



Guidelines for Advocacy and Political Participation Pastors & Ministry Leaders

Let us pray for the courage and the honesty to speak the truth, no matter how high the cost to ourselves.¹ We belong to the Lord, in Him is our strength, and through His grace, we can change the world.

Each election season, questions arise over what parishes can do to promote civic participation while avoiding partisan electioneering. This document outlines the Texas bishops' guidelines on addressing these questions. In sum, while the laity should live out their baptismal call by putting their faith into political action, the clergy and ministry leaders should not advocate for a specific candidate or party.

What role do Texas bishops take during elections?

The Catholic faith is not a means to a political end, but our faith has implications for political, economic, and social policies. Therefore, the Texas bishops will not tell Catholics how to vote by endorsing a candidate or party. Instead, they call upon the faithful to view political debates from the perspective of Catholic moral theology and social doctrine.² Put simply: Catholics should be guided by a well-formed conscience, not party affiliation.

Why don't the bishops issue a voter's guide? It is not the Church's role to endorse or oppose specific political candidates or parties – and even less to propose a single party or candidate as the acceptable one. These are temporal questions that God has given to the free and responsible judgment of each person. It is, however, the Church's duty to provide a moral judgment on temporal matters when this is required by faith or the moral law.³

How can Catholics form their consciences? The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops published *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, which helps us see politics in light of our faith. *Faithful Citizenship* lists several ways that we need to form our consciences in an ongoing manner.

- 1) Begin by being open to the truth and searching for what is right.
- 2) Study Sacred Scripture and the Catechism of the Church.
- 3) Examine the facts and background information about various political choices.
- 4) Prayerfully reflect to discern the will of God.⁴
- 5) Seek the prudent advice and good example of others to support and enlighten our conscience.
- 6) The authoritative teaching of the Church is an essential element.
- 7) The gifts of the Holy Spirit help us develop our conscience.⁵
- 8) Regularly examine your conscience.

As Catholics we are not single-issue voters. A candidate's position on a single issue is not sufficient to guarantee a voter's support. Yet a candidate's position on a single issue that involves an intrinsic evil, such as support for abortion, may legitimately lead a voter to disqualify a candidate from receiving support.⁶

To understand current issues in state law, we recommend visiting the policy pages on txcatholic.org, which discuss the issues before the current Texas legislature.

1. USCCB, *Living the Gospel of Life*, no. 27.

2. USCCB, *Faithful Citizenship*, no. 43.

3. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *The Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, no. 3.

4. USCCB, *Faithful Citizenship*, nos. 17-18.

5. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1786-1789.

6. Abortion and euthanasia are the most morally severe threats to human life listed by *Faithful Citizenship*. There are 10 other examples of acts that are intrinsically evil. See *Faithful Citizenship*, nos. 22-23.

Next Steps. We offer the guidance below to explain how to engage politically. To learn more, visit us online at txcatholic.org, or visit the USCCB's faithfulcitizenship.org webpage. If you have questions or want printed information in English or Spanish, please contact TCCB staff at 512-339-9882, or email info@txcatholic.org.

We offer the following guidance on ways pastors and ministry leaders *can* engage:

- Educate and encourage advocacy on *issues*. For example:
 - Educate Catholics about specific legislation using TCCB materials.
 - Encourage Catholics to contact legislators to comment on legislation.
 - Preach about protecting the sanctity of life, preserving the dignity of migrants, serving the poor, and maintaining religious liberty.
 - Host nonpartisan voter registration and get-out-the-vote campaigns.
- Distribute civic or issue advocacy materials which emphasize educational objectives. *All such materials must be approved by your local bishop.*
- Join the Texas Catholic Advocacy Network at txcatholic.org to stay up-to-date.

Pastors and ministry leaders *should not* replace the exercise of conscience by doing the following.

- Publicly support groups which are not approved by your local bishop.
- Support multi-issue coalitions which advocate for issues that are absolutely prohibited by Church teaching.
- Personally endorse candidates or parties, keeping in mind that people may not be able to recognize that you are not speaking as a representative of the Church.
- Endorse or fundraise for candidates, parties, or Political Action Committees (PACs). This includes:
 - Encouraging parishioners to vote for or against a particular candidate or party;
 - Labeling a candidate or party as “pro-school choice” or “anti-life;”
 - Issuing voters guides rating candidates or providing marked sample ballots;
 - Using parish or school facilities for candidate or party campaign events;
 - Posting signs or distributing materials supporting a candidate on parish or school property; and
 - Inviting candidates, parties, or PACs to address parishes during campaign season.

The Role of the Bishops

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