

From the Desk of Fr. Jerry

September 8, 2024

Dear Friends,

Pastors received the following reminder as the campaign season unfolds:

As a tax-exempt religious organization under §501(c)(3) of the IRS Code, we, as the Archdiocese of Chicago with its parishes, schools and agencies, are prohibited from participating or intervening in political campaigns on behalf of, or in opposition to, any political candidate for national, state or local office. There can be no negotiation of that principle, as a violation of it in any instance has the potential of impacting us all. This means the following:

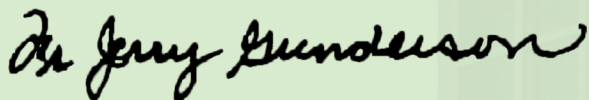
- that there can be no direct or indirect support or opposition to a particular candidate for elective public office through a sermon or church bulletin or encouraging individuals who visit a parish/school/agency website to access a linked website that supports or opposes a candidate.
- that there can be no financial support to any candidate, which includes direct monetary contributions to a candidate, providing free or selective use of volunteers or paid staff to a candidate, allowing a candidate to use parish/school/agency facilities or office equipment, or providing candidates with mailing lists.
- there can be no distribution of campaign literature or voter education material other than from the Archdiocese of Chicago or the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on Church premises, through parish mailings, during worship services, or by other means.

Forming Catholic Consciences

While the Church in the U.S. does not endorse or oppose specific candidates, it does seek to form consciences. Various attempts have been made to provide guidance to Catholics whose conscience guides the decision regarding the selection of candidates for whom to vote. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops every four years publishes such a document: Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship. It is available online at: <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship.pdf>

As the 2020 elections approached, I discovered the writings and talks of Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego (elevated to Cardinal in 2022) helpful in understanding the complexity of the moral aspects of voting for candidates. Cardinal McElroy delivered a talk Feb. 6, 2020, at the Harpst Center for Catholic Thought and Culture at the University of San Diego. Entitled, "Conscience, Candidates and Discipleship in Voting," McElroy's talk looks at the moral act of voting in original and incisive ways and lays the groundwork for development of "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," the U.S. bishops' quadrennial document on voting.

You can read Cardinal McElroy's entire talk at: <https://www.ncronline.org/opinion/bishop-mcelroy-voting-faith-and-conscience>



Fr. Jerry Gunderson