

YOUTH MINISTRY IDEAS

Youth ministry programs on *Faithful Citizenship* can be as simple or elaborate as the leader chooses. They can be incorporated over several weeks and months, or they can be the focus of one session or retreat or part of one, depending on how much time is available.

The following activities can be used together as part of an outreach night or mini-retreat for youth, or they can be used separately to educate youth about Faithful Citizenship over time. It would be helpful to prepare the young people for the session(s) on Faithful Citizenship by familiarizing them 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 **CST101 Video Series**. . . .

Activities for a Faithful Citizenship Outreach Night or Mini-Retreat:

1. After an opening prayer to start off your session, introduce the topic by using an interactive game to help youth mingle and interact while at the same time leading them to engage in conversation about the moral principles that guide our political involvement. Youth can be given pieces of paper, some with the **seven themes of Catholic social teaching (CST)** written on them, and others with issues mentioned in *Faithful Citizenship* (abortion, poverty, immigration, etc.) written on them. Youth must walk around the room meeting other people and trying to find the CST theme to which the issues are related. Once CST themes and issues find one another, they should gather as a small group. Some issues will fit under more than one theme, but that is okay. The point is for youth to discuss how the issues relate to the themes of Catholic social teaching. You might provide youth with the card summarizing the seven key themes of CST in case they need definitions of the principles.
2. After the youth have formed groups, ask them to read excerpts from *Faithful Citizenship* on that theme and discuss the following questions:
 - How would you describe this theme of Catholic social teaching to a friend who was not familiar with it?
 - How does the CST theme relate to our Catholic faith?
 - How does the theme relate to the issues on the pieces of paper you received? To other issues not mentioned?

3. Ask each small group to develop a skit to illustrate to the other groups the theme they focused on. However, they are not allowed to say the name of the theme in the skit. Afterwards, the groups in the audience must guess which theme the skit illustrated by writing down their guess on a piece of paper. Groups that guess all groups' skit themes correctly receive a prize.
4. Read **stories on Acting Together**. . . from the **WeAreSaltAndLight.org**. . . website. Use the stories to prepare youth to brainstorm about action they might take to advocacy for human life and dignity.
5. Invite a young person (preferably from your parish) who is involved in social action issues to share his or her experiences. The young person should talk about his or her own experiences, but you can work with him or her in advance of the sharing so that some of the key ideas from *Faithful Citizenship* can be included. If you would like to invite someone from outside your parish to speak about these issues, contact your diocesan pro-life or social action offices.
6. Hold a discussion about the concept of faithful citizenship, based on the witness of the young person.
7. After gathering back into the large group, facilitate the group in determining three issues that they would like to focus on as "faithful citizens." Then brainstorm, as a group, some action ideas of how the group can learn about and respond to these issues in light of their faith. Ask for student volunteers to form committees of three or more people who will be responsible for organizing action activities for the group to partake in at a later time (writing letters, lobbying local leaders, inviting a speaker on a particular issue, etc.). You might want to consider having the young leaders contact diocesan social concerns and pro-life directors or your state Catholic conference to see how your youth group can become involved in diocese or state-wide advocacy efforts.
8. Close the session in prayer. One idea is to use a litany format in which students are invited to mention some of the issues they are concerned about, to which the entire group responds, "Lord, hear our prayer." Students can pray spontaneously, or they can work in small groups to prepare prayers for the litany beforehand to share as part of the large group prayer.

General Suggestions for Youth Ministers

INFUSE THE CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY MESSAGE INTO WHAT YOU'RE ALREADY DOING.

Prayers and Liturgies: Opening and closing prayers and parish Masses 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. **Sample general intercessions** are available.

Regular Youth Ministry Meetings/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. **Sacraments and Social Mission materials**. . . can help youth prepare for Confirmation.

Connect with Parents: To help parents and youth discuss *Faithful Citizenship* as a family and to make them aware of what is happening in youth ministry programs, send home a copy of **Part 1** and **Part 2** of the bulletin insert, *The Challenge of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, as well as the **Family Guide to Faithful Citizenship**.

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 youth ministry programs do a good job of involving students in efforts to serve those in need. Young people 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, many youth ministry programs do not effectively involve students in advocacy and political responsibility education. It is important to teach young people 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. 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 your diocesan social action or pro-life office, your state Catholic conference, or the **USCCB**.

CONNECT OUR TRADITION OF SERVICE TO OUR TRADITION OF PARTICIPATION IN CIVIC LIFE

Some of the best starting points for teaching about the Catholic tradition of civic responsibility are the direct service activities in which young people are already involved. Youth ministers can encourage young people to do social analysis, through which they examine the underlying causes of the immediate problems their service efforts address. For example, when young people collect food for those who are hungry, youth ministers can ask why people are hungry and what opportunities our society offers for us to change those conditions. When they donate goods or money to a mission in a developing land, young people can be asked 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.

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**.

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 meeting or as sophisticated as a parish-wide voter education campaign. The first step for most youth ministers is to become familiar with the basic message by reading the bishops' Faithful Citizenship statement and the bulletin insert 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 youth ministry programs.