



# Policies of the Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

## Policy # 230.3

### Political Activities by Parish Staffs and Organizations

Approved By: Most Reverend James V. Johnston

Approved: August 21, 2020

Effective: August 21, 2020

The Diocese does not endorse candidates or political parties, however we strongly advocate and encourage voters to become duly informed about issues and candidates. The decisions of individual citizens should be grounded on sound moral principles consonant with the authentic teaching of the Catholic Church and factual information about the positions and principles of candidates.

To ensure that the Church does not become entangled in political systems and for the Diocese to continue to qualify for tax exempt status as its right, it must not engage in prohibited political campaign activity. Violation of these prohibitions can have serious tax consequences, including the loss of deductibility of contribution to the parish as well as loss of tax exempt status for the Diocese.

Unfortunately, the line between activities that are permitted and activities that are prohibited is often unclear. These policy restrictions are based on detailed guidelines issued by the General Counsel of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Guidelines are published by the General Counsel at [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org).

One specific activity that merits particular attention is the preparation and distribution of candidate questionnaire responses, candidate voting records, and similar "voter education" materials. Due to the technicality of the regulations, do not get involved in this unless the material comes from the USCCB, the Missouri Catholic Conference, or the Office of the Bishop (or his designated delegate).

- Candidate materials should never be allowed in the church or parish buildings, on parish websites or shared on parish social media pages.
- Parish email or mailing lists should never be used by candidates, or their representatives, for voter solicitation.
- Pastors may not actively promote the distribution of partisan materials on cars, but they are not responsible for controlling it.
- Priests and deacons are encouraged to preach on the issues in accord with the authentic Magisterium, but must not preach in favor of specific candidates or political parties.
- Persons participating in public liturgical ministries should be discouraged from wearing partisan buttons, t-shirts, scarves or other apparel.
- Candidates or their representatives may not address the public on Church property.

- Candidate forums may not take place in the Church. Candidate forums that take place on other parish property should be approved in advance, in writing, by the Chancery. Please contact either the Vicar General-Vicar for Clergy or the Vicar General-Chancellor.
- Voter registration may not take place on parish property without approval. Approval for party-neutral registration should be sought, in writing, through either the Vicar General-Vicar for Clergy or the Vicar General-Chancellor.
- Catholic organizations should not make statements, either oral or written, supporting or opposing any candidate for elective office, any slate of candidates, a political party or political action committee. This would include statements made in a homily, a parish bulletin, through social media, websites, email or distribution of filled-in sample ballots.
- An individual candidate for office should not be invited or permitted to speak at Church events. Candidate forums may, however, be sponsored by a parish provided all candidates running for the same office are invited to participate.
- Be aware that the rules for properly accepting paid political advertising in a parish bulletin are complex and need special attention. Please contact the Office of General Counsel prior to any engagement of such advertising in any media sponsored by the parish.

### **Political Responsibility of Catholics**

With any political season comes a wave of contention and extreme propaganda. This is amplified significantly during in a presidential election year, and digital media including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Snapchat, makes it easier than ever to share information to a large number of people instantaneously. In the midst of this backdrop, Catholics have a moral obligation to form their consciences and exercise the right to vote.

- Every citizen is called to participate in public life and contribute to the common good. In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.
- For all Catholics, including those nobly seeking public office as a sign of service, our participation in political parties or other groups to which we may belong should be influenced by our faith, not the other way around.
- Wherever we live, work, and worship, we strive to understand before seeking to be understood, to treat with respect those with whom we disagree, to dismantle stereotypes, and to build productive conversation in place of vitriol. The USCCB campaign "[Civilize It.](#)" is a good parish resource.
- Politics in our country often can be a contest of powerful interests, partisan attacks, sound bites, and media hype. The Church calls for a different kind of political engagement: one shaped by the moral convictions of well-formed consciences and focused on the dignity of every human being, the pursuit of the common good, and the protection of the weak and the vulnerable.
- Personal sites of church personnel should also reflect Catholic principles and values. Businesses are cautioning their employees that, while employees have a right to privacy and confidentiality regarding what their employers know about them, an employee's use of social networking—because of its very nature—means he or she relinquishes some privacy and could be construed as representing the company's ethics and values. Likewise, church personnel should be encouraged to understand that they are witnessing to the faith through all of their social networking, whether "public" or "private."
- Many employers and church organizations ask their personnel to consider including a disclaimer on their personal sites, especially if employees/church personnel are highly visible in the community and/or post material related to church work/ministry on their personal sites. One example: "The views expressed on this site are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer."

Read more from the USCCB's [\*\*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship\*\*](#).