

Diocese of San Diego

POLICY ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY

One task of the whole Church is to build up the temporal order to conform more nearly with Christian principles. In that task the clergy and laity have different roles.

Thus, it is the specific task of bishops and priests to teach the Church's social doctrine; but it is the role of the lay faithful to translate that teaching into political action.

Nevertheless, pastors may be subjected to various pressures (including their own propensities) to involve the parish in some political activity. In considering whether to yield to those pressures, the first consideration must always be whether the project will enhance or impede the COMMUNION of the parishioners with God and each other in behalf of the common MISSION to live and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. Creating dissension in a parish is counter productive; and it is important to remember that parishioners, acting in good conscience and in accord with Catholic teaching, may differ on solutions to political problems, and the priority of political goals. Nevertheless, the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to the pastor; and it is the pastor, acting within these guidelines, who decides the nature and extent of his own and parish political activity.

Finally, there are restrictions imposed by the Internal Revenue Code on political activities by church organizations. Violation could result in the loss of the Church's tax exempt status.

With that background, the following is a list of activities that a parish or priest (in his individual capacity and using his own funds) may wish to do. A "yes" response means the activity is permissible, a "no" means it is not.

Guidelines for Political Activities of Parishes and Priests

	<u>Parish</u>	<u>Priest</u>
(1) Discuss the positions of candidates on public issues. (See note 1)	Yes	Yes
(2) Endorsement of Political Candidates. (See note 2)	No	Yes
(3) Contributions to Political Candidates	No	Yes
(4) In-Kind Expenditures in Favor of or Against Political Candidates	No	Yes

	<u>Parish</u>	<u>Priest</u>
(5) Independent Expenditures In Favor of or Against Political Candidates	No	Yes
(6) Contributions to PACs	No	Yes
(7) Appearance of Political Candidate at Church Meeting	Yes	N/A
Church Service. (See note 7)	No	N/A
(8) Distribute:		
(a) Acceptable Candidate Surveys. (See note 8(a))	Yes	Yes
(b) Voting Records. (See note 8(b))	Yes	Yes
(c) Candidate Political Statement	No	Yes
(9) Invite Distribution by others of Candidate Political Statements in Church Parking Lot	No	N/A
(10) Allow or Prohibit Distribution by others of Candidate Political Statements in Church Parking Lot	Yes	N/A
(11) Rent Parish list. (See note 11)	No	N/A
(12) Non-partisan Voter Education and Registration. (See note 12)	Yes	Yes
(13) Parish Bulletin or Newsletter: (See note 13)		
(a) Political Ads at regular rate	Yes	N/A
(b) Political Ads at less than regular rate	No	N/A
(c) News Stories	Yes	N/A
(d) Editorials	No	N/A
(14) Non-partisan activity, including contributions in support of, or in opposition to, ballot measures. (See Note 14)	Yes	Yes

Explanation of Individual Items

Note 1 Discuss the positions of candidates on public issues.

Priests and parishes are free to discuss the positions of candidates on issues - - including criticizing or praising them for their positions. That is called issue advocacy.

Note 2 Endorsement of Political Candidates.

The endorsement of a candidate includes any statement which uses explicit words to expressly advocate the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate, such as “elect,” “support,” “defeat,” or “oppose.” That is called express advocacy. A parish may not engage in express advocacy; but a priest, in his individual capacity, may.

Note 7 Candidate appearance at Church Service or Meeting

A political candidate may not be introduced or speak at a church service. The appearance of a candidate at a parish meeting for political reasons is limited as follows:

(1) Any other candidate for the office who requests to appear must be given the same opportunity, and

(2) No solicitation for funds for the candidate or endorsement of the candidate may be made by anyone representing the church. In addition, a parish may allow political candidates to have a meeting or use the facilities of the parish on the same basis that civic groups and other organizations are allowed to. If civic groups and other organizations are required to pay some rent for using the parish property, the political candidate should be charged the same amount.

Note 8(a) Candidate Survey

A parish may distribute the results of surveys of candidates on public issues. Such surveys, however, must be non-partisan. As a result parish groups should observe the following conditions in distributing the survey:

(1) The survey must publish the response of all the candidates for the particular office by use of “yes” and “no,” and avoid use of “+” and “-” or “pro-life” and “anti-life.” The survey should not specify what is the desired response;

(2) The survey must not include any words indicating either endorsement of or support for any of the candidates or indicate that the reader should “vote pro-life.”

It is important that candidate surveys involve a variety of issues.

Note 8(b) Voting Records.

Parish groups may also circulate the voting records of incumbent public officeholders. In the case of publication and circulation of voting records, the church has more leeway than in the publication and circulation of candidate surveys as follows:

(1) The parish in publishing the incumbent’s votes on particular issues, may indicate the church’s view and the fact that the incumbent supported or opposed the church’s view. thus, “+” or “-” or “pro-life” and “anti-life” may be used, and

(2) In other respects, the publications should be non-partisan. As a result, the voting records of all incumbents in the area should be presented, candidates for reelection should not be identified, no comment should be made on an individual’s overall qualifications for public office,

and no statements expressly advocating the election or defeat of any incumbent as a candidate for public office should be offered.

Note 11 Rental of Parish List to Political Candidates.

It is contrary to diocesan policy to rent membership lists for any purpose.

Note 12 Voter Education.

A parish may participate in non-partisan voter education. Here, voter education involves discussion of the electoral process, such as how to run for public office, how to register, where to vote, helping people to register, and get-out-the -vote drives. All such activity is permissible as long as it is not directed at one party or candidate over another.

Note 13 Parish Bulletin or Newsletter.

(a) & (b) Political Ads

A parish bulletin or newsletter may publish an ad for a political candidate, as long as the ad is purchased at the regular rate for such ads published in that bulletin. If discounts are given to regular advertisers under certain circumstances, the same discounts must be extended to the political advertiser. Advertising must be available to all candidates on an equal basis, even if a candidate's stands on issues conflict with Church teaching. The bulletin or newsletter must state that it does not endorse any candidate, and finally, the publication must ensure that political advertising is identified as paid political advertising. A parish may decide to not publish political ads at all in order to avoid the above requirements and potential controversy.

(c) News Stories

A parish bulletin may publish without limitation news stories on political candidates, political campaigns and endorsements of political candidates by political organizations.

The publication of voting records and candidate surveys in bulletins are subject to the limitations delineated in Items 9(a) and 9(b) above.

(d) Editorials

A parish bulletin may not publish an editorial supporting or endorsing a candidate for political office. This would be considered a church endorsement which is not permissible.

Note 14 Non-Partisan Political Action.

Many ballot measures are presented to the electorate in California, and an increasing number are important to Catholics. The only *legal* restriction on the local Church regarding proposing, supporting or opposing legislation (including ballot measures) is that such activity must not constitute a substantial part of its total activities. Cases suggest that the line between substantial and insubstantial lies somewhere between 5% and 15%.

Nevertheless, diocesan policy forbids any and all political activity which impinges on the integrity of Church liturgies. Furthermore, pastors may not contribute parish funds for political purposes.

Priests

Priests as individuals, have the same rights as all other American citizens to involve themselves in political activity. Priests thus have much greater latitude to involve themselves in political activities than do parishes. The following should guide a priest regarding personal political activities:

(1) A priest may individually and personally endorse candidates for political office, but a priest may **not** endorse candidates **on behalf of the church**.

(2) A priest may allow his name to be used as a supporter of a candidate in the candidate's political advertisements. In this connection, the pastor may be identified as pastor of a particular church.

(3) While a parish may not establish a political action committee, priests and other like-minded individuals may establish a political action committee. Care should be taken that the committee is separate from the parish and no use is made of parish assets or facilities except to the extent that parish facilities are available for use by other outside groups.

WHEN IN DOUBT...

If there are questions about a particular activity, the diocesan **Office for Civil Affairs**, 858-490-8277, or the **Office for Social Ministry**, 858-480-8323, should be contacted.