



CARDINAL'S OFFICE  
2121 COMMONWEALTH AVENUE  
BRIGHTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02136-3193  
October 11, 2006

Dear Reverend Monsignor/Father,

As we approach the general elections in November, I write to provide guidance on election related matters and our parishes. At this time, I also want to take the opportunity to thank you for your dedicated attention to your many pastoral responsibilities. In the course of my visiting parishes throughout the Archdiocese people consistently speak of how important their priests are to them. Your daily response to our Lord's call to service is a blessing for us all.

Concerning election related activities, parishes are not restricted from educating parishioners about campaign issues and the Church's position on issues. In keeping with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' "Faithful Citizenship" project the Church encourages this kind of helpful information sharing. However, there are specific limits to the involvement of tax-exempt organizations in the election of candidates for public office. Parishes, which are exempt from federal taxation, must abide by these restrictions. Neither parishes nor parish staff acting in their official capacity may support or oppose a candidate. Under no circumstances may materials produced by a candidate's campaign or a political action committee, or materials advocating a candidate's election or defeat, be distributed at a parish. Publications that mention candidates and their positions on issues, such as voter guides, may be distributed at a parish only if the publications are not biased for or against any candidate and only with the pastor's permission. Any person seeking to distribute voter guides or similar materials at a parish must request the pastor's permission and submit the proposed materials no less than three weeks before the desired distribution date. This allows time for the pastor to review the materials and seek further guidance if he deems such would be helpful or is necessary.

Parishes may host non-partisan candidate forums, voter registration drives and "get out the vote" campaigns as long as these activities are conducted in an unbiased manner and not on behalf of any candidate or party.

Detailed, comprehensive guidelines about election related matters can be found in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops publication "Political Activity Guidelines for Catholic Organizations". This document and other helpful materials are available online at: [www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship](http://www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship). Additionally, the staff of the Massachusetts Catholic Conference (617-367-6060) would be happy to provide information and answer questions about election related activities at parishes. Should you wish to seek legal advice concerning a particular issue, please contact our archdiocesan attorney, Wilson Rogers, Jr., at 617-723-1100.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters, and for all that you do on behalf of the Church and her people.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

*+ Sean, OFM Cap*  
Archbishop of Boston

September 19, 2006

Dear Monsignor/Father:

The approach of the upcoming general elections in November provides the occasion for a reminder with respect to election-related activities in the parish. This letter provides general guidance concerning voter guides, voter registration and other election-related issues. \*

Neither parishes nor parish staff acting in their official capacity may support or oppose candidates. Under no circumstance can the pastor authorize the distribution of any materials produced by a candidate's campaign or by a political action committee. The same restriction applies to any other literature that advocates a candidate's election or defeat.

However, parishes are entirely free and certainly encouraged to educate parishioners about campaign issues and the Church's position on those issues. Moreover, materials that mention candidates and list their positions on the issues, such as voter guides, can be distributed on parish grounds with the pastor's permission if they are not biased for or against any candidate.

Whether a voter guide qualifies as unbiased voter education about the candidates and their stands on the issues will require an evaluation of the materials beforehand.

Thus, individuals wanting to distribute voter guides must request the pastor's permission and submit the materials in question to the pastor no closer than three weeks from the day desired for distribution. This gives the pastor time to evaluate the materials and to seek advice before deciding to grant or withhold permission. If there are questions, the diocesan attorney is available to pastors for legal consultation.

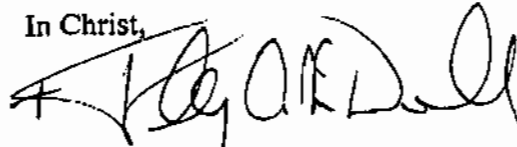
Parish grounds generally include parish parking lots but not any adjacent public streets or public sidewalks. Literature otherwise ineligible for distribution on parish grounds may be distributed in these other areas since parishes have no control over access to public property. Furthermore, the pastor and parish leaders in their personal capacity are free to participate in activities otherwise prohibited in their official capacity, but should be prudent about possible misinterpretations of their actions.

Parishes may host non-partisan "candidate forums," voter registration drives and "get out the vote" campaigns. These activities provide an invaluable civic service that encourages citizens to be more involved in the democratic process. As long as these activities are conducted in an unbiased manner, and not on the behalf of any candidate or

party, according to the steps described in the USCCB's Faithful Citizenship materials, they are permissible in the parish.

Thank you for giving your attention to these important matters.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timothy A. McDonnell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T" and "M".

Most Reverend Timothy A. McDonnell  
Bishop of Springfield

\* For more comprehensive guidelines, please consult the Political Activity Guidelines for Catholic Organizations produced by the General Counsel's Office of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, written in a question-and-answer format and available online at <http://www.usccb.org/ogc/guidelines.shtml>. Also the USCCB has excellent materials produced as part of the Bishops' Faithful Citizenship project giving practical suggestions for conducting voter registration drives, candidate forums, and other permissible election-related activities in the parish. The Faithful Citizenship materials are available online at <http://www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/>.

If you need specific legal advice regarding your parish, please contact our diocesan attorney, John Egan, Esq., at 737-0260. The staff of the Massachusetts Catholic Conference, 617-367-6060, is also available for general questions.

Parishes are exempt from paying federal taxes, and thus have to abide by certain restrictions enforced by the Internal Revenue Service. There are limits to the involvement of tax-exempt groups in the election of candidates for public office.



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F A X  
to MCC  
w/ Bishop's  
approval

September 19, 2006

Dear Brother Priests:

The approach of the upcoming general elections in November provides the occasion for reminding pastors of their rights and responsibilities with respect to election-related activities in the parish. This letter provides general guidance concerning election-related issues.<sup>1</sup>

Parishes are exempt from paying federal taxes, and thus have to abide by certain restrictions enforced by the Internal Revenue Service. There are limits to the involvement of tax-exempt groups in the election of candidates for public office.

Neither parishes nor parish staff acting in their official capacity may support or oppose candidates. Under no circumstance can the pastor authorize the distribution of any materials produced by a candidate's campaign or by a political action committee. The same restriction applies to any other literature that advocates a candidate's election or defeat.

Parishes are entirely free, however, and certainly encouraged to educate parishioners about campaign issues and the Church's position on those issues. Moreover, materials that mention candidates and list their positions on the issues can be distributed on parish grounds with the pastor's permission if they are not biased for or against any candidate. The Massachusetts Catholic Conference is considering a voter guide for our use.

Parish grounds generally include parish parking lots but not any adjacent public streets or public sidewalks. Literature otherwise ineligible for distribution on parish grounds may be distributed in these other areas since parishes have no control over access to public property.

Parishes may host non-partisan voter registration drives and "get out the vote" campaigns. These activities provide an invaluable civic service that encourages citizens to be more involved in the democratic process. As long as these activities are conducted in an unbiased manner, and not on the behalf of any candidate or party, according to the

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<sup>1</sup> For more comprehensive guidelines, please consult the Political Activity Guidelines for Catholic Organizations produced by the General Counsel's Office of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, written in a question-and-answer format and available online at <http://www.usccb.org/ogc/guidelines.shtml>. Also the USCCB has excellent materials produced as part of the Bishops' Faithful Citizenship project giving practical suggestions for conducting voter registration drives, candidate forums, and other permissible election-related activities in the parish. The Faithful Citizenship materials are available online at <http://www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/>. The staff of the Massachusetts Catholic Conference, 617-367-6060, is also available for general questions.

steps described in the USCCB's Faithful Citizenship materials, they are permissible in the parish.

I thank you for giving your attention to these important matters.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George W. Coleman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Bishop of Fall River