



St. Michael Catholic Church

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Dear Friends in Christ,

Recently, Bishop Golka published some instructions regarding upcoming election activities that I'd like to share with you here:

“As our communities gear up for another election season, the inevitable questions regarding what can and cannot be said or done in the church setting come to the forefront.

The Johnson Amendment is a provision in the U.S. tax code that prohibits all 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations [including U.S. Catholic Churches] from endorsing or opposing political candidates or parties.

As the USCCB has insisted in *Faithful Citizenship*, Catholics who bring their moral convictions into public life do not threaten democracy, but enrich our communities and nation. The separation of church and state does not require division between belief and public action, between moral principles and political choices, but protects the right of believers and religious groups to practice their faith and act on their values in public life.

We will continue to abide by the overarching principle, articulated by the tax code, of not endorsing political parties or candidates in our houses of worship. The prohibition against political campaign intervention is a condition placed on the receipt of the benefits of federal tax exemption and qualification under section 501(c)(3), including the ability to receive tax-deductible charitable contributions.”

*Peace in Christ,
Fr. Bob*

FAQs REGARDING POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

What kinds of activities are prohibited generally under the U.S. Government's Internal Revenue Service (IRS) section 501(c)(3)?

Under the rubric “*participation in or intervention in any political campaign on behalf of or opposition to any candidate for public office,*” section 501(c)(3) prohibits a range of activities, generally including:

- statements, in any medium, of support or opposition for any candidate, political party or political action committee (“PAC”);
- providing or soliciting financial support to or for any candidate, political party or PAC;
- soliciting in-kind support to or for any candidate, political party or PAC;
- distribution of voter education materials biased with respect to any candidate, political party or PAC; conduct public forums, debates or lectures biased with respect to any candidate, political party or PAC; and
- conduct voter registration or get-out-the-vote drives biased with respect to any candidate, political party or PAC.

Can Candidates Make Appearances at Church Events?

The IRS has indicated that whether a Catholic organization may invite a candidate to speak at a sponsored event depends upon all the facts and circumstances surrounding the invitation and whether the candidate is invited in their capacity as a candidate or in their individual capacity.

A candidate's attendance at an exempt organization-sponsored event that is open to the public, such as a concert, lecture, or church picnic, does not by itself constitute intervention in a political campaign. However, the sponsoring organization should ensure that no political campaigning takes place at the event, including distribution of campaign literature, that the sponsoring organization does not publicly recognize the candidate for public office, and that a non-partisan atmosphere is maintained.

Can Campaign Materials be Distributed?

Catholic organizations may not distribute voter education or other campaign materials prepared by any candidate, political party or PAC. (*Voter education material approved and/or provided by the Colorado Catholic Conference can and should be distributed in Churches.*)

Can Signatures be Collected for Ballot Access?

Catholic organizations may not collect signatures on or encourage voters to sign petitions to enable *any candidate* to appear on an election ballot. Even if all candidates are treated equally, this activity directly furthers the political candidacies of the individuals involved. (*Signatures may be collected at Churches in the furtherance of putting an issue on the ballot, but only with the express permission of the Bishop and/or the Colorado Catholic Conference.*)

Can Voter Education be Provided?

During election campaigns, Catholic organizations may educate voters about the issues. In addition, they may educate voters about candidates' positions on the issues through such activities as sponsorship of candidate forums and distribution of voter education materials (e.g., incumbents' voting records or results of candidate polls or questionnaires). Such activities, if unbiased in content, structure, format, and context, do not violate the prohibition against political campaign intervention.

Can a Catholic Organization make Endorsements and/or Statements of Opposition?

A Catholic organization may not directly or indirectly make any statement, in any medium, to endorse, support, or oppose any candidate for public office, political party, or PAC.

Can Financial Support be Provided to a Candidate or Political Party?

A Catholic organization may not provide or solicit financial support, including even market-rate loans or loan guarantees, for or on behalf of any candidate, political party, or PAC.

Can Fundraising be Conducted on Behalf of a Candidate or Political Party?

A Catholic organization may not conduct fundraising events or activities, or otherwise solicit funds, for or on behalf of any candidate, political party, or PAC. Likewise, a Catholic organization should not permit fundraising for or on behalf of any candidate, political party, or PAC at any sponsored event.

Can In-Kind Support be Offered to a Candidate or Political Party?

A Catholic organization may not provide or solicit in-kind support, such as free or selective use of volunteers, paid staff, facilities, equipment, office supplies, mailing lists, etc. for or on behalf of any candidate, political party, or PAC.

Can Political Signs be Placed Church Property?

Political signs should not be placed on property owned by Catholic organizations or rented by Catholic organizations for official business. Section 501(c)(3) does not prohibit the placement of political signs on the personally-owned property of Church officials, employees, and/or parishioners.

Can the Church Conduct A Voter Registration/Get-Out-the-Vote Drives?

Catholic organizations may sponsor voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, provided that no bias for or against any candidate, political party, or voting position is evidenced. Such bias would be indicated by distribution of partisan literature or materials indicating the sponsoring organization's political viewpoint in connection with the voter registration or get-out-the-vote drive, by targeting registration or get-out-the-vote drives toward individuals who support the organization's positions or a particular candidate or party, or by coordinating the drive with candidates or their committees.

Catholic organization voter registration or get-out-the vote efforts should **not** be conducted:

- in cooperation with any political campaign;
- according to the identity of the candidates;
- in a manner targeting members of a particular party; and/or
- based upon a candidate's or party's agreement or disagreement with the sponsoring organization's positions

(There are very specific guidelines that the State of Colorado imposes for conducting a Voter Registration Drive and this activity must be approved in advance by the parish's Pastor.)

VOTER REGISTRATION INFORMATION TO BE AWARE OF (DO'S & DON'TS)

- In Colorado, a voter registration drive (VRD) is defined as two or more people *distributing and collecting* voter registration applications in the State of Colorado.
- Voter registration drives can only be conducted by groups that are registered with the Secretary of State's office and have attended VRD training.
- If a parish wants to promote voter registration in the parish and without going through the process of being an official VRD group here is what is allowed:
 - ❖ the parish can provide laptops or computers at the parish that are connected to the internet and logged onto the Colorado Secretary of State's website where people can register to vote online.

**<https://www.sos.state.co.us/voter-classic/pages/pub/olvr/verifyNewVoter.xhtml>
(Colorado Secretary of State Voter Registration website)**

- ❖ your parish can hand out paper voter registration forms for parishioners to take home, fill out and mail back to the Secretary of State.

***PARISHES AND/OR PARISHIONERS
CANNOT COLLECT THE COMPLETED PAPER
VOTER REGISTRATION FORMS.***

(<http://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/vote/VoterRegFormEnglish.pdf>)
(Colorado Paper Voter Registration Form)

➤ Voter registration at a parish must be conducted in a way that is non-partisan. This means that political parties and/or candidates cannot aid the parish in organizing any type of voter registration at the parish. Parishes cannot have information about a political party or candidate on-site at a parish.

Thank you in advance for your time and kind assistance in this important matter.

Respectfully
Yours in Christ,

cc: File



Rev. Robert G. Newbury Jr., KHS
Parochial Administrator

