

---

# Political Endorsements Policy

Diocese of Marquette

*Office of the Bishop*



July, 2019

---

POLITICAL ENDORSEMENTS POLICY

**Table of Contents**

Table of Contents ..... 1

DECREE ..... 2

I. Overview ..... 3

II. Internal Revenue Code..... 3

III. Issues vs. Candidates ..... 4

IV. Voter Education ..... 4

V. Pamphleteering..... 4

VI. Voter Registration Drives ..... 5

VII. Dialogue about Legislation..... 5

# IOANNES FRANCISCUS

Divina Miseratione et



Apostolicae Sedis Gratia

## EPISCOPUS MARQUETTENSIS

### DECREE

#### PROMULGATION OF THE POLICY ON POLITICAL ENDORSEMENTS

Following an ordinary review of the policy on political endorsements of the Diocese of Marquette, it was deemed opportune to update these policies;

Having heard the Presbyteral Council on May 28, 2019, after their review of the proposed policy and receiving a positive recommendation; it is my decision to establish this policy;

**Therefore, in accord with canons 8 §2, 29, 391§1 I hereby decree and promulgate as particular law for the Diocese of Marquette the Policy on Political Endorsements.**

All former policies on political endorsements of the Diocese of Marquette are hereby repealed and abrogated in accord with canon 20 §1. Any policies or particular laws of the Diocese of Marquette that are not in conformity with the Policy on Political Endorsements are hereby repealed and abrogated.

The provisions of this decree shall become effective July 1, 2019.

Given at the chancery in Marquette, Michigan this 29<sup>th</sup> day of May in the year 2019.

Most Reverend John F. Doerfler, STD, JCL  
Bishop of Marquette

Very Reverend Daniel J. Moll  
Chancellor

## I. Overview

With the frequent scheduling of local, state and national elections, we must be cognizant of the proper balance between helping parishioners to be informed in their voting and complying with the restrictions imposed by the Internal Revenue Service Code. Moreover, political endorsements could render the Church susceptible to be used by political candidates for their own advantage.

1. The Diocese of Marquette, its parishes and other corporate entities are committed to the policy of neither supporting nor opposing any political party or individual candidate for office.
2. An endorsement of a party or candidate for public office by a minister of a religious organization at an official function of the organization, e.g. Mass or a parish meeting, is construed as an endorsement by the religious organization itself and is a violation of diocesan policy.
3. The inclusion of a personal endorsement in an official publication of the religious organization, e.g. the parish bulletin or newsletter, also qualifies as inappropriate activity on the part of the religious organization itself and is a violation of diocesan policy.

## II. Internal Revenue Code

An organization that is exempt from federal income taxation under section 501(c)(3) of the tax code may not “participate in or intervene in any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office, even if such participation or intervention is not substantial.” If a Church violates the prohibition, its federal tax-exempt status may be revoked by the IRS and / or a tax may be assessed against it. The problem, of course, is in defining “participation” which includes the publishing or distributing of statements and “intervention.” The IRS considers the following five types of activity a form of participation or intervention and therefore, inappropriate:

1. Endorsement of candidates;
2. Donations to a candidate campaign fund;
3. Fund-raising for a candidate;
4. Distributing statements relating to specific candidates;
5. Involvement in other activities that may be beneficial or detrimental to a candidate.

### **III. Issues vs. Candidates**

As a general rule, it is always permissible to provide information to parishioners about important issues and to encourage them to make such issues a significant part of their deliberation as informed voters.

1. This can be done from the pulpit or in a parish bulletin or other publication.
2. Distributing unbiased candidate questionnaires or voting records on a wide variety of issues is also permissible. Such a survey, however, should not be restricted to a few selected issues nor shall it rate candidates numerically to classify them “favorable or unfavorable.”
3. There should be no homilies or bulletin inserts about specific candidates which could be construed as an endorsement of or opposition to their election.

### **IV. Voter Education**

A neutral voter education forum held in parish facilities is permissible under these conditions:

1. There are no overt campaign activities such as enlisting campaign volunteers or fund raising.
2. All candidates are afforded an equal opportunity to participate
3. Parishioners are informed before or after the speeches, that the Church does not endorse any particular candidate for public office.

Voter education publications, e.g. distributing information in a parish bulletin, are also permissible provided that they are neutral in both content and format. When the circulation or distribution of the publication is rather limited, its use for voter education is looked upon more benignly.

### **V. Pamphleteering**

Pamphleteering may be viewed as indirectly intervening or participating in a political campaign.

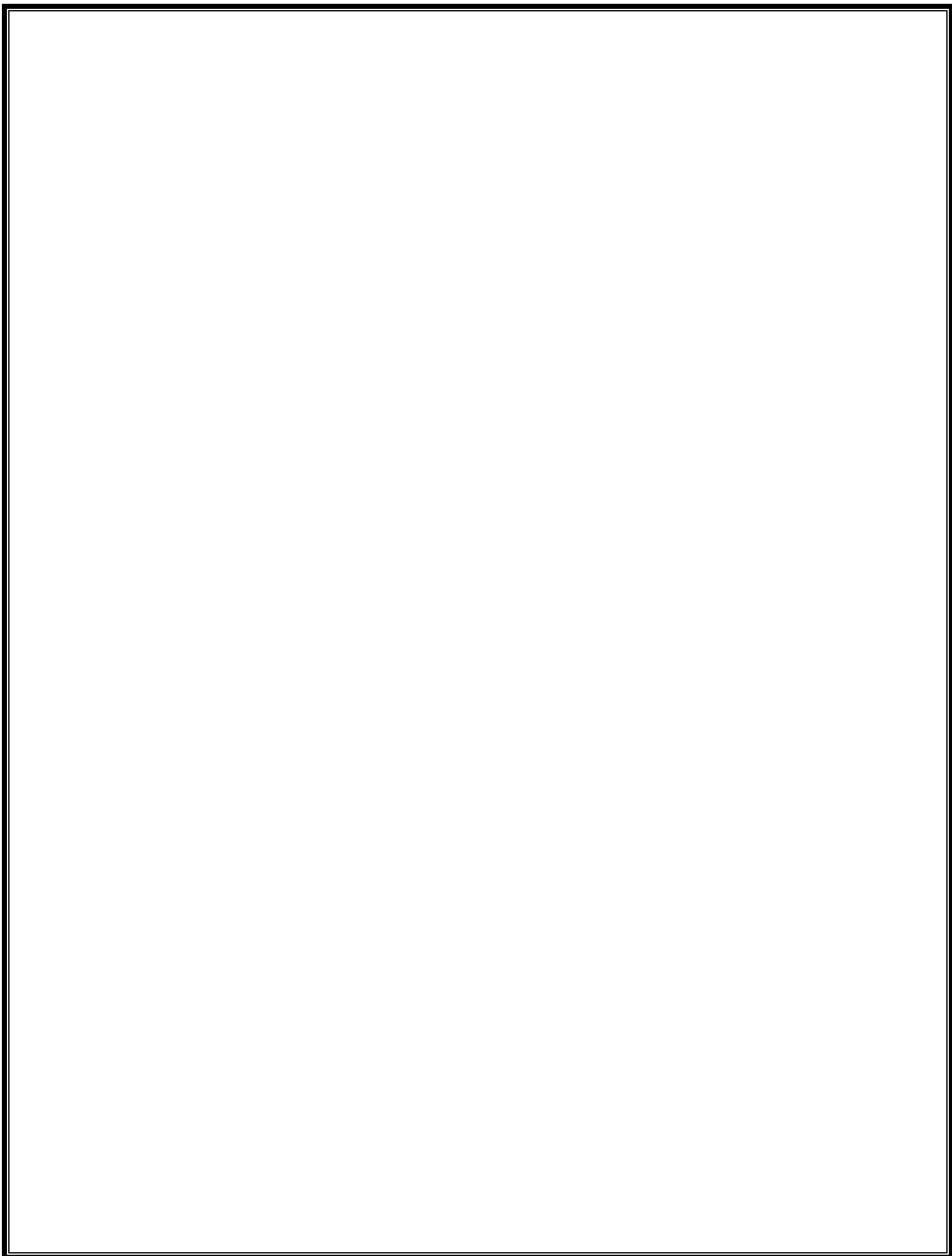
1. Handing out campaign literature by parishioners or non-parishioners under parish auspices or on parish property is not permissible.
2. Granting permission to anyone to put campaign literature on cars parked on parish property or to hand out such pamphlets on parish property is also considered inappropriate activity.

## **VI.Voter Registration Drives**

Such drives are eminently suitable activities for a parish provided they are conducted in a neutral, non-partisan way, with no bias for or against a particular party or candidate.

## **VII.Dialogue about Legislation**

When deciding about particular activities on parish property or under the auspices of the parish, the principle criterion to keep in mind is the following: the content or format should not endorse specific candidates or parties or otherwise instruct people how to vote on specific candidates or parties.





Diocese of Marquette

1004 Harbor Hills Dr.

Marquette Michigan 49855

(906) 225-1141

[www.dioceseofmarquette.org](http://www.dioceseofmarquette.org)