

## **Diocese of Greensburg**

### **Political Campaign Activities Policy**

*(updated Oct. 6, 2020)*

With the November 3, 2020, general elections approaching, this is a reminder to parishes about voter guides and what is permitted and not permitted during the campaign season. I would like to draw your attention to the policy on diocesan e-mail stated below. Also, this activities policy applies to homilies or bulletin articles in which candidates or political parties are endorsed from the pulpit because of a single issue.

A Pennsylvania Catholic Conference (PCC)-approved voter guide will be provided by the diocese prior to the election that will include information about the races for U.S. President and the Pennsylvania General Assembly (House and Senate) contests in districts within the Diocese of Greensburg. The voter guide material will be made available to the parishes and posted to the diocesan website.

### **Diocese of Greensburg Political Activities Policy**

As a 501(c)(3) organization, the Church is **prohibited** by the Internal Revenue Code from participating or intervening in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. The ban is absolute. Any amount of participation in a political campaign, no matter how slight, can put the tax-exempt status of the Church in jeopardy. Therefore, voter guides or flyers that are single-issue guides or that endorse candidates, political parties, or that support single issues cannot be used as bulletin inserts or distributed in parishes.

Churches and church organizations may not endorse or state their opposition to political candidates, including the publishing or distribution of materials that favor one candidate or party over another. Nor may churches or church organizations contribute to political candidates or parties, even in the form of in-kind expenditures such as donations of facilities, supplies, or employee time. Restrictions on political activity apply in equal force to the use of websites and email as well as to more traditional forums.

In addition to the limitations imposed under IRC §501(c)(3), the Federal Election Campaign Act forbids nonprofit entities to work in concert or cooperation with any federal candidate or campaign committee in the development or distribution of campaign materials.

Church officials and employees are permitted, however, to instruct the faithful about the Church's teaching on moral and social issues and identify such issues as important current political topics. Care must be taken, however, not to identify any particular candidate's or political party's views as preferable on such issues.

Both the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference (PCC) have issued guidelines for political activities for Catholic churches and organizations. Two areas of concern that come up in our parishes at election time are voter guides and campaign literature in church parking lots.

## **Voter Guides and Resources**

Use of the PCC Voter Guide is approved and encouraged. Candidate questionnaires, interview transcripts, voter guides and other up-to-date election resources from the PCC are at [www.pacatholic.org](http://www.pacatholic.org).

*Faithful Citizenship* materials from the USCCB have been used by parishes for years and continue to be an important resource. Information can be found at <https://www.usccb.org/offices/justice-peace-human-development/forming-consciences-faithful-citizenship>

## **Church Parking Lot Leafleting**

Church parking lots are not public forums as a public street or shopping mall would be and remain dedicated to accommodating the religious activities of the church. Churches must avoid complicity in the dissemination of material endorsing or opposing political candidates. Therefore, churches may neither favor nor disfavor any particular group that seeks to distribute materials of that type on portions of its property that are generally accessible to the public. Churches may, as a policy, refuse to allow parking lot leafleting altogether. **At the same time, the law does not impose any obligation on a church to actively monitor and prevent the leafleting of cars parked in its lots.**

Some groups will leaflet during Mass without notifying the parish and/or the pastor. If questioned about a leaflet campaign, note the bold sentence in the paragraph above and the fact the Diocese of Greensburg does not authorize any leafleting or pamphleting.

## **Diocesan E-mail**

You are not permitted to use the diocesan e-mail system for publishing information endorsing or repudiating candidates that support single issues. You could lose your e-mail privileges.

If you have any questions please contact my office.

The Rev. Msgr. Larry J. Kulick, JCL

Diocesan Administrator