

2014  
ELECTION-YEAR  
GUIDELINES FOR CATHOLIC  
PARISHES AND INSTITUTIONS



MICHIGAN  
CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE

The following guidelines are intended to encourage and facilitate appropriate participation in political activities for Catholic churches and other 501(c)(3) institutions that qualify for tax-exempt status under the Internal Revenue Code.

## Do...

- ... share the Church's teaching on public issues such as religious liberty, human life, marriage, immigration, education, social justice and peace
- ... engage in non-partisan education
- ... urge evaluation of candidate positions in light of Church teaching
- ... abide by guidelines for tax-exempt organizations concerning "candidate nights"
- ... hold or sponsor voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives
- ... encourage participation in the electoral process
- ... address moral and human dimensions of issue and ballot proposals

The Church and Church organizations are not to be involved in partisan politics. Expressions of preference for a political party and of direct or indirect support for or in opposition to specific candidates or political parties are not permissible.

## Don't...

- ... provide parishioner lists to candidates or parties
- ... use official Church or parish channels to distribute partisan materials
- ... engage in endorsements, contributions, or electioneering as a religious leader
- ... invite or permit only select candidates to "candidate nights"
- ... display political signs or bumper stickers on Church property or vehicles
- ... arrange for groups to work for a particular candidate or party
- ... post partisan endorsements or selective partisan links to website or social media

## What guidelines should be followed regarding the provision of election-year materials?

Voter education materials from political campaigns, parties, Political Action Committees (PACs), and outside organizations are prohibited. Issues covered in these types of materials may not address the range of issues of importance to the Church. Moreover, their content, format and presentation may not satisfy IRS regulations applicable to Catholic organizations. Though distribution of these materials elsewhere may have value, they may not be appropriate for the Church. Election-year materials can be provided and distributed that have been published by the diocesan bishop, the Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC), or the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

## What are the rules regarding candidate visits to Catholic institutions?

Appearances by candidates in the pulpit, other worship services, or Church events may not single out or promote any particular candidate. If an individual is invited to appear in a candidate capacity, equal access must be provided to other candidates for the same office. On the other hand, if the candidate is invited to appear in a non-candidate

capacity and is instead invited as a current public official or expert, it is not necessary to provide equal access to other candidates, provided that individual does not mention an upcoming campaign or candidacy.

## As a pastor or religious leader, can I make personal endorsements outside of my official role?

While personal endorsements are not prohibited, it may be difficult to separate personal activity from one's role as a representative of the Church. Officials and employees of the Church, acting in their individual capacities on political matters, should make clear that they are not acting as representatives of the Church or any Church organization. No endorsements or contributions can be made to a candidate through official Church channels. Similarly, Church officials or employees may display political signs at personally-owned property but not on owned or rented property of the organization.

## Are Catholic institutions allowed to take positions on ballot proposals?

Advocacy for or against a specific issue or ballot proposal is permissible and in fact is encouraged.

## May candidate questionnaires be provided to parishioners?

Candidate questionnaires may be provided as long as they are unbiased, cover a wide range of issues important to the Church, and have been reviewed and approved by the diocesan attorney. Any questionnaire provided must be published by the diocesan bishop, the MCC or the USCCB.

## May student political groups meet on Catholic educational facilities?

Student political groups or activities may be given permission to meet on Catholic educational facilities as long as the facilities are also open to all other student groups and activities.

Michigan Catholic Conference Board of Directors reaffirms the long-standing prohibition of the distribution of election year material in parishes **unless published by the diocesan bishop, the Michigan Catholic Conference or the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.**

This brochure highlights more common examples of permissible and prohibited election-year activities as published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office of General Counsel. For a more complete understanding of those activities that are and are not legally allowed, visit the USCCB Political Activities Guidelines website at <http://www.usccb.org/about/general-counsel/political-activity-guidelines.cfm>.

### Published by

Michigan Catholic Conference  
510 South Capitol Avenue  
Lansing, Michigan 48933

publicpolicy@micatholic.org  
Phone: (517) 372-9310  
Fax: (517) 372-3940

