

March 2008

Dear Priests, Deacons, Religious and Parish and School Leaders:

Questions arise about the role of the Catholic Church when an election is coming. While some people are asking the Church to take a more active role in promoting certain candidates or political parties, it is not the role of the Church to advocate for particular candidates or to take partisan positions. The Iowa Catholic Bishops have developed positions on public policy issues that can help as you review candidates' policies. Information on the Iowa Bishops' positions on these issues can be found at <http://www.iowa.nasccd.org>.

The role of the Church is to educate everyone about Catholic social teaching so people can make informed choices in all aspects of their lives, including voting. Catholic social teaching is based on the life and dignity of the human person. Our teaching speaks to rights and responsibilities, the option for the poor and vulnerable, the call to family and community, the dignity of work and rights of workers, solidarity with the human family and care for God's creation.

A short summary on *Faithful Citizenship* from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is attached. It includes the official teachings of the Church on political responsibility. I ask you to review these materials and to plan to use them in preparation for the elections. Working with our diocesan staff, you may also wish to schedule educational programs on these materials for your parish.

Some groups are producing political publications intended for distribution to Catholic audiences. The USCCB and diocesan staff have found that some of these are not consistent with the teachings of the Church. These should not be distributed! Only materials that have been approved by my office may be distributed on church property. If someone requests to distribute political materials at your parish and they are not materials of the USCCB or Iowa Catholic Conference, please decline the request or ask them to send the materials to our Social Action Director, John Kiley at kiley@davenportdiocese.org. For a complete list of activities allowed and forbidden for entities of the Diocese of Davenport, please refer to the attached *Do's and Do Not's* document.

The Office of the General Counsel of the USCCB has issued an update on the *Political Guidelines for Catholic Organizations* which is available at <http://www.usccb.org/ogc/guidelines.shtml>. If you have any questions about the information in this mailing, please contact John Kiley at 563-324-1912 ext. 269.

Thank you for your attention to our *Faithful Citizenship* responsibilities.

Yours in Christ,

(Most Rev.) Martin Amos
Bishop of Davenport

Attachments: Political Responsibility Do's and Do Not's
Faithful Citizenship

DIOCESE OF DAVENPORT
Political Responsibility Do's and Do Not's
For Catholic Parishes, Schools and Other Entities of the Diocese

Introduction: Our world is increasingly focused on public policy and the people who make this policy. This is understandable due to the enormous impact state and national public policy can have on issues that directly affect the lives of people in our Diocese. This focus is particularly evident during the political processes of campaigning, caucusing, and preparing for an election.

The following is a quick reminder of the activities that are encouraged (**Do's**) and those that are prohibited (**Do Not's**). It is essential that our Church is fair and that we follow the rules established for non-profit organizations in our laws. Our guidelines are based on the great work done on this topic by the US Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) and the Iowa Catholic Conference (ICC). All questions on these guidelines should be directed to John Kiley, Social Action Director for the Diocese of Davenport at 563-324-1912, ext. 269 or email: kiley@davenportdiocese.org.

Do's:

- Address the moral and human dimensions of public policy based on the Church's teaching.
- Share Catholic Social Teaching on topics such as human life, rural life, social justice and peace.
- Apply Catholic values to legislation and public issues, recognizing that there are limits to the extent of lobbying allowable for churches based on preserving our non-profit status.
- Urge parishioners to register and vote after informing themselves on the issues and candidates.
- Set up programs for parishioners to learn about moral issues affected by our public policy.
- Strictly observe Church guidelines and IRS rules (see below) about political responsibility.
- Only distribute candidate questionnaires that have been approved by the Bishop.
- Check with the Diocesan Social Action Director on any questions about what is allowed.
- Promote the USCCB materials on *Faithful Citizenship: Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*.

Do Not's:

- Do not engage in partisan politics at any level.
- Do not endorse, support or oppose any specific candidates or parties (directly or indirectly).
- Do not allow church facilities to be used for any electoral forums which are limited to just one candidate or political party, including an Iowa caucus. This prohibition includes the rental of all church facilities when only one candidate or one party is involved.
- Do not distribute or authorize the distribution of partisan campaign material on church property or under church auspices (this includes the grounds surrounding the church).
- Do not permit church property (including parking lots) to be used for fundraisers, campaign events or the distribution of partisan materials.
- Do not invite only selected candidates to address your church-sponsored group.
- Do not conduct voter registration slanted toward one political party or candidate.
- Do not distribute any electoral materials that have not been authorized by the Bishop.

References:

- For more information on this topic visit our website at <http://www.davenportdiocese.org/>
- For USCCB information on *Faithful Citizenship* see <http://www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/>
- For guidelines for the IRS, visit www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=122887,00.html