



Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops

THE PUBLIC POLICY VOICE OF THE CHURCH

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 these have political implications that can be difficult to separate from advocating for a specific candidate or party.

The Texas bishops refrain from telling parishioners how to vote or from endorsing candidates. Instead, they call upon 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. Our faith should 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 see politics in light of our faith, and encourage them to fulfill their civic responsibilities. The bishops wrote, "As Catholics we are not single-issue voters. Our cause is the defense of human life and the protection of the weak and vulnerable." In working for these causes, Catholics have an obligation to oppose intrinsically evil acts that violate the Commandments, such as "you shall not kill." At the same time, Catholics have an obligation to support acts that uphold Christ's commandment: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Decisions about how to vote require the exercise of a well-formed conscience. The exercise begins with outright opposition to intrinsically evil acts, with the recognition that political issues carry different moral weights. The exercise also takes into account a candidate's commitments, character, integrity, and ability to influence a given issue. In the end, each Catholic should make their decision based upon their well-formed conscience and Catholic moral teaching.

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 at www.txcatholic.org, or to the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops website at www.faithfulcitizenship.org.

The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops’
Guidelines for Advocacy and Political Participation

We offer the following guidance on positive ways to engage in politics:

- Parishes and other institutions may, and in some cases should, engage in issue-oriented activities and advocacy. As a rule, issue advocacy is not a problem because it 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 legislators 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.

We offer the following guidance on ways parishes should not engage in politics:

- Do not provide evaluations or endorsements of candidates or political parties. Any type of endorsement is not permitted. For example:
 - encouraging parishioners to vote for or against a particular candidate or party;
 - labeling a specific candidate or party as “pro-school choice” or “anti-life,” because such acts seek to replace the exercise of conscience;
 - rating candidates or using graphics (e.g., plus/minus, checks, stars, etc.); and
 - 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.
- 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.

If you have questions or want more information on the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops’ *Guidelines for Advocacy and Political Participation*, in English or Spanish, please contact us at 512-339-9882, or find us on the web at www.txcatholic.org.