churches and church-related agencies and organizations based on requirements by the Federal Election Act and Section 501©(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

What Churches/Agencies May Do

Discuss and educate on important moral and social issues pointing out their human and ethical dimensions

Share gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching on issues impacting human life, human dignity, human rights, and on justice and peace

Invite *all* candidates for public office to a church/ agency sponsored public forum, debate or candidates’ night

Conduct a nonpartisan voter registration drive on church/agency property

Distribute the unbiased candidate questionnaires of the DSAO that cover a wide variety of issues

Encourage members and employees, as individuals, to join a party or campaign of their choice, monitor the positions of their representatives, and make their voice heard

Take positions on nonpartisan, county health, human services, and education levies

Permit local election authorities to utilize parish facilities as polling places

What Churches/Agencies May *Not* Do

Endorse/Oppose candidates for political office

Arrange groups to work for a candidate for office

Permit distribution on church or agency property (including parking lots) of any fliers or material that might favor or oppose a candidate. This includes voter scorecards, endorsements from outside organizations, fliers or other materials biased toward a candidate

Use parish/agency bulletin or other official channels to support or oppose candidates or political parties

Provide financial support to any candidate, political action committee or political party; furthermore, a church or agency may not provide volunteers, facilities or mailing lists to candidates

Invite only selected candidates to address your church/agency sponsored group

Label a candidate or party, e.g. “pro-life” or “anti-life”

Solicit signatures for a petition enabling a candidate to appear on the ballot.

Make loans to or loan guarantees to any candidate, political party, or political action committee



What Churches/Agencies May Do

Rent parish facilities to candidates or political parties so long as the parish has a policy of renting to third parties (consult with the Diocesan Legal Office)

What Churches/Agencies May *Not* Do

Renting space to a candidate or political party if any of the following are true:

- your parish doesn't routinely rent such space or if it made available only for affiliated Catholic users;
- your parish charges the candidate or party less than market rate;
- your parish allows a candidate or party to use the space for free;
- your parish rents the space to a party or candidate under different terms or conditions than it does for other renters/users;
- your parish rents space in a manner that demonstrates preference towards or against particular candidates or parties (e.g. your parish is only willing to rent to one candidate or party);
- your parish promotes, advertises, or provides any services in connection with a candidate or party event on its property.

For further information on these guidelines, contact Brother Patrick Shea, General Counsel for the Diocese of Cleveland @ 216-696-6525 or 1-800-869-6525, ext. 4370 or Kevin Burke, Associate General Counsel @ ext. 4360.

For further information on “Forming Christian Consciences for Faithful Citizenship” or parish presentations and resources, contact:

For further resources on Faithful Citizenship:

Karen Leith, Diocesan Education & Training Center for Social Justice, 330-535-2787 or kpl7@aol.com
Tom Allio, Diocesan Social Action Office, 888-620-5280 or email tjallio@clevelandcatholiccharities.org
Len Calabrese, Commission on Catholic Community Action, 216-939-3839 or lmcalabrese@clevelandcatholiccharities.org
Sharon Kleppel, Catholic Commission of Lorain County, 440-244-6037 or smkleppel@clevelandcatholiccharities.org
Patrick O'Bryan, Catholic Commission of Wayne, Ashland & Medina, 330-263-6176 or pjobryan@clevelandcatholiccharities.org
J. Rocky Ortiz, CCHD/CRS, 440-245-5043 or jrortiz@clevelandcatholiccharities.org
Jerome Walcott, Catholic Commission of Lake and Geauga, 440-943-7608 or jwalcott@clevelandcatholiccharities.org