

## GUIDELINES FOR CHURCH INVOLVEMENT IN ELECTIONS (2026)



The Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC), the public policy agency for the Catholic Church in Missouri, offers these guidelines to assist clergy and lay faithful in attending to their obligation to participate in the political life of our nation. These guidelines provide a short summary of activities parishes may and may not engage in during the election season and includes basic information about election day and voter ID requirements.

### THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN POLITICS

The right to participate in the political process is a Constitutional right that extends as equally to churches and other religious organizations as it does to secular institutions and private citizens. As Catholics, we are called to participate in the political process to promote human dignity and the common good. Now, more than ever, in these days of hyper-partisanship, Catholics need to infuse our politics with the healing balm of Christ. We must work for a more just society by:

- Educating Catholics and others about the teachings of the Church and the duty of its members to participate in politics.
- Analyzing the moral and social dimensions of the issues.
- Measuring policies against Gospel values.
- Participating with others in debates on public policies.
- Speaking out in charity with courage, skill, and concern on issues involving life, human dignity, social justice, and the life of the Church in society.

### THE CHURCH'S MISSION IS RELIGIOUS, NOT POLITICAL

For reasons both theological and legal, the Church's involvement in public life does not extend to endorsing or opposing political parties or candidates for public office. Yet, the Church as a whole and Catholics individually have a role to play in the fight for justice using rational argument.

### PERMITTED CHURCH ACTIVITIES

- Distributing non-partisan literature on issues of interest to the Church.
- Encouraging and assisting parishioners to register to vote and to vote on election day.
- Conducting non-partisan candidate forums.
- Endorsing or opposing an issue (as opposed to a candidate), such as a ballot initiative or Constitutional amendment.
- Educating lawmakers or candidates to persuade them on an issue.
- Reviewing legislation and tracking the position of elected officials.
- Organizing committees for political education.
- Making Church facilities available for candidate debates or forums, provided all candidates are invited and the forum isn't geared towards a certain party or partisan agenda.
- Organizing letter-writing campaigns on legislative issues.

### PROHIBITED CHURCH ACTIVITIES

- Endorsing or opposing political candidates or parties or engaging in a campaign for or against a candidate or party.
- Permitting the preparation or distribution on Church premises of any communication that supports or opposes a candidate or a party.
- Evaluating candidates in writing or speech, such as by labeling a candidate in a manner that would prevent a reader or listener from evaluating a candidate objectively. This would include rating candidates with a (+) or (-) sign and labeling a candidate as "pro-life" or "anti-school choice."
- Issuing "marked" sample ballots that tell people how to vote.
- Lending Church funds to a candidate or a party.
- Using Church facilities for a prohibited activity.

## PUBLISHING OR DISTRIBUTING VOTER EDUCATION MATERIALS

Parishes and other diocesan agencies and organizations should exercise great care when preparing or distributing voter education materials. When preparing such material, such as general educational information or material outlining the results of candidate surveys or candidate voting records, these guidelines should be followed:

- Materials designed to educate voters regarding state or national elections should be prepared either by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), the MCC, or the local diocese.
- Materials relating to county, municipal, or local elections should be prepared either by the MCC or the local bishop's office.
- Materials may not advocate a position that is opposed to one taken by the Holy See, the USCCB, or the MCC.
- Materials prepared by an organization or individual other than the Holy See, the USCCB, or the MCC should be approved by the MCC or the local bishop's office prior to distribution.
- Materials prepared by organizations that endorse candidates should not be distributed on diocesan or parish property.
- All surveys or questionnaires of candidate's positions for state, federal, or local election must be prepared or approved by the USCCB, or the MCC if they are distributed on parish property (including parking lots).
- Diocesan or parish bulletins, brochures, or other publications reporting candidate's positions on specific issues should point out that the diocese or parish does not endorse candidates and the material is for voter educational purposes only.
- Those seeking the approval of the MCC of education materials for distribution to voters must submit those materials far enough ahead of the distribution date (a minimum of two weeks) to allow the MCC time to review and approve the materials.

## ACCEPTABLE FORMS OF ID

In order to cast a ballot in 2026, Missouri voters must show one of the following forms of photo identification and sign the poll book to obtain a ballot:

- A nonexpired Missouri driver or non-driver license;
- A nonexpired military ID, including a veteran's ID card;
- A nonexpired United States passport; or
- Another photo ID issued by the United States or the state of Missouri which is either not expired or expired after the date of the most recent general election.
- \*If the driver or non-driver license has expired after the most recent general election, it is an acceptable form of voter ID.

If you do not possess any of these forms of photo identification, but are a registered voter, you may cast a provisional ballot. Your ballot will count if: (1) you return to your polling place on Election Day with a photo ID; or (2) the signature on your provisional ballot envelope is determined by your local election authority to match the signature on your voter registration record.

If you cast a provisional ballot, you will receive a stub from your provisional ballot envelope with instructions on how to verify that your provisional ballot is counted.



## IMPORTANT 2026 ELECTION DATES

The following dates apply to the general election:

- Sept. 22, 2026 – In-person absentee with excuse voting begins
- October 7, 2026 – Deadline to register to vote in the November general election.
- Oct. 20, 2026 – In-person no excuse absentee voting begins
- October 21, 2026 – Deadline to apply for an absentee ballot for the November general election.
- November 3, 2026 – General Election. Polls open at 6:00 a.m. and close at 7:00 p.m. Any voter in line at 7:00 p.m. has a right to cast a ballot.

