

POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Members of the Catholic community are called to exercise political responsibility. This call extends to Catholic organizations such as churches, but because of their exemption from federal income tax under section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code, there are restrictions such groups must honor. Among prohibited activities identified by the United States Catholic Conference are the following:

Endorsements/Statements of Opposition. Catholic organizations may not make statements, either oral or written, supporting or opposing any candidate for elective public office, any slate of candidates, political party or political action committee ("PAC"). This would include statements made in a sermon, a church bulletin, or an editorial in a Catholic periodical, and distribution of filled-in sample ballots. In addition, Catholic organizations should avoid statements that *indirectly* support or oppose a particular candidate; e.g., labeling a candidate as pro-life or anti-family, using plus (+) or minus (-) or similar signs that indicate candidates' agreement (or lack thereof) with the organization's position on issues.

Financial and In-Kind Support. A Catholic organization may not provide financial support to any candidate, PAC, or political party. Likewise, it may not provide or solicit in-kind support, such as *free or selective* use of volunteers, paid staff, facilities, equipment, mailing lists, etc.

Mailing Lists. Providing mailing lists to candidates, political parties, or PACs on a preferential basis or without charge, or lending such lists to candidates, political parties or PACs would violate the political campaign activity prohibition.

Sponsoring PACs. A PAC is a political action committee whose purpose is to influence the election of any individual to public office, whether as a separate organization or of a segregated fund of an organization. IRS takes the position that a section 501(c)(3) organization may not establish or support (financially or otherwise) a PAC.

Partisan Campaign Literature. A Catholic organization should not distribute or authorize distribution of campaign literature, biased voter education material, etc., through member mailings, during worship services, or by other means, whether by its own employees or representatives or by the representatives of a candidate, political party or PAC. This restriction applies to Church parking lots as they are considered private property. Such political activity is not allowed.

Additional policies of the Diocese of Las Cruces.

1. Only position papers or voter guides made available by the diocesan office, the New Mexico Catholic Conference, or the National Conference of Catholic Bishops may be distributed by parishes or other diocesan organizations.
2. No facilities may be rented or used free of charge by a political candidate. Unbiased public forums may be sponsored.
3. Paid political ads may not be accepted nor presented in church bulletins or Catholic newspapers.

Although the above mentioned prohibited activities may seem rather restrictive, there are many appropriate activities that are permitted for Catholic organizations. It is recommended that the February 14, 1996, memorandum from the office of the General Counsel of the United States Catholic Conference, be kept on file and be reviewed periodically. Questions about appropriate or inappropriate political activities may be addressed to the Chancellor's office.