

Press Release – October 5, 2008

Catholic Democrats Corresponds with Pastors Across Ohio to Keep Parishes Safe from Divisive Politics

Letter Publicizes US Bishops' Guidelines



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Cincinnati, OH - [Catholic Democrats](#), an organization that advances the rich tradition of Catholic Social Teaching within the Democratic Party and in the public square, has corresponded with all Catholic pastors in Ohio this weekend encouraging them to keep their parishes safe and free from disruption by divisive partisan politics during this presidential election campaign. In a letter faxed to, and received by, more than 600 Ohio parishes in advance of "Respect Life Sunday," the Catholic Democrats wrote to support the pastors who found themselves inundated this weekend by conservative organizations and representatives from the McCain campaign who have used the divisive issue of abortion to polarize Catholics for political gain. In 2004 it was well documented that the Bush Campaign employed similar tactics in Catholic parishes to their advantage.

"We know that inappropriate politicking is taking place in parishes across Ohio, and in other parts of the country," said Dr. Patrick Whelan, president of *Catholic Democrats*. "We hear from Catholics every day who have told us that they don't feel comfortable in their own parishes because of angry flyers being thrust in their hands in the back of their churches, inserted into their parish bulletins, or slipped under the windshield wipers of their cars in the parking lot. The message that you can't be a good Catholic and a Democrat is just wrong and not supported by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. Amidst all the pandemonium created by the competing television ads and intense media focus on churches at this late stage in the presidential campaign, we are encouraging pastors to follow the specific guidelines created by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops to prevent this kind of political assault right in our churches. All Catholics want their parishes to remain a safe place for worship and spiritual development, and free from the kind of divisive partisanship we are hearing about."

Addressed to individual priests, the letter is signed by the state chair for the [Catholic Democrats of Ohio](#), Lisa Schare, and closes with the words, "Father, we know that being a pastor is one of the toughest jobs in the world and we regret the burden the election season is putting on you, but we sincerely believe that such preventive measures will protect the church and make your job easier in the long run." It offers four suggestions for pastors to keep their parishes safe from partisan political activity.

The text of the letter follows:

October 3, 2008

Dear Pastor,

I am sure that you recognize as a pastor how divisive partisan politics can be in a parish. This year,

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many organizations are targeting Catholic parishes as places for political campaigning. On September 14, for example, the pastor of the Baltimore Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin had to call the police to remove men giving out partisan leaflets on church property who had refused to leave. We want to keep our parishes a safe place for worship and are mindful of the bishops' guidance on the need to not politicize our parishes.

We encourage you to take preventive action before your parish is disrupted by partisan politics. Here are some practical things you can do to protect your parish:

- Prominently print the following USCCB recommended announcement in your parish bulletin every Sunday until the election is over: "We strongly urge all parishioners to register, to become informed on key issues, and to vote. The Church does not support or oppose any candidate, but seeks to focus attention on the moral and human dimensions of issues. We do not authorize the distribution of partisan political materials on parish property." See <http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org/parish/planning>.
- Print the USCCB bulletin summary of "Faithful Citizenship" in your parish bulletin. For camera-ready copy, see <http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org/resources/bulletin>.
- Instruct parish employees, ushers and/or other parishioners to be on the lookout for unauthorized pamphlets and handouts in the back of the church and on church property - the entrances to church and the church parking lot. Empower them to remove the unauthorized material immediately from the back of the church or from cars that have been leafleted and to instruct the people distributing the materials to leave church property immediately or that the police will be notified. Remember, only material authorized by the USCCB, your local bishop or your state Catholic conference should be distributed on church property.
- You and the parish staff will also want to familiarize yourself with the USCCB's guidelines for permissible political activity in parishes (<http://www.usccb.org/ogc/guidelines.shtml#22> and http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org/resources/dos_and_donts), including the distribution of voter guides, voter registration, and permissible messages from the pulpit.

Father, we know that being a pastor is one of the toughest jobs in the world and we regret the burden the election season is putting on you, but we sincerely believe that such preventive measures will protect the church and make your job easier in the long run.

Peace,

Lisa A. Schare
Ohio State Chairperson

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About Catholic Democrats

Catholic Democrats is an association of state based groups representing a Catholic voice within the Democratic Party, and advancing a public understanding of the rich tradition of Catholic Social Teaching and its potential to help solve the broad range of problems confronting all Americans. For more information about Catholic Democrats please go to www.catholicdemocrats.org