


2024 Election Year Guidelines for Catholic Parishes and Organizations

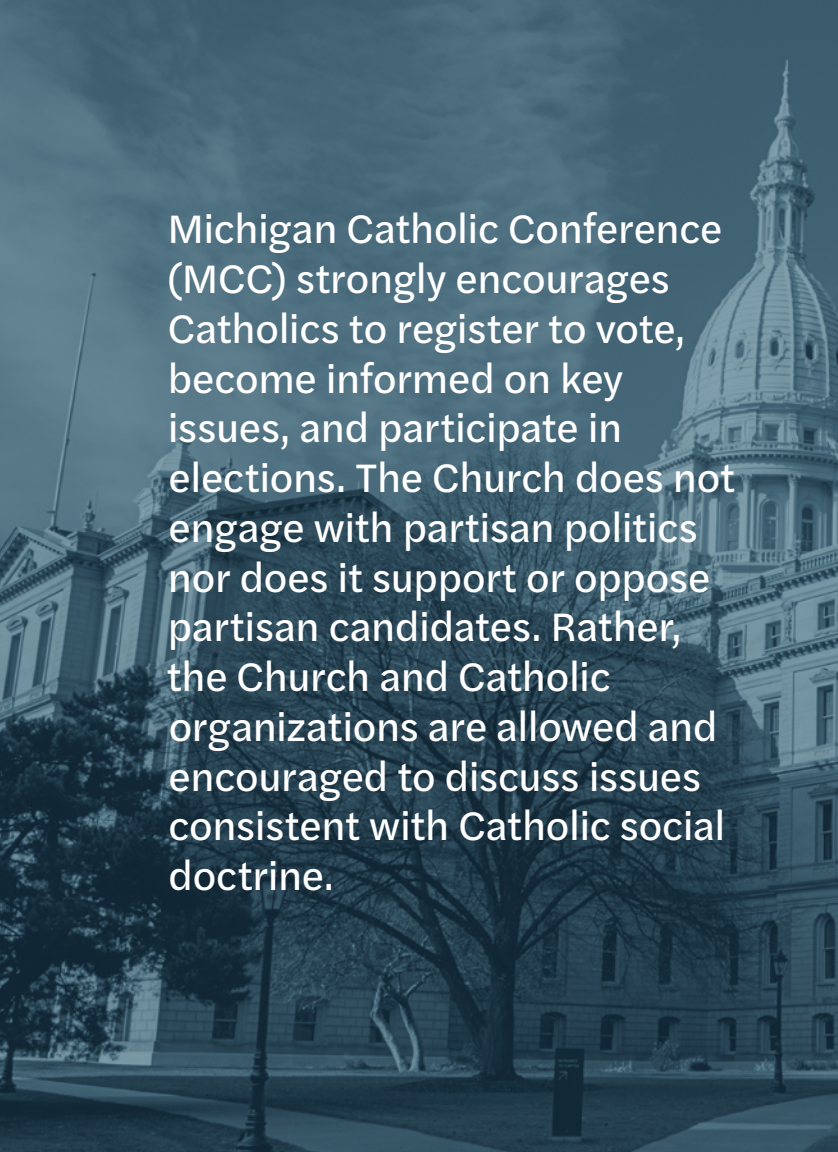


**MICHIGAN
CATHOLIC**
CONFERENCE

The background image shows the interior of a Gothic cathedral. The architecture features high, pointed arches supported by massive stone columns. The ceiling is a complex wooden truss system. The floor is made of stone tiles, and rows of wooden pews are visible on either side of a central aisle. A blue semi-transparent rectangle is overlaid on the center of the image, containing white text.

“The Church is involved in the political process but is not partisan. The Church cannot champion any candidate or party. Our cause is the defense of human life and dignity and the protection of the weak and vulnerable.”

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops,
Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, No. 58

The background of the left side of the page is a photograph of the Michigan State Capitol building, featuring a prominent dome and classical architectural details. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC) strongly encourages Catholics to register to vote, become informed on key issues, and participate in elections. The Church does not engage with partisan politics nor does it support or oppose partisan candidates. Rather, the Church and Catholic organizations are allowed and encouraged to discuss issues consistent with Catholic social doctrine.

This year, in addition to the presidential election, Michigan voters will fill one of the state's U.S. Senate seats. Other significant races include Michigan's 14 congressional districts, all 110 seats in the state House of Representatives, and two justices of the Michigan Supreme Court.

Because individuals and groups may contact parishes, pastors, and parish staff to promote a campaign or issue, it can be difficult to determine what constitutes appropriate election-related activities for 501(c)(3) organizations, such as entities affiliated with the Catholic Church.

This resource is intended to clarify appropriate political and electoral activity for Catholic parishes, organizations, and other 501(c)(3) organizations that qualify for tax-exempt status under the Internal Revenue Code.

These guidelines are intended to highlight common questions during an election year but are not an exhaustive list. MCC encourages Catholic organizations to consult with their diocese and ask for legal guidance if they have questions. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops also offers a useful resource, *Political Activities Guidelines*, with further information at cthl.cc/83oyg.

General Prohibitions

Because the Church does not and will not engage in partisan activity, parishes and Catholic organizations are prohibited from:

- Endorsing or opposing candidates for political office.
- Distributing partisan campaign literature under church auspices.
- Gathering petition signatures for nominating candidates on parish grounds.
- Providing financial resources, time, volunteers, or staff to support a candidate for office.
- Inviting only select candidates to speak at the church or address a church-sponsored group/event.
- Conducting voter registration drives slanted toward one party.



Distribution of Election Information

The Michigan Catholic Conference Board of Directors often speak to issues that are both moral and political. The dignity of the human person demands a concern for all the weak and vulnerable members of our society. Voters must become educated on the Church's social teaching and its application to today's social concerns. The independence and integrity of the Church's social teaching must be maintained. To this end:

The MCC Board of Directors reaffirm the long-standing prohibition of the distribution of election-year material unless published by the diocesan bishop, the Michigan Catholic Conference, or the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Engagement with Political Candidates and Public Officials

Are pastors and parish staff allowed to support political candidates?

- Individuals cannot be prohibited from endorsing, volunteering for, or donating to candidates in their own personal capacity and time. However, it can be difficult to separate one's personal activity from his or her role as clergy or as an employee of the Church.
- If publicly supporting a candidate, pastors and parish employees should make it clear they are not acting or speaking on behalf of the Church.
- A Catholic organization's facilities or resources—such as but not limited to envelopes, email, parishioner lists, and paid working time—*cannot* be used to benefit a political candidate's campaign.

Can a parish invite candidates or elected officials to speak?

- Candidates and elected officials may be invited to parishes, provided IRS rules are followed.
- If an individual is invited to appear as a candidate, all other candidates for the same office must also be provided equal access.
- A parish may invite an incumbent public official who is running for office without inviting all other candidates, provided the purpose is not to promote that individual's candidacy.
- Public officials may speak about issues but may not campaign during a parish visit.

Political Signs

Signs posted on Catholic organization property that endorse candidates or political parties are prohibited. Political bumper stickers also cannot be placed on vehicles owned or leased by Catholic organizations.

There are three types of political signs allowed to be posted on Catholic organization property:

- Signs advocating for or against a particular ballot issue, especially those which MCC has taken a public position. As of publication, there are no statewide ballot issues this year for which MCC has taken a position.
- Signs encouraging people to register to vote.
- Signs indicating polling place locations on Election Day, such as those that read “vote here.”



Voter Registration Drives

- Catholic organizations can host voter registration drives, provided they are educational and non-partisan.
- The organization must ensure that *any partisan election materials*, such as brochures promoting a certain candidate or party, *are not distributed*.
- Information about the election date and voting must be consistently shared with participants in the drive, regardless of their political preference.
- If distributing the names of the candidates running for each office, all must be listed without any indication of favoritism.





When a Catholic Organization Serves as a Polling Location

- Limited campaign literature can be distributed by local volunteers—*but not* staff of the Catholic institution—outside of the polling place, provided all election rules and laws are followed.
- This distribution should not be linked to the Catholic organization.

A Call for Catholics to Participate in Elections

The Church strongly encourages Catholics to participate in elections, to learn about the issues, and to vote according to a well-formed conscience grounded in the Church's teachings.

To assist the faithful in approaching the election and the issues from a Catholic perspective, consider reviewing and distributing resources associated with the U.S. bishops' *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* document, which can be found at cthl.cc/fcfc.

MCC will publish an edition of *Focus* intended to summarize the key concepts from *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* for the lay faithful of Michigan ahead of the November election.

For general Michigan election-related questions, including how to find local polling locations, registering to vote, and viewing what is on the ballot for upcoming elections, visit and direct others to the Michigan Voter Information Center website at cthl.cc/jlncp.



For a complete list of links and to read and share a digital version of this publication, visit cthl.cc/24eyg.

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The Michigan Catholic Conference Board of Directors is comprised of the seven arch/diocesan bishops of Michigan, plus five lay persons, one priest, and one religious sister.

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