

FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP  
AND  
THE PORTUGUESE AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP PROJECT

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops has a long standing policy of encouraging its members to fully participate in the civic affairs in their communities. Simply put, if a parishioner is committed to helping the poor by working as a volunteer in soup kitchens, that same parishioner should also go to the polls on election days to vote for candidates who will vote for funding soup kitchens.

The principle of fully promoting fulfilling the obligations of citizenship as it relates to all Catholics is in complete accord with the goals and objectives of the Portuguese American Citizenship Project as it relates to Portuguese Americans specifically.

The Church is classified as a not-for-profit organization under Federal law and is bound by the Internal Revenue rules on not engaging in partisan political activity.<sup>1</sup> The Project is bound by the same rules. The coincidence of rules and the common purpose of both entities created the a natural alliance as it first affected Catholic Parishes in Portuguese communities and in 2004 as it related to many diverse parishes in the state of California.

Both the Church and the Project are allowed to engage in efforts to promote voting itself.<sup>2</sup> Under the guiding principle that no good deed goes unpunished, the Project's non-partisan work with parishes has nonetheless come under criticism from liberal observers commenting that working with parishes to encourage voting indirectly supports controversial issues such as same sex marriage. From the conservative side, the Project's same efforts to promote voting by Catholic parishioner is indirectly support controversial issues such as workers' rights, just wages, and assistance for the poor and disadvantaged.

The substantive response to these opinions is that the Catholic Church is neither Republican nor Democratic, Neither political party seems capable of embracing the totality of the Churches teaching. There are matters of faith that the Church encourages its members to act upon but it is left to the individual voter to choose between a candidate who supports the 'right to life' but does not support social welfare programs and a

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<sup>1</sup> "Currently, the law prohibits political campaign activity by charities and churches by defining a 501(c)(3) organization as one 'which does not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.'"

See <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/charities-churches-and-politics>

<sup>2</sup> "Certain activities or expenditures may not be prohibited depending on the facts and circumstances. For example, certain voter education activities (including presenting public forums and publishing voter education guides) conducted in a non-partisan manner do not constitute prohibited political campaign activity. In addition, other activities intended to encourage people to participate in the electoral process, such as voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, would not be prohibited political campaign activity if conducted in a non-partisan manner." See <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/the-restriction-of-political-campaign-intervention-by-section-501c3-tax-exempt-organizations>

candidate who supports social welfare program but is on the ‘right to choose’ side of the abortion argument.

For the Project, the response to these critical assessments is that for its part we do not take any sides on any issue. That decision is left to the individual parishioner/voter to choose. The Project and the Catholic Church both have the objective of promoting the participation of its members in this civic action. In this matter, we are in complete accord.

The California Catholic Conference in its essay on “What is Faithful Citizenship” presents clear definition of the Church’s position on the issues of concern and the importance of political participation

The term “faithful citizenship” recognizes our dual heritage as both faithful Catholics and citizens in a democratic society. We hold rights and duties, both in participating in the civic order but also as “citizens of the heavenly Kingdom. It is as citizens faithful to the Lord Jesus that we contribute most effectively to the civil order.”

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship is an ever-evolving document first issued in 1976. Every four years, the U.S. bishops revisit the document, considering current societal concerns and the civic and political environments. The current version, approved in November 2015, was developed by the chairmen, in consultation with the membership, of the USCCB Committees on Catholic Education, Communications, Cultural Diversity in the Church, Doctrine, Domestic Justice and Human Development, Evangelization and Catechesis, International Justice and Peace, Migration, Pro-Life Activities; the Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage; and the Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty.

The document is updated every four years to take account of developments in the United States in both domestic and foreign policy issues such as:

- The ongoing destruction of over one million innocent human lives each year by abortion
- Physician-assisted suicide
- The redefinition of marriage—the vital cell of society—by the courts, political bodies, and increasingly by American culture itself
- The excessive consumption of material goods and the destruction of natural resources, which harm both the environment and the poor
- The deadly attacks on fellow Christians and religious minorities throughout the world
- The narrowing redefinition of religious freedom, which threatens both individual conscience and the freedom of the Church to serve
- Economic policies that fail to prioritize the poor, at home or abroad
- A broken immigration system and a worldwide refugee crisis

- Wars, terror, and violence that threaten every aspect of human life and dignity.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.cacatholic.org/what-faithful-citizenship>