

ELECTION & POLITICAL ACTIVITIES GUIDE



A HANDBOOK
FOR THE 2010
ELECTIONS
FROM THE
MICHIGAN
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

ELECTION & POLITICAL ACTIVITIES GUIDE: A HANDBOOK FOR THE 2010 ELECTIONS FROM THE MICHIGAN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

As Catholics, we are called to carry the values of the Gospel and the teachings of the 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 dual responsibilities to faith and citizenship are at the heart of what it means to be a Catholic in a free and democratic nation.

This guide 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 season's debate, to focus their attention on candidate positions, and encourage them to exercise their right to vote. Questions about electoral matters, and requests for additional handbooks, provided at no cost to the parish or diocese, should be directed to:

Michigan Catholic Conference
510 South Capitol Avenue
Lansing, Michigan 48933
(517) 372-9310
mccinfo@micatholicconference.org



Founded in 1963, the Michigan Catholic Conference serves as the official voice of the Catholic Church in Michigan on matters of public policy, and promotes a social order that respects the dignity of the human person and serves the common good in the spirit of the Beatitudes and in accord with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2** **SECTION I**
Introduction
- 3** **SECTION II**
Guidelines on Electoral Politics for Pastors and Parishes
- 6** **SECTION III**
Faithful Citizenship and Conscience Formation
- 8** **SECTION IV**
Public Policy Issues of Concern to the Church
- 10** **SECTION V**
Catholic Legislative Advocacy Network
- 12** **SECTION VI**
Resources for Further Reading

Michigan Catholic Conference Board of Directors reaffirms the long-standing prohibition of the distribution of election year material in parishes unless published by the diocesan bishop, the Michigan Catholic Conference or the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

I. INTRODUCTION

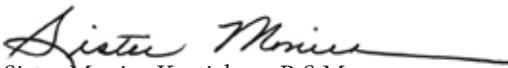
With this handbook it is the intention of the Michigan Catholic Conference to help educate, through the lens of Catholic Social Teaching, parish officials and parishioners on the electoral matters that arise in an election year. I sincerely hope this publication will stimulate discussion and reflection within parish gatherings and family settings alike.

2010 is a watershed year for Michigan politics. The 38 State Senate seats, 110 House of Representative seats, 15 congressional districts, the constitutional offices of governor, secretary of state and attorney general, and two Supreme Court seats—are all up for election. Because of term limits, 29 Senate seats and 52 House seats will be vacated by sitting members. It is also the first time in decades that none of the three constitutional offices will have an incumbent running for re-election, nor will a sitting lieutenant governor be running for the governor's office.

Amid such high turnover forthcoming in Michigan government, it becomes ever more crucial for all citizens to participate in the democratic process, especially and including Catholics. **Catholics are called to be Faithful Citizens**—people of faith who bring Gospel values to the public square in order to transform society into a more just and better world for all. Practicing *Faithful Citizenship* flows from a **well-formed conscience**, meaning when the appropriate moment arises one chooses to do good and to avoid evil. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking.”

Many people, including Catholics, typically invoke provocative questions when the Church and the lay faithful become active and involved in the political process. “What about the separation of Church and State?” The Founding Fathers asked a similar question, and proceeded to give birth to a pluralistic nation where ideas and proposals are welcome in government from all sectors of society, especially religious groups. Communities across the state are emboldened and the common good is advanced when Catholics and people of faith bring the social teachings of the Gospel to the public square.

Welcome to the Michigan Catholic Conference's *“Election & Political Activities Guide: A Handbook to the 2010 Elections from the Michigan Catholic Conference.”*



Sister Monica Kostielney, R.S.M.
President and C.E.O.

II. GUIDELINES ON ELECTORAL POLITICS FOR PASTORS AND PARISHES

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 are not to 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. **Advocacy for or against a specific issue or ballot proposal, however, is permissible and in fact is encouraged.**



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

- DO...** share the Church's teaching on human life, marriage and the family, immigration, education, social justice and peace.
- DO...** highlight the moral and ethical dimensions of public policy issues and ballot proposals.
- DO...** urge parishioners to join the party or campaign of their choice and, in light of Church teaching, evaluate candidate positions.
- DO...** facilitate voter education through the provision of materials only published by the local diocesan bishop, the Michigan Catholic Conference or the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
- DO...** ensure that a "candidate night" or similar event is conducted within the guidelines established for tax-exempt organizations. All candidates for a particular office must be invited to the Church event and absolutely no bias toward a specific candidate or party should be conveyed.
- 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 to vote. Registration may be accomplished by means of the internet or through voter registration drives.

DO... take precautions 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.

The above-mentioned points are based on extensive guidelines, which relate to diocesan newspapers, problems of constitutionality and related matters. Questions that might arise should be referred to the Michigan Catholic Conference or the diocesan attorney.

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.

ENDORSEMENTS AND ELECTIONEERING

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

DISTRIBUTION OF ELECTION YEAR MATERIAL

Pastors and others should be wary of outside organizations seeking to distribute voter education materials through parishes. It may happen that issues covered in outside materials do 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 may not be appropriate for distribution in Catholic parishes.

The Michigan Catholic Conference Board of Directors often speaks to issues that are both moral and political. The consistent ethic of life demands a concern for all the weak and vulnerable members of our society throughout all phases of life and must be promoted through the Church's social teaching and

its applications to today's social concerns. The independence and integrity of the Church's social teaching must be maintained. To this end:

Michigan Catholic Conference Board of Directors reaffirms the long-standing prohibition of the distribution of election year material in parishes unless published by the diocesan bishop, the Michigan Catholic Conference or the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

“BUILDING A WORLD OF RESPECT FOR HUMAN LIFE AND DIGNITY, WHERE JUSTICE AND PEACE PREVAIL, REQUIRES MORE THAN JUST POLITICAL COMMITMENT. INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, BUSINESSES, COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, AND GOVERNMENT ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY. PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE IN LIGHT OF FUNDAMENTAL MORAL PRINCIPLES IS AN ESSENTIAL DUTY FOR EVERY CATHOLIC AND ALL PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL.”

FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP, UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, 2007

III. FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP AND CONSCIENCE FORMATION

Most Americans are familiar with the term “separation of church and state,” a watchdog phrase that is commonly employed in the call for the parting of religion and faith from policy matters. From a historical perspective, the term may be traced, in part, to President Thomas Jefferson, who in 1802 spoke of a “wall of separation.” The United States Constitution speaks to this important issue through two clauses within the First Amendment:

- the Establishment Clause, which prohibits government from creating a national religion; and
- the Free Exercise Clause, which protects freedom of religion.

The phrase “separation of church and state,” however, does not formally exist in any document that gave birth to our nation and its laws.

Yet frequently lost in the “separation” rhetoric is each citizen’s moral obligation to participate in the democratic process, regardless of his or her religious belief. The Catholic Church, which views the wedding of Church and state as a suppression of religious freedom and other inalienable human rights, calls for the faithful to participate in the democratic process by bringing their moral and social message to the public debate. This concept may be described as “**Faithful Citizenship**.” Casting ballots, joining political parties, contacting legislators, organizing get-out-the-vote efforts, and participating in community forums are just a few examples of how one may blend their faith with politics. The United States is a pluralistic nation. Our society is enhanced and flourishes because of the right of minority groups and those of differing viewpoints to bring forth their perspectives on important social issues of the day.

“ANY TENDENCY TO TREAT RELIGION AS A PRIVATE MATTER MUST BE RESISTED. ONLY WHEN THEIR FAITH PERMEATES EVERY ASPECT OF THEIR LIVES DO CHRISTIANS BECOME TRULY OPEN TO THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF THE GOSPEL.”

POPE BENEDICT XVI, CELEBRATION OF VESPERS AND MEETING WITH THE BISHOPS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. 16 APRIL 2008

The Church does not seek to, nor does she have an interest in telling Catholics which candidate to vote for or against. The Church does have the responsibility of informing the consciences of Catholics in accordance with God's truth. It is within this formation of conscience that the individual Catholic voter must open himself to the teachings of the Church and to bring moral truths to the public square. For example, a well-formed conscience does not accept the intentional destruction of human life or racism as acceptable public policy. These are not principles held exclusively by Catholics; rather, they are principles based in moral and natural law that all faiths and people of goodwill can agree upon. 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.

The Church joins the public debate to share its experiences in serving the powerless and to add its values to the political dialogue. This kind of participation does not involve religious tests for candidates. 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.

**“WE RECOGNIZE THAT THE RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE CHOICES
IN POLITICAL LIFE RESTS WITH EACH INDIVIDUAL IN LIGHT OF A
PROPERLY FORMED CONSCIENCE, AND THAT PARTICIPATION GOES
WELL BEYOND CASTING A VOTE IN A PARTICULAR ELECTION.”**

**FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP, UNITED
STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, 2007**

IV. PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES OF CONCERN TO THE CHURCH

From education to economic justice, to the protection of human life and the promotion of the dignity of every individual, the Church speaks to a breadth of issues that are of concern to the people of Michigan. These issues may be addressed in six categories: human life, religious freedom, children and families, health care, education, and economic justice and regulatory policy. Not all issues carry equal moral weight. Welcoming the immigrant, and assisting the sick, the destitute and the elderly, help to advance the common good and to promote the dignity of human life from conception until natural death. The right to life is a commandment of God, an inherent and fundamental moral principle. It is the primary right through which all other rights flow. **Policy issues that involve the willful destruction of human life—abortion, human embryo research, unnecessary capital punishment, and assisted suicide—are intrinsically evil and must always be opposed.**

HUMAN LIFE

Human life must be respected and protected from the moment of conception until natural death. From the first moment of existence, a human being must be identified as a unified individual endowed with human nature and as such is the proper bearer of fundamental human rights. Every life is sacred because the person has been willed for its own sake in the image and likeness of God.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Freedom of conscience and of religion is a primary and inalienable right of the human person. Insofar as it touches the innermost sphere of the spirit, one can even say that it upholds the justification, deeply rooted in each individual, of all other liberties.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Children are among the most vulnerable members of the human family. As

“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.”

policies are advanced to help children, they must support families, since children's lives are nurtured or neglected, enhanced or diminished, by the quality of family life. Since the family is the primary, indispensable, and essential unit of society, policies must maintain and promote marriage, and strengthen the family.

HEALTH CARE

Equitable, accessible and ethical health care is an essential safeguard of human life. Health care is a basic human right, and genuine health care reform, recognizing the dignity of persons and the unique needs of the poor, is a matter of fundamental justice.

EDUCATION

All children, by virtue of their dignity as human beings, have an inalienable right to a quality education. Parents have the right to choose how that education is provided. Any effort to improve schools must include a commitment to educational choice.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND REGULATORY POLICIES

Of key concern is ensuring that economic policies that are advanced are shaped by moral principles. Economic choices and regulatory policies must be judged by how they protect or undermine the life and dignity of the human person, support the family, care for God's creation, and serve the common good.

“THE CHURCH IS CALLED UPON TO MANIFEST ANEW TO EVERYONE, WITH CLEAR AND STRONGER CONVICTION, HER WILL TO PROMOTE HUMAN LIFE BY EVERY MEANS AND TO DEFEND IT AGAINST ALL ATTACKS, IN WHATEVER CONDITION OR STATE OF DEVELOPMENT IT IS FOUND.”

JOHN PAUL II, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO (22 NOVEMBER 1981) 30

V. CATHOLIC LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY NETWORK

In an effort to facilitate “Faithful Citizenship,” the Michigan Catholic Conference has established a web-based action center that generates legislative advocacy from the grassroots level. Grassroots advocacy is a powerful communications method that involves a group of like-minded citizens expressing their position on important public policy issues to elected officials. To bring a strong Catholic grassroots voice to the State Capitol, the Michigan Catholic Conference has developed the *Catholic Legislative Advocacy Network*.

This simple-to-use web-based tool allows Catholics across the state to instantly transmit electronic messages to elected officials in support or opposition to issues of concern to the Church. The *Catholic Legislative Advocacy Network* is also intended to help Catholics understand how core Church teaching directly correlates to specific legislative issues. The following are offered through this network:

- Timely action alerts urging Catholics to email or call legislators at the state or federal level;
- Sample messages to use when communicating with elected officials;
- An elected officials locator, which provides a biography and information about officials;
- The ability to write a letter to your local newspaper; and
- Information about candidates running for political office.

Those who are interested in joining the *Catholic Legislative Advocacy Network* can sign up by visiting www.micatholicconference.org, and clicking on the “Catholic Legislative Advocacy Network” button on the left hand side of the website. There is no cost

“BY DIVINE FAVOR, ESPECIALLY IN MODERN TIMES, HUMAN GENIUS HAS PRODUCED FROM NATURAL MATERIAL ASTONISHING INVENTIONS IN THE FIELD OF TECHNOLOGY. SOME OF THESE HAVE EXTRAORDINARY BEARING ON THE HUMAN SPIRIT, SINCE THEY OPEN UP NEW AND HIGHLY EFFECTIVE AVENUES OF COMMUNICATION FOR ALL KINDS OF INFORMATION, IDEAS, AND DIRECTIVES.”

DECREE ON THE MEDIA OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS, SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

to participate, and the Michigan Catholic Conference does not share subscriber information with any other individuals, groups or organizations.

Catholic Legislative Advocacy Network

[Advocacy Network Home](#) · [Elected Officials](#) · [Issues](#) · [Elections](#) · [Write Your Local Newspaper](#)

Enter your ZIP code to find your representatives [GO](#)

ACTION ALERT!

Help Protect Religious Freedom in Michigan
Opposition Needed to Anti-Conscience Bill
[TAKE ACTION](#)

Advocacy Needed Against Energy Regulation
Non-Public Schools and the Poor to be Harmed by Legislation
[TAKE ACTION](#)

Non-Public Schools Need Your Help
Legislation Will Bolster Shared Time Programs
[TAKE ACTION](#)

Help Outlaw Partial-Birth Abortion in Michigan
Urge Your State Representative to Support Common Sense Legislation
[TAKE ACTION](#)

Welcome to the Michigan Catholic Conference Legislative Advocacy Network. [Sign Up](#) today to receive timely e-mail alerts when your advocacy is needed on important issues as they move through the legislative process.

After signing up you will be sent a confirmation email. Please click on the link in that email as soon as possible to activate your support.

The Michigan Catholic Conference thanks you for participating in the growing Catholic advocacy voice in Michigan!

VI. RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING

CATHOLICS IN POLITICAL LIFE

www.usccb.org/bishops/catholicsinpoliticallife.shtml

FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP: A CALL TO POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY FROM THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF THE UNITED STATES

www.faithfulcitizenship.org

MICHIGAN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

www.micatholicconference.org

POLITICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES FOR CATHOLIC ORGANIZATIONS, UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL, JULY 2007

www.usccb.org/ogc/guidelines.shtml

TASK FORCE ON CATHOLIC BISHOPS AND CATHOLIC POLITICIANS

www.usccb.org/bishops/mccarrick1104.shtml

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

www.usccb.org

“THE CHURCH IS INVOLVED IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS BUT IS NOT PARTISAN. THE CHURCH CANNOT CHAMPION ANY CANDIDATE OR PARTY. OUR CAUSE IS THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN LIFE AND DIGNITY AND THE PROTECTION OF THE WEAK AND VULNERABLE.”

FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP, UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, 2007

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Michigan Catholic Conference Board of Directors is comprised of the seven arch/diocesan bishops of Michigan, plus five lay persons, one priest, and one religious sister.

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The Michigan Catholic Conference does not endorse or oppose any candidates, under any circumstances, and no inference of endorsement or opposition should be concluded as a result of information provided here.

June 2010