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August 20, 2010

Subject: Faithful Citizenship and CCK Policy on Political Activity

Dear Pastor, Parish Administrator, School Superintendent, Principal and Catholic Charities Director,

As we head into this year's fall political campaign season, we recall the obligation we have as Faithful Citizens to be participants in our nation's political process and to bring our values to the shaping of public policy. As we taught in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, every Catholic has a responsibility to be involved in political life:

*In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us, "It is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person...As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life" (nos. 1913-1915).*  
**<http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org/>**

Consistent with the prior practice of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, we bring to your attention *the Political Activity Guidelines for Catholic Organizations* as published by the Office of General Counsel, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Certain activities, such as non-partisan voter registration drives, are permitted. It should be noted, however, that there is an absolute prohibition against non-profit organizations, such as parishes, schools and Catholic Charities agencies, *"from participating or intervening in political campaigns on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office."* **<http://www.usccb.org/ogc/guidelines.shtml>**

As part of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky's history and policy regarding elections and voters' guides, we recall and repeat the long-standing policy of not distributing voters' guides or election year materials unless they have been published by the USCCB or the Catholic Conference of Kentucky. Such materials, even though they may be prepared by other Catholic

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Bishop of Lexington

**Most Reverend  
William F. Medley, D.D.**  
Bishop of Owensboro

**Robert J. Castagna**  
Executive Director

entities or people, may not be distributed on Catholic property or in conjunction with church activities since they may not cover a full range of issues and may violate the *Political Activity Guidelines for Catholic Organizations* and the requirements for non-profit organizations as issued by the Internal Revenue Service.

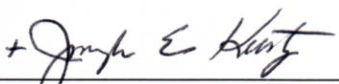
We established this policy in 1995 because of concerns expressed to us. The content and presentation of such voter guide education materials may fail to satisfy the requirements applicable to Catholic non-profit organizations. Often, the organizations preparing the materials are not 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations subject to the prohibition against political campaign activity. Even though these other organizations may be permitted to distribute such literature, it is not appropriate for Catholic organizations to do so.

While Catholics are encouraged to be active participants in the political process, all are required to abide by the *Political Activity Guidelines for Catholic Organizations*. The energy and passion often on display during elections should not encourage or permit individuals or organizations to violate these guidelines. We appreciate your taking the time to disseminate this letter's contents to your parish, especially parish council and parish committee chairs, school, Catholic Charities staff and to your entire parish through the parish bulletin and/or pulpit announcements to apprise them of what activities are permitted and what activities are prohibited during this election year.

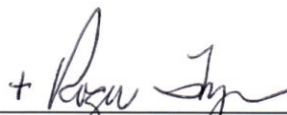
Thank you for your review and sharing of this letter and the information contained through the Internet links to the web site of the USCCB.

May God continue to bless you as together we seek to build God's Kingdom on earth.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



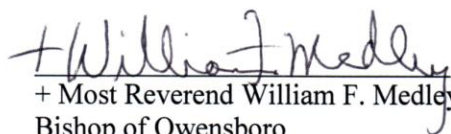
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enc.

## “...participation in political life is a moral obligation.”

*Certain activities generally are appropriate for parishes and other Catholic organizations.*

### Sharing the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

Parishes and other Catholic organizations are encouraged to share the Church's teaching on the relationships between Christian faith and political life. The Church's teaching on political responsibility, human life, human rights, and justice and peace need to be shared more widely and effectively. Cards summarizing seven key themes of Catholic social teaching that can serve as guidelines for involvement in public life are available from the USCCB (English pub. no. 5-315, Spanish pub. no. 5-815; call 800-235-8722.) The *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* statement, bulletin insert, and DVD are helpful tools for developing educational programs.

### Voter Participation

Parishes and other church organizations can encourage members to participate in the electoral process: to register, to vote, to become informed on a broad range of issues, and to become active in the political life of the community. Parishes and other church organizations can also sponsor non-partisan voter registration and "get out the vote" drives. (See "Ideas for Social Concerns and Pro-Life Committees: Tips for Conducting a Non-Partisan Voter Education Campaign and Voter Registration Drive." at [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org).)

### Ballot Measures

Supporting or opposing ballot measures, including referenda, initiatives, constitutional amendments, and similar procedures, is considered "lobbying" activity and not political campaign activity. Parishes and other church organizations can take positions on such measures and work to support or oppose them within the limits of permitted lobbying activity for section 501(c)(3) organizations. Any questions on these limits should be directed to the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, (502) 875-4345.

### Voter Education

Parishes and church organizations can and should engage in non-partisan voter education. Only voter education materials published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (e.g., *Faithful Citizenship*) or by the Catholic Conference of Kentucky may be distributed in parishes. Other materials, even if they are published by a Catholic organization and seem non-partisan, shall not be distributed.

**A**ddress the moral and human dimensions of public issues.

**S**hare church teaching on human life, human rights, and justice and peace.

**A**pply Catholic values to legislation and public issues.

**C**onduct a non-partisan voter registration drive on church property.

**D**istribute materials published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or by the Catholic Conference of Kentucky about issues related to human life and dignity, justice, and peace.

## *The Church is*

*involved in the political process, but is not partisan,  
engaged in the political process, but should not be used,  
and principled, but not ideological.*

### Non-Partisanship

Parishes and other section 501(c)(3) church organizations are prohibited from participating in political campaign activity. Thus, certain political activities that are entirely appropriate for individuals may not be undertaken by church organizations or their representatives. The USCCB Office of General Counsel provides detailed guidance on what is allowed and not allowed under the law. This detailed guidance is available at [www.usccb.org/ogc](http://www.usccb.org/ogc).

The Church does not and will not engage in partisan politics. Pastors may wish to publish the following bulletin announcement in the weeks before the election.

*We strongly urge all parishioners to register, to become informed on key issues, and to vote. The Church does not support or oppose any candidate, but seeks to focus attention on the moral and human dimensions of issues. We do not authorize the distribution of partisan political materials on parish property.*

In order to avoid violating the political campaign activity prohibitions, parishes, other church organizations, and their representatives should remember these guidelines:

- Do not endorse or oppose candidates, political parties, or groups of candidates, or take any action that reasonably could be construed as endorsement or opposition.
- Do not make available the use of church facilities, assets, or members for partisan political purposes.
- Do not authorize distribution of partisan political materials or biased voter education materials (those that support or oppose—or exhibit bias for or against—any candidate or party) on church property, in church publications, or at church activities. Only distribute materials published directly by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or by the Catholic Conference of Kentucky
- Do not invite or permit only selected candidates to address your members. Before inviting candidates, make sure such events are consistent with USCCB and CCK policy. If so, it is important that all candidates be invited.

If you have any questions about what is allowed, call the Catholic Conference of Kentucky at (502) 875-4345. Please remember that the IRS rules against political campaign activity also apply to materials posted on parish or other church organization web sites.

Material for this document is based on text found at [www.faiithfulcitizenship.org/resources/](http://www.faiithfulcitizenship.org/resources/) and [www.ccky.org/Political%20Campaign%20Activity.htm](http://www.ccky.org/Political%20Campaign%20Activity.htm). Resources cited are available online at <http://www.faiithfulcitizenship.org> and <http://www.ccky.org>.

## Activities To Avoid! *Do Not:*

**E**ndorse or oppose candidates for political office.

**D**istribute partisan campaign literature under church auspices.

**A**rrange for groups to work for a candidate for public office.

**I**nvoke only selected candidates to address your church-sponsored group.

**C**onduct voter registration slanted toward one party.