

## Policy Regarding Political Candidates and Catholic Parishes

### Preamble:

The question has arisen as to the possibility of candidates for political office addressing parish congregations, particularly in the context of liturgy, but also in the context of church events. In light of this question, several considerations present themselves. First, the liturgy is set apart for the worship of God, so that certain elements of our common life, appropriate and even commendable and necessary in themselves, do not find an appropriate place there. Second, the Church cannot and does not identify any one party as embodying the fullness of the Gospel or even of Catholic Social Teaching. Indeed, this point should be particularly clear in our current political context. Third, though the previous point demonstrates that the Church has no interest in endorsing any political party or candidate, we should be aware that legislation pertaining to non-profit organizations prevents such action and that violations of this legislation can result in the loss of charitable status. Fourth, the laity are called to be actively engaged in the world in ways that “serve the integral promotion of the human person and the common good,” including, in our context, participation in the democratic process. Parishes can and should, therefore, encourage engagement with this process. The most vital role of the parish in this regard is “to instruct and illuminate the consciences of the faithful,” recognizing that genuine formation of conscience does not replace the freedom of the Christian but engages and fosters it. “Living and acting in conformity with one’s own conscience on questions of politics is not slavish acceptance of positions alien to politics or some kind of confessionalism, but rather the way in which Christians offer their concrete contribution so that, through political life, society will become more just and more consistent with the dignity of the human person.”\*

### Policy:

1. Bulletin notices, parish announcements, preaching, and faith formation efforts in the parish may make specific references to political events, elections, and other opportunities for people to be engaged in civic life. It would even be possible, for instance, for a parish to host an all-candidates forum, though not in a liturgical space. In any case, preference cannot be given to one candidate over another.
2. No political parties or candidates may be formally endorsed or publicly promoted by pastors, parishes, or Catholic organizations, orally, in written materials, or with signage on church property. (This is not to be understood to apply to *positions*. E.g., parishes may have signage on church property promoting a pro-life position, but not a political party’s endorsement of such a position.)
3. Candidates may not be introduced as such in liturgical spaces or services or other parish events. Nor may they be permitted to speak as candidates in the same.
4. Candidates and/or political organizations may rent spaces that are available for rent provided that a) signage, advertisements, and introductions indicate that the church and/or church properties do not endorse the party or candidate, b) candidates and/or organizations pay the same rent as one another and other renters c) parish events take

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\* All quotations taken from *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2002, paragraph 6.

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priority over outside rentals, and d) the event would be in keeping with the parish's rental policy.

### **Further reading:**

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 1897-1917: "Participation in Social Life.

*Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2002.

*Gaudium et Spes*, Second Vatican Council, paragraphs 40-45: "Chapter IV: The Role of the church in the Modern World"

*Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis, paragraphs 177-185: "I. Communal and societal repercussions of the kerygma"

*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

*Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.