

ABOUT

The Minnesota Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Minnesota. It serves the purpose of putting our Catholic faith into action for the betterment, or common good, of society. MCC supports the ministry of our state's Catholic bishops by:

- ❖ Working with political and community leaders to shape legislation that serves human dignity and the common good
- ❖ Educating Catholics and the public about the ethical and moral framework that should be applied to public policy choices
- ❖ Mobilizing the Catholic community to make its voice heard in the public arena

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GET INVOLVED

Visit www.mncatholic.org to join MNCAN, MCC's web-based, grassroots public advocacy network of Catholic lay and religious persons.



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Guidelines for Parish and Church Organization Political Activity



"In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is a moral obligation."

-United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



As Catholics, we are called to fully participate in the political process. As individual citizens, we are called to be informed voters and to encourage our elected officials to act on behalf of the common good. At the same time, it is important to note that there are limits to official Catholic Church political activity.



How Does the Church Work to Influence Public Policy?

The Church expresses its official position on public policy matters through the Minnesota Catholic Conference (MCC). MCC public policy staff lobbies and communicates on issues of concern to the Church. The Catholic Bishops of the state guide the work of the MCC. The MCC provides information and resources to help citizens engage their elected officials on matters of concern to the common good.

Why is Some Activity Prohibited?

Because of its tax-exempt status, the Church, its parishes, agencies, and organizations are subject to rules regarding political activity. Any individual or group acting in an official Church capacity must conform to laws and regulations that govern tax-exempt organizations. While the Church may engage in issue-related activity, it may not be involved in partisan political candidate activities.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) reported that during the 2004 election cycle, it found some level of prohibited political activity in nearly 75 percent of the cases reviewed. The IRS provides an extensive amount of guidance on its website, including practical examples, for churches and religious organizations that wish to avoid prohibited activities (www.irs.gov/charities/churches/index.html).

If a parish or a Church organization violates the law, the IRS may revoke the parish's or Church organization's tax-exempt status temporarily or permanently.

The IRS may also assess additional penalties and taxes on any funds that they believe the Church, parish, or Church organization spent on prohibited political activities.

What Activity is Prohibited?

Any partisan political activity is prohibited. A common concern that arises during political campaigns is the distribution of voter information materials prepared by outside groups. Catholic organizations should be wary of outside groups seeking to distribute voter education or election-related materials on Church property or at official Church functions. Often, the groups preparing these materials are not subject to the same restrictions as the Church. Any materials not approved by the Minnesota Catholic Conference or the Diocese should not be distributed. The Church is also prohibited from the following types of activities:

Prohibited Activities

- ❖ Providing support for or opposition to candidates for elected office
- ❖ Preparing or distributing campaign literature materials that favor or oppose a specific candidate or political party
- ❖ Using Diocesan or parish bulletins and websites to support, promote, endorse, or oppose any particular political party or candidate
- ❖ Giving Church money or support to candidates for political office or to office holders

What Activity is Permitted?

The Church has a right and responsibility to weigh in on public issues. As Catholics, we are called to work for policies that protect the poor and vulnerable and uphold life at all stages. To that end, parishes and Church organizations are allowed to participate in the following types of activities:

Permitted Activities

- ❖ Advocacy for or against ballot initiatives such as constitutional amendments
- ❖ Advocacy for or against legislation
- ❖ Distributing materials related to specific issues that do not reference candidates or parties
- ❖ Participating in non-partisan voter registration efforts or get-out-the-vote drives
- ❖ Organizing issue-specific letter writing campaigns or lobby day events
- ❖ Sponsoring public voter education forums on specific issues

This information is intended to provide general guidance only. Contact your diocesan attorney with specific questions or concerns. More information is also available from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



General Counsel online at www.usccb.org/about/general-counsel/political-activity-guidelines.cfm.