

## **INVOLVEMENT IN 2006 ELECTION YEAR ACTIVITIES**

As Catholics, we are called to carry the values of the Gospel and the teachings of our Church into the public square. As citizens of the United States, we have a duty to participate in the framing and the debate of public issues, and in the selection of those who occupy positions of civic leadership. These responsibilities to faith and citizenship are at the heart of what it means to be a Catholic in our country.

This pamphlet is intended to encourage Catholic clergy and laity to facilitate the involvement of their faith communities in appropriate election related activities. These activities are designed to increase parishioner interest in the policy issues that will characterize this election year's debate, to focus their attention on candidate positions, and encourage them to exercise their right to vote.

Contained within this pamphlet is information on the following:

- **The Church's Role in the Political Order** – within the political arena, the Church serves to educate and motivate society towards the attainment of justice;
- **Guidelines for Parish Involvement** – appropriate parish participation in political activities;
- **Voter Registration** - how to facilitate voter registration for parishioners who are not registered to vote, and re-registration for those who have changed their names or addresses, or who wish to change their party affiliation;
- **Candidate Appearances** - how to respond to candidates who wish to address or be introduced at parish gatherings; and
- **Candidate Questionnaire Project (CQP)** – jointly sponsored by *The Florida Catholic* newspaper, Florida Catholic Conference, Florida Council of Catholic Women and Florida State Council of the Knights of Columbus, is a poll of all gubernatorial, state legislative, and U.S. congressional and senate candidates regarding their positions on current public policy issues of interest to the Church.

Questions and requests for guidance on these and other election-related issues should be directed to the **Florida Catholic Conference, 201 W. Park Avenue, Tallahassee, FL 32301-7715, phone (850) 222-3803 or email at [fccadvocacy@flacathconf.org](mailto:fccadvocacy@flacathconf.org).**

## THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN THE POLITICAL ORDER

Christians believe that Jesus' commandment to love one's neighbor extends beyond individual relationships to all human relations from the family to the entire community. Jesus brings "good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, new sight to the blind, and to set the down-trodden free" (Luke 4:18). His example and His words invite individual acts of charity from each of us. They also encourage understanding and action on a broader scale, one that necessarily involves the institutions and structures of society, the economy, and politics.

While it is increasingly acknowledged that major public issues have moral dimensions and that religious values have public consequences, there often is confusion and controversy over the participation of religious groups in public life.

The importance of the separation of church and state is often misunderstood. It is the responsibility of the state to build a just society for its people. The Church, however, plays a role in the promotion and attainment of justice. Pope Benedict XVI explains in his first encyclical, "The Church is duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically." (*Deus Caritas Est*, 28a) By advocating its social doctrine through education and rational argument, the Church opens minds and helps to form the consciences of both those actively involved in political life and the electorate.

***"In the Catholic tradition,  
responsible citizenship is a virtue;  
participation in the political process  
is a moral obligation."***

(Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility, USCCB, September 2003)

In his 1995 visit to the United States, Pope John Paul II said, "Democracy needs wisdom, democracy needs virtue. Democracy serves what is true and right when it safeguards the dignity of every human person, when it respects inviolable and inalienable human rights, and when it makes the common good the end criterion regulating all public and social life." To achieve these purposes, democracy needs each of us to participate in the public debate and to apply Gospel values to our participation.

Catholics are challenged to use the resources of our faith and the opportunities of our democracy to defend human rights and to work for a more peaceful and just society. The Bishops of Florida ask us to “share our values with a strong voice and use our votes to shape a society that will protect human life, promote family life, pursue social justice and, with charity, work together in solidarity.” (*Be Faithful Citizens!*, Statement of the Bishops of Florida, October 5, 2004)

The Church joins the public debate to share its experience in serving the powerless and to add its values to the political dialogue. This kind of participation does not involve religious tests for candidates, or telling people for whom they should or should not vote. Rather, it seeks to lift up the moral dimensions of public issues. It encourages Catholics, as believers and citizens, to use the resources of our faith in building a society that is more respectful of life and human dignity, and more cognizant of the Christian obligation to seek peace and justice.

### ***The Church’s Role in the Political Order***

- ◆ ***Education Regarding the Teachings of the Church and the Responsibilities of the Faithful;***
- ◆ ***Analysis of Issues for Their Social and Moral Dimensions;***
- ◆ ***Measuring Public Policy Against Gospel Values;***
- ◆ ***Participation with Other Concerned Parties in Debate over Public Policies; and,***
- ◆ ***Speaking Out with Courage, Skill and Concern on Public issues Involving Human Rights, Social Justice and the Life of the Church in Society.***

## GUIDELINES FOR PARISH INVOLVEMENT

While individual citizens are free to engage fully in *partisan* politics, churches and other 501(c)(3) institutions that qualify for tax-exempt status under the Internal Revenue Code are not. **The Church and Church organizations may not 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.**

The following guidelines are intended to encourage and facilitate appropriate parish and Church-organization participation in political action:

**Do...**share the Church's teaching on human life, human rights, social justice, the common good and peace.

**Do...**highlight the moral and ethical dimensions of public policy issues.

**Do...**urge parishioners to join the party or campaign of their choice and, in the light of Church teaching, evaluate party and candidate positions.

**Do...**facilitate voter education through the provision of materials produced or authorized by the Florida Catholic Conference (candidate survey responses, election year issue summaries, and voter guides). Should any other organization attempt to distribute such material, contact the Florida Catholic Conference.

**Do...**encourage active participation in church-sponsored voter registration efforts, "get-out-the-vote" campaigns, and other non-partisan voter education initiatives.

**Do...**urge parishioners to register and vote. Registration may be accomplished by means of the Internet. Please encourage those of your parishioners who are not registered to utilize the Conference's web site -- [www.flacathconf.org](http://www.flacathconf.org) and click "Register To Vote" (see Voter Registration, pages 7-8).

***But take care to avoid partisanship*** -- No diocesan or parish entity or organization shall endorse, oppose or campaign for or against any political party or candidate for public office; nor shall any funds of any such entity or organization be contributed to any political candidate, party, campaign or political action committee. Judicial retention elections are included under these provisions.

## **Parish Lists, Campaign Materials, Use of Buildings**

Parishioner lists should not be provided to any candidate or political party. Church-owned buildings and properties should not be made available to just one candidate or party, nor is the distribution of partisan campaign materials through official Church or parish channels permissible. Parish officials should avoid any association with the distribution of partisan campaign materials on Church-owned parking lots. Churches have no jurisdiction over public sidewalks and other public property in their vicinities. The distribution of partisan literature on such property, therefore, is beyond a parish's control.

## **Endorsements and Electioneering**

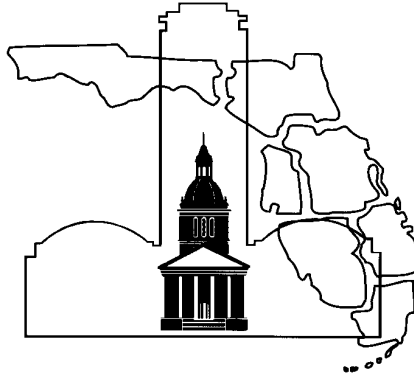
Pastors or other religious leaders are urged to avoid endorsements, contributions, electioneering, or other political activity. Although not prohibited, it may be difficult to separate their personal activity from their role as a representative of the Church. Officials and employees of the Church and other tax-exempt organizations, 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.

## **Outside Organizations**

Pastors and others should be wary of outside organizations seeking to distribute voter education materials through parishes. The issues covered in outside 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 still may not be appropriate for distribution in Catholic parishes. Parishes are discouraged from distributing any materials that are not approved or made available to the diocese through the Florida Catholic Conference and/or United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

## **Web Sites and Electronic Communications**

Many parishes maintain Web sites and utilize e-mail to communicate with parishioners and the general public. The guidelines set forth here apply equally to Catholic organization Web sites and electronic communications. Diocesan or parish Web sites must not link to other sites that support or oppose candidates or political parties. Consult with your diocesan attorney or the Florida Catholic Conference before placing any political content or links to political content on sites.



### **Issue-Oriented Activities**

Advocacy that supports or opposes public policy issues (and not candidates or parties) is encouraged. Such advocacy is not partisan activity. Church organizations may and properly should support public policies and legislative proposals that affirm and promote the dignity and rights of the human person and oppose policies and proposals that violate them. As a general rule, the limitations on the extent of such lobbying would not be a problem for parishes or active institutions, since lobbying would be an insubstantial part of their total work.

The following are examples of such acceptable activity:

1. Educational efforts about issues and in support of legislation;
2. Encouragement of letter writing campaigns and other contacts with state or federal legislators designed to educate them and to develop support for legislation;
3. Distribution of fliers containing a statement about an issue or issues before the Congress or the Florida legislature, and containing the names and addresses of Senators and Representatives;
4. Preaching and distribution of information concerning issues dealing with the sanctity of life and the protection of human dignity;
5. Support or opposition to ballot measures, i.e. constitutional amendment initiatives, including distribution of petitions for placement of an amendment on a General Election ballot.

## VOTER REGISTRATION

In order to vote in a Florida election, a Florida citizen who is 18 years of age or older must be registered at least **29 days** prior to the election in which he or she wishes to vote. Florida is a closed primary state. If you wish to vote in a partisan primary election, you must be a registered voter in the party for which the primary is being held. All registered voters, regardless of party affiliation, can vote on issues and non-partisan candidates.

**The 2006 PRIMARY ELECTION will occur on TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5. The GENERAL ELECTION will occur on TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 7. The deadline for registering to vote in the Primary Election is August 7. The deadline for registering to vote in the General Election is October 10.** Persons who are registered to vote in the Primary Election are also qualified to vote in the General Election.

It is permissible to encourage parishioners to embrace their right and duty to share in the political life. A citizen who is *registered* to vote likely *will* vote and, in anticipation of casting his or her ballot, will become more aware of the important policy issues of the day.

*“Faithful citizenship  
calls Catholics to see  
civic and political responsibilities  
through the eyes of faith  
and to bring our moral  
convictions to public life.”*

(Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility,  
USCCB, September 2003)

## Registering On-Line

In the weeks preceding the registration deadline, parishes are encouraged to include information about on-line registration in their bulletins. A sample **bulletin announcement** follows:

*To vote in this year's election, you must be registered. If you are registered prior to August 7, you may vote in both the primary and the general elections. Participation in the November 7 general election requires registration by October 10. Parishioners who are not registered are encouraged to do so through the Internet. The web site of the Florida Catholic Conference includes a link to the Florida Voter Registration Application. Go to [www.flacathconf.org](http://www.flacathconf.org) and click on "Register To Vote". Follow the instructions for filling out and mailing a voter registration form. You will receive a voter registration card in the mail to confirm receipt of your registration. Follow the same procedure if your name or address has changed since the last time you voted, or if you wish to change your party affiliation.*

The Florida voter registration application requires an original signature. If the PDF application is completed online, it must be printed out and signed prior to mailing.

## Conducting Voter Registration Drives

***Note: During this 2006 election year, the Florida Catholic Conference recommends that parishes do not conduct parish voter registration drives, as new laws governing third party drives are being challenged, resulting in considerable confusion. Failure to meet the requirements of the current law may result in substantial fines for the parish and/or pastor or designee.***



## CANDIDATE APPEARANCES

### Requests from Candidates to Speak / Appear at Gatherings

In an election year, candidates for public office aggressively seek opportunities to promote their campaigns. Parish gatherings provide especially attractive opportunities for politicians who seek support for their candidacies. And at such gatherings, what most candidates want is the chance to address the entire group. The following guidelines should be helpful:

1. Candidates should never be permitted to speak in connection with Mass or any other religious service. If a candidate seeks to do so, straightforwardly deny permission, citing Internal Revenue Service (IRS) regulations governing political activity of tax-exempt religious organizations. You might also make clear that religious services are inappropriate occasions for partisan politics.
2. A candidate for a given office should not be permitted to address a parish-sponsored event (e.g., communion breakfast, parish committee meeting, etc.), unless all other candidates for that office have been invited to make a presentation at the same event.
3. A parish official may introduce a public office holder to participants in a parish-sponsored event, but not in that person's capacity as a candidate. Thus, a senator or congressman may be recognized as "Senator" or "Representative," but not as a candidate for reelection to the U.S. or Florida Senate or House of Representatives.
4. A public figure or expert who also is a candidate may be allowed to speak in his/her capacity as public figure or expert without providing equal access to other candidates. However, the following precautions must be taken in order not to violate IRS rules:
  - a. the person must speak only in his/her capacity as expert or public figure;
  - b. no mention may be made of his/her candidacy;
  - c. no campaign activity may occur in connection with the appearance; and
  - d. all communications, oral or written, should identify the other-than-candidate capacity in which the person is appearing and should not mention his/her candidacy. The IRS has made clear that if the primary purpose of the invitation is to showcase an individual's candidacy, the organization may violate election rules *even if no campaign activity occurs*.

## Conducting Candidate Forums / Debates / Candidate Nights

Parishes may sponsor unbiased public forums, debates and lectures in which candidates explain their views to the public, but there must be no indication of a bias for or against any candidate, party, or position. Those sponsoring candidate forums must invite all candidates qualified for election (though some may opt not to attend), have questions prepared and presented in a non-partisan fashion, cover a broad range of issues, give each candidate an equal opportunity to present views on issues discussed, and make no comments indicating approval or disapproval of any candidate.

All candidates for a particular office are to be invited to participate, since excluding candidates may evidence bias. However, there are specific circumstances in which candidates may be excluded. For example, a candidate debate during the *primary* election campaign may be limited to legally qualified candidates seeking the nomination of a particular political party.

Since the work involved in hosting a candidate forum requires careful advance planning, the following guidelines are offered to assist you:

1. Discuss the ground rules for the forum early in the process and ensure that all parties involved agree to these. Because many candidates represent an area that is larger than the boundaries of one parish, candidate forums are often organized most effectively in cooperation with other groups, such as nearby parishes, diocesan offices, Catholic Charities offices, etc.;
2. Treat all candidates alike. This includes invitation and follow-up, the information you provide in advance, the questions they are asked, and the opportunities they have to respond. If all candidates appear at the public forum to speak, all candidates may distribute their campaign literature. If all candidates do not appear to speak, no distribution of campaign literature should be permitted;
3. Cover a broad range of issues. This will more effectively educate voters and will avoid any appearance of bias;
4. Use an independent nonpartisan panel to prepare and present questions. The moderator may not comment on the questions or imply approval or disapproval of any of the candidates;
5. Plan your turnout strategy and be realistic about your ability to bring out a crowd so that you don't promise more than you can deliver. Candidates must feel that the event is worthwhile and that they will be able to address a significant number of people;

6. Screen questions from the audience before they are asked to ensure they follow the guidelines of the forum;
7. Identify leaders for several roles, including moderator, timekeeper, greeters (for the candidates and others), and publicity coordinators;
8. Develop a press release several weeks in advance of the event and follow up with the diocesan newspaper and local secular media (newspaper, radio, and television);
9. Contact the offices of the Florida Catholic Conference for assistance in planning your forum. The Conference has experience with candidate forums and has established relationships with many of the incumbents and other candidates.

Note: In instances when diocesan media are conducting broadcast interviews, it is recommended that all candidates be available on the same program.

*“The challenge for our Church  
is to be principled without being  
ideological, to be political  
without being partisan,  
to be civil without being soft,  
and to be involved without being used.”*

(Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility,  
USCCB, September 2003)

## CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE PROJECT

The Candidate Questionnaire Project is a collaborative effort of the Florida Catholic Conference, *The Florida Catholic* newspaper, the Florida Council of Catholic Women and the Florida State Council of Knights of Columbus. Questions on public policy issues are posed to all gubernatorial, congressional, and state candidates in Florida, and all candidates are encouraged to respond. The questions pertain to issues of concern for the Church including: abortion, embryonic stem cell research, cloning, healthcare, assisted suicide, death penalty, education, undocumented persons, affordable housing, the definition of marriage, U.S. military engagement, and the environment. For 2006 candidate responses visit [www.informedcatholicvoter.org](http://www.informedcatholicvoter.org).

Materials prepared for use in educating citizens, including surveys or polls, must emphasize educational objectives. Surveys or polls of political candidates may be distributed at churches, or reported in parish bulletins only if:

1. The poll is objectively worded and objectively taken;
2. Poll results are accurately reported and free of bias;
3. Poll results do not contain discussions of issues;
4. The poll is multi-issue, involving various issues such as respect for human life and dignity, the needs of families and justice and peace issues;
5. The validity of the poll has previously been approved by the Florida Catholic Conference or the diocesan attorney; and
6. Parish bulletins containing reports of polls should point out that the parish does not endorse or oppose candidates and that the polls are distributed to inform and educate voters.

Evaluations of candidates or political parties should be avoided. Types of objectionable evaluations are as follows:

1. Encouraging readers or listeners (e.g., a homily) to vote for or against a particular candidate or party;
2. Labeling a candidate or party as “pro school choice” or “anti-life”; such a practice removes objectivity by not allowing readers to evaluate a candidate’s position themselves;
3. Using plus (+) or minus (-) signs or similar markings to evaluate the candidate or party;
4. Rating candidates or parties on a scale of “one to ten” for example, or otherwise saying “X is good,” “Y is better”; and,
5. Using marked sample ballots.

## 2006 Questionnaires

The following are the questions asked of this year's state and federal candidates:

### **2006 STATE CANDIDATE QUESTIONS (Gubernatorial, Legislative)**

#### ***Will you support or oppose?***

- A. A ban on state funding of research that destroys a living human embryo?
- B. Requiring a unanimous jury recommendation before sentencing someone to death?
- C. Allowing a physician to prescribe a drug for the purpose of assisting in suicide?
- D. State funding for abortion alternatives and pregnancy support services?
- E. Protecting faith-based social service and health providers from being forced to provide services that contradict their moral principles?
- F. No caps on the state housing trust fund, using all revenue each year for affordable housing?
- G. A state policy assuring future generations adequate water for consumptive use, agriculture and natural ecosystems?
- H. No reduction in medically necessary services to Medicaid patients during transition to managed care?
- I. Allowing nonpublic school teachers who teach critical subject areas as defined by law to be eligible for the Critical Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program?
- J. Allowing undocumented students educated in Florida's public or private schools to be eligible for in-state tuition at Florida post-secondary institutions?
- K. Allowing nonpublic school children who meet the poverty threshold established in law to participate in the Florida Corporate Tax Scholarship Program?

## 2006 U.S. SENATE AND CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

### *Will you vote to support or oppose?*

- A. A national health policy to ensure there is affordable, accessible health care for all, with a priority for poor families, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities?
- B. A law to prevent federally controlled drugs from being prescribed to assist suicide?
- C. Using federal taxpayer funds for abortion?
- D. A law to prevent all cloning of human embryos, including cloning for research purposes?
- E. An amendment to the U.S. Constitution to define marriage as a union solely between a man and a woman?
- F. Legislation to provide tax credits for personal and corporate donations to organizations providing scholarships to lower income children for educational costs, including private school tuition?
- G. Legislation that provides tax credits for out-of-pocket classroom expenses made by teachers in public, private and religious schools?
- H. Legislation that would reform the immigration system by initiating an earned legalization program for undocumented persons already in the U.S.?
- I. An increase in U.S. resources for debt relief and development assistance for the poorest countries?
- J. Active U.S. engagement in bringing about a just and peaceful solution to the Israeli Palestinian conflict that promotes genuine security for Israel and a viable state for Palestinians?
- K. Using preventive U.S. military force in cases where there is not clear and compelling evidence of the danger of an imminent attack?

## RESOURCES

2006 Candidate Questionnaire Project, [www.informedcatholicvoter.org](http://www.informedcatholicvoter.org).

*Be Faithful Citizens! Vote on November 2*, Statement of the Bishops of Florida, October 2004.

*Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Administrative Committee, September 2003.

*Faithful Citizenship: Tips for Conducting Candidate Forums*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Department of Social Development and World Peace, 2004.

Florida Catholic Conference, *Political Activity Guidelines for Pastors and Parishes*, June 2006.

Florida Department of State, Division of Elections, [www.dos.state.fl.us](http://www.dos.state.fl.us).

*God is Love (Deus Caritas Est)*, Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI, February 2006.

*Political Activity Guidelines for Catholic Organizations*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of General Counsel, March 2004.

Section 97.0575, Florida Statutes (Third-party voter registrations).



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*This information is provided for educational purposes only and does not endorse or oppose any candidate or political party.*