

DIRECTORS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND CATECHISTS - IDEAS

Religious education programs on Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship can be as simple or elaborate as the DRE or catechist chooses. They can be incorporated over several weeks and months, or they can be the focus of 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**, or the **CST101 video series**. . . , which summarizes these themes.

Activities for Children

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**.
4. Use the sample *Faithful Citizenship* **catechetical session plans and materials** for elementary and middle school children.
5. To help parents understand what is being discussed with their children, send home a copy of **Part 1** and **Part 2** of the summary handouts on Faithful Citizenship or the **Family Guide for Faithful Citizenship**.

For older youth:

1. Ask the class to identify one public issue being discussed in the campaigns or on the news. Facilitate a discussion of how Catholics might respond to the issue in light of our faith.
2. Ask each student to identify a public policy issue in which he or she is interested. (Provide newspapers, magazines or links if necessary.) Youth can write a prayer for those impacted by the issue, for public policymakers, and for citizens like themselves who are called to respond.
3. The **Ideas for Youth Ministers** resource includes many relevant activities for this age group.
4. Use the sample *Faithful Citizenship* **catechetical session plans and materials** for junior high and high school ages.

Adult Faith Formation

1. Include a **bulletin announcement** on civic responsibility, in every parish bulletin.
2. Distribute the **Part 1** and **Part 2** bulletin inserts summarizing Faithful Citizenship at all masses one Sunday.
3. Distribute or publicize the **Family Guide to Faithful Citizenship**.
4. Host an adult education program on *Faithful Citizenship*. Invite a guest speaker. For ideas about speakers, contact your diocesan social action director, pro-life director, or your state Catholic conference.
5. Encourage small faith communities to use the **Small Faith Communities Session Plans**.
6. For the RCIA program, use the resource on **Preaching and Teaching from the Lectionary about Catholic Social Teaching**. . . to generate discussion about Catholic social teaching and the connection between our faith and public life.

General Suggestions for Catechists

Promote Citizenship but Avoid Partisanship

Parish leaders and staff play an important role in promoting "faithful citizenship." However, it is not appropriate for parish representatives to promote partisan positions on candidates or parties. For more information, see **Do's and Don'ts: Political Responsibility Guidelines to Keep in Mind during Election Season**.

Infuse the Faithful Citizenship Message into What You're Already Doing:

Prayers and Liturgies: Opening and closing prayers for catechetical sessions can include **general and 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.

Regular Religious Education 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 religious education programs do a good job of involving children and adults in efforts to serve those in need. They 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 religious education programs do not effectively involve students and their families in advocacy and political responsibility education. It is important to teach children and adults that voting and helping to shape policies that protect human life and promote justice and peace are part of what it means to be an active Catholic. One effective way to do this is to provide opportunities for adults to join a diocesan legislative network. Both young people and adults 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 additional parish voter education ideas and ongoing information about advocacy opportunities, contact your diocesan social action or pro-life office or your state Catholic conference, or visit the [USCCB advocacy webpage](#).

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 parishioners are already involved. Catechists can encourage parishioners to do social analysis, through which they examine the underlying causes of the immediate problems their service efforts address. For example, when religious education classes collect food for those who are hungry, catechists can ask why people are hungry and what opportunities our society offers for us to change those conditions. When parishioners donate goods or money to a mission in a developing land, the bulletin or another handout can encourage them to consider how U.S. policies can exacerbate or relieve poverty in other parts of the world.

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 parish-wide voter education campaign. The first step for most catechists and DRE's 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 religious education programs.