



DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO

OFFICE OF
CATHOLIC CHARITIES &
SOCIAL CONCERNS

2110 Broadway • Sacramento, California 95818 • 916/733-0253 • Fax 916/733-0215

Memo

To: All
From: Miriam Sammartino
Date: May 4, 2026
Subject: Updated: Guidelines for Pastors and Parishes on Advocacy and Political Action

“An authentic faith . . . always involves a deep desire to change the world, transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than what we found it . . . If indeed ‘the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics,’ the Church, ‘cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.’”

*-Evangelii Gaudium, no. 183
Pope Francis*

The California Catholic Conference of Bishops (CCC) offers guidance on political advocacy for Catholic clergy and parishioners, emphasizing the importance of engaging in politics with a foundation in Catholic social teaching and ethical principles. Clergy and parishioners are invited to review the attached documents prior to engaging in advocacy and political action:

- CCC’s Memorandum on Election Materials
- CCC Policy on California and National Ballot Propositions
- Guidelines for Pastors and Parishes on Advocacy and Political Action

Please visit <https://cacatholic.org/> for more information on resources and legislative priorities from the California Catholic Conference.

Respectfully,

Miriam Sammartino, Director



DATE: April 20, 2026
TO: Pastors, Principals, Parish leaders
FROM: CA Catholic Conference
RE: Election materials

MEMORANDUM

Each election season brings a renewed opportunity for pastors and Church leaders to assist the faithful in forming their consciences for faithful citizenship. This responsibility is pivotal in enabling us to better pursue the common good and follow Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Through prayer, reading Scripture, Church teaching and Catholic social doctrine, reflection, and conversation, Catholics integrate their faith with exercising their right to vote for political leaders and on significant federal, state, and local issues.

Election seasons are also a time when we are inundated with messaging from candidates and special interests encouraging us to vote a certain way. As Church leaders, it is important that we safeguard our parishes and schools to be places of authentic instruction in the faith and not used for partisan purposes. To that end, the bishops of California ask parishes and schools to follow these guidelines:

- Religious leaders should never make public endorsements of candidates or political parties to maintain their role as impartial spiritual guides. Practically speaking, no candidate or political party authentically embraces the totality of Catholic social or moral teaching.
- Before offering guidance on supporting or opposing a piece of legislation or a ballot initiative, parish leaders should connect with the California Catholic Conference and/or their local diocese.
- Parishes and schools should not provide any printed campaign information or voter guides or allow such information to be disseminated on parish or school grounds or through parish or school communications – unless the information is provided by the USCCB, the CA Catholic Conference, or the diocese, and has the official logo of any of those organizations.

For more detailed information, please visit usccb.org/resources/dos-and-donts-guidelines-during-election-season or cacatholic.org/vote.

Approved by the Catholic Bishops of California



CCC Policy on California and National Ballot Propositions Approved by the Catholic Bishops of California

The California Catholic Conference staff review all statewide ballot initiatives and referenda. The bishops, after appropriate consultation, may choose—either individually or as a Conference—to support, oppose, or take no position on each measure.

Signature gathering, through parishes, schools and ministries, to place an initiative on the California ballot, is very rarely permitted. These policies, as well as further guidelines, are available at cacatholic.org/vote.

- When neither the California Catholic Conference nor an (Arch)diocese has taken a public position on a specific measure, a parish, school or Catholic organization should not do so without previous consultation with the bishop.
- Granting the use of church facilities to supporting or opposing partisan or interest groups should rarely be allowed. Only with the specific permission of the diocesan bishop and the local pastor should church facilities be used for signature gathering to place an initiative on the ballot.
- Although churches have no jurisdiction over public sidewalks and other public property in their vicinities, church parking lots are ordinarily private property, and the public has no right to distribute partisan materials thereon. This may be difficult to control, but parish leaders should nevertheless deny permission for any such activity. Lack of enforcement here may be construed as institutional support for partisan activities.
- All public policy, election, or political advocacy materials distributed in parishes must be prepared by and include the logos of the (Arch)diocese, the California Catholic Conference (CCC) and/or the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

In anticipation of the 2026 midterm election, there are many ballot initiatives currently seeking signatures or support. A number of these are of interest to California Catholics. The CA bishops have not approved signature gathering through parishes, schools or ministries for any of these initiatives. Once ballot initiatives have qualified for the ballot, the CA bishops, through the CCC, will offer guidance on the ballot propositions based on Catholic social teaching and our pursuit of the common good.

Guidelines for Pastors and Parishes on Advocacy and Political Action

“Education and upbringing, concern for others, a well-integrated view of life and spiritual growth: all these are essential for quality human relationships and enabling society to react against injustices, aberrations and abuses of economic, technological, political and media power.” (Fratelli Tutti, 167)

The California Catholic Conference of Bishops offers guidance on political advocacy for Catholic clergy and parishioners, emphasizing the importance of engaging in politics with a foundation in Catholic social teaching and ethical principles.

Pope Francis on Political Engagement

Pope Francis, in his 2013 reflection "Pray for Politicians that They Govern Us Well," encourages Catholics to engage in politics for the common good:

“We need to participate for the common good. Sometimes we hear ‘a good Catholic is not interested in politics.’ This is not true: good Catholics immerse themselves in politics by offering the best of themselves so that the leader[s] can govern.”

As disciples of Christ, we are called to share our faith in the public arena. Pope Francis further states in "Gaudete et Exsultate":

“Your identification with Christ and his will involves a commitment to build with him that kingdom of love, justice and universal peace. . . . You cannot grow in holiness without committing yourself, body and soul, to giving your best to this endeavor.”



Principles of Catholic Social Teaching



Catholic social teaching provides a moral framework for addressing political issues. Key principles include:

- **Human Dignity** - the prime principle of Catholic social teaching. It recognizes that man is made in God's image and likeness. It is this that makes every human life sacred.
- **Solidarity** - flows from human dignity in that it "consists in the very fact that in God and with God I love even persons I do not like or even know." (Pope Benedict XVI, 18).
- **Subsidiarity** - flows from human dignity in that it recognizes "in the person a subject who is always capable of giving something to others." (Pope Benedict XVI, 16).

Guidelines for Advocacy and Political Action

Participation in public life by religious individuals and groups can be complex. Here are practical guidelines for clergy and parishioners:

1. Individual Participation

- **Voting and Political Engagement:**
 - Catholics are encouraged to vote and are welcome to engage in partisan politics. When voting, consider candidates' positions on a range of issues as well as their personal integrity as leaders. Catholics should recognize that no candidate or party authentically embraces the totality of Catholic Social Teaching and take every opportunity to encourage candidates and parties to work toward the fundamental right to life for all and the common good.

Guidelines for Advocacy and Political Action



- **Role of Religious Leaders:**

- Religious leaders should never make public endorsements of candidates or political parties to maintain their role as impartial spiritual guides. Practically speaking, no candidate or party authentically embraces the totality of Catholic Social Teaching.
- Pastors, deacons, and other parish leaders play an important role in helping Catholics form their consciences. It is important to share Catholic Social Teaching and discuss the moral and social dimensions of policies, initiatives and measures.
- Before offering guidance to support or oppose a piece of legislation or a ballot initiative, parish leaders should connect with the California Catholic Conference or their local diocese.

2. Institutional Restrictions

- **Partisan Politics:**

- Churches and tax-exempt organizations must not engage in partisan politics, including endorsing or opposing candidates.
- Voter education should remain neutral and non-partisan, avoiding any appearance of supporting specific candidates or parties.

- **Educational Initiatives:**

- Parish leaders are encouraged to offer education around important moral and social issues, even those that are contentious. When offering education based in Catholic Social Teaching, it is important to focus on the teaching itself, and the application of our social doctrine to real-life examples, without reverting to partisan politics or political slogans.
- If parishes would like to hold Town Hall meetings or Candidate Forums, they are welcome to do so only if all candidates running for a particular position are invited to attend.

Guidelines for Advocacy and Political Action



3. Issue-Oriented Activities

- **Partisan Politics:**
 - Churches and tax-exempt organizations must not engage in partisan politics, including endorsing or opposing candidates.
 - Voter education should remain neutral and non-partisan, avoiding any appearance of supporting specific candidates or parties.
- **Educational Initiatives:**
 - Parish leaders are encouraged to offer education around important moral and social issues, even those that are contentious. When offering education based in Catholic Social Teaching, it is important to focus on the teaching itself, and the application of our social doctrine to real-life examples, without reverting to partisan politics or political slogans.
 - If parishes would like to hold Town Hall meetings or Candidate Forums, they are welcome to do so only if all candidates running for a particular position are invited to attend.
- **Advocacy and Legislation:**
 - Distribute informational fliers about legislative issues, including contact details for elected representatives.
 - Encourage parishioners to contact their legislators to support or oppose legislation based on Catholic social teachings. Always check with the California Catholic Conference or your local diocese.

4. Prohibited Activities

- **Political Endorsements:**
 - No diocesan or parish entity should endorse or oppose any political candidate or party.
 - Avoid urging parishioners to vote for specific candidates or labeling candidates with biased terms.

Guidelines for Advocacy and Political Action



- **Objective Representation:**

- Do not use symbols like plus (+) and minus (-) signs or ratings to evaluate candidates.
- Distribute non-partisan voter education materials without bias.

5. Use of Church Property

- **Distribution of Partisan Materials:**

- Church property, including parking lots, should not be used for distributing partisan materials.
- Parish leaders should prevent any partisan activities to avoid the appearance of endorsement.

6. Ballot Initiatives and Referenda

- **Review and Consultation:**

- The California Catholic Conference reviews statewide ballot measures. Bishops may support, oppose, or take no position on these measures.
- Parishes should consult the California Catholic Conference or their bishop before taking any public position on a measure if the diocese has taken no official stance.

- **Facility Use:**

- Church facilities should only be used for signature gathering initiatives with approval of the pastor and direct instruction from their local bishop and the California Catholic Conference.