

## **CATHOLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS' RECOMMENDATIONS**

School programs on *Faithful Citizenship* can be as simple or elaborate as the principal or teacher chooses. They can take several class periods, one class period or part of one, depending on how much time is available.

It is important for adults and children to be familiar with some of the key ideas from **Catholic social teaching** that shape our approach to issues and campaigns. To do this, it is helpful to have already shared with them in previous sessions the Themes from Sharing Catholic Social Teaching, a card summarizing seven key themes of Catholic social teaching, or the **CST 101 video series**.

*For younger children:*

1. Hold a discussion on faith and political responsibility. Ask the children to think about the upcoming election and then ask them the following:
  - How do you think God sees people? How does this help us treat people better?
  - What do people need in order to live a decent life?
  - What makes someone a good leader?
  - Why do you think the Church teaches that voting is an important thing for grown-up Catholics to do?
  - Although you can't vote yet, what can you do to make the world around you better?
2. Sponsor a poster contest or ask students to draw a picture to illustrate the theme, "Love Your Neighbor: Vote!" Display the drawings or posters in the parish education center or parish hall.
3. Copy and use the children's **secret code activity page**.

*For older students:*

1. Ask the children to read the **Part 1** and **Part 2** bulletin inserts on *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*. Hold a discussion using the following questions.
  - Name examples of public policies from the past that were harmful to people (e.g., slavery, the Holocaust, and lack of voting rights for women or minorities). What does our Catholic faith tell us about those policies?
  - Name some issues being discussed in this campaign that have moral or ethical dimensions (e.g., abortion, poverty, war and peace, the death penalty, environmental protection, workers' rights,

*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship Catholic Schools*

©2016 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

- educational choice, gun control, or accessible and affordable health care). How would you apply Catholic teaching to those issues?
2. Hold a mock election. Encourage students to identify the values of their faith that can help shape their decisions before they cast their ballots. Organize a discussion on how the ideas and issues in *Faithful Citizenship* apply to these choices.
  3. The activities suggested for **youth ministry** can be adapted for use with older students.

*For both younger and older children:*

1. Ask the class to identify one public issue being discussed in the campaigns or on the news. For younger children, have them draw a picture illustrating how Catholics might respond to the issue in light of our faith. Have older students create a chart that illustrates how this issue relates to each of the themes of Catholic social teaching.
2. Ask each student to identify a public policy issue in which he or she is interested. (Provide newspapers, magazines or access to the web if necessary.) After receiving permission from their parents, ask each student to write a letter to an elected official. Include the letters as an "Offering of Letters" during a school mass. Younger students can participate by bringing the letters up during the Offertory.
3. Incorporate Catholic social teaching and the message of *Faithful Citizenship* into a variety of subjects. For example, social studies classes can discuss how Catholic teaching on citizenship relates to our civic understanding of citizenship. Science classes can explore Catholic teaching about our concern for God's creation. Children's literature often deals with basic values and social issues.
4. To help parents understand what is being discussed with their children, send home copies of Part 1 and Part 2 of the bulletin inserts on *Faithful Citizenship*.

### **General Suggestions for Teachers and Principals**

**Promote Citizenship but Avoid Partisanship** — Teachers and principals play an important role in promoting "faithful citizenship." However, it is not appropriate for Catholic educators to promote partisan positions on candidates or parties. For more information, see the "**Do's and Don'ts**" resource.

### **Infuse the Civic Responsibility Message into What You're Already Doing:**

*Prayers and Liturgies:* Morning prayers and school liturgies can include **special intentions** for those whose lives are at risk, for those suffering from injustice, for political leaders who make important decisions, and, close to the election, for those who will be voting for our leaders.

*Religion Classes:* In addition to offering sessions focused specifically on the Church's teaching on civic responsibility, those who offer religious education can weave this topic into other discussions. For example, a discussion of the Corporal Works of Mercy can explore why people need our mercy, how public policies affect them, and why it is important for us to participate in shaping a society of greater justice and compassion. Classes on the Trinity can recall that we are created as social beings in God's image and likeness, and can discuss how this leads us to believe it is our right and duty to participate in social, economic, and political life.

**Seize the Opportunities:** While elections are the most obvious opportunities to discuss the message of *Faithful Citizenship*, other events lend themselves to this topic as well. A local right-to-life march or a "lobby day" sponsored by a diocesan or state legislative network can generate both discussion and action on the Catholic tradition of participation in public life.

**Expand Advocacy Activities:** Many Catholic Schools programs do a good job of involving students in efforts to serve those in need. Students are encouraged—and in some cases required—to collect food for food banks, gather toys for needy children at Christmas, provide clothing and other items for the homeless, and perform many other services. **However, too many Catholic educational programs do not effectively involve students and their families in advocacy and political responsibility education. It is important to teach children that advocating for policies that protect human life and promote justice and peace are part of what it means to be an active Catholic.** Young people can learn a great deal from attending "lobby days" sponsored by state Catholic conferences or from researching and writing letters to decision-makers about issues of justice and peace.

For ongoing information about advocacy opportunities, contact Patrice Critchley-Menor, Director of the Social Apostolate for the Diocese of Duluth at 218-724-9111 or [pcritchley@dioceseduluth.org](mailto:pcritchley@dioceseduluth.org)

**Connect Our Tradition of Service to Our Tradition of Participation in Public Life:** Some of the best starting points for teaching about the Catholic tradition of civic responsibility are the service activities in which students are already involved. Teachers can encourage students to do social analysis, through which they examine the underlying causes of the immediate problems their service efforts address. **For example, when students collect food for those who are hungry, teachers can ask why people are hungry and what opportunities our society offers for us to change those conditions.** When students donate

goods or money to a mission in a developing land, teachers can encourage them to consider how U.S. policies can exacerbate or relieve poverty in other parts of the world. Specific opportunities to act on issues of justice and peace can then be explained.

**Do What You Can:** Efforts to share the Church's tradition of civic responsibility can be as simple as asking a couple of questions during a class or as sophisticated as a school-wide voter education campaign. The first step for most principals and teachers is to become familiar with the basic message by reading the bishops' statement and the brochure that summarizes it. Then decide what is realistic in your unique context, and do as much as you can to weave this message into your school programs.