

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship

Dr. Stephen Colecchi

April 2008

Good News/Bad News

- Greater interest in social issues as elections draw near.
- Greater interest in what the Church has to say

But...

- There are dangers in a highly polarized and partisan environment.
- Too many Catholics start with partisan or ideological views, not Church teaching.

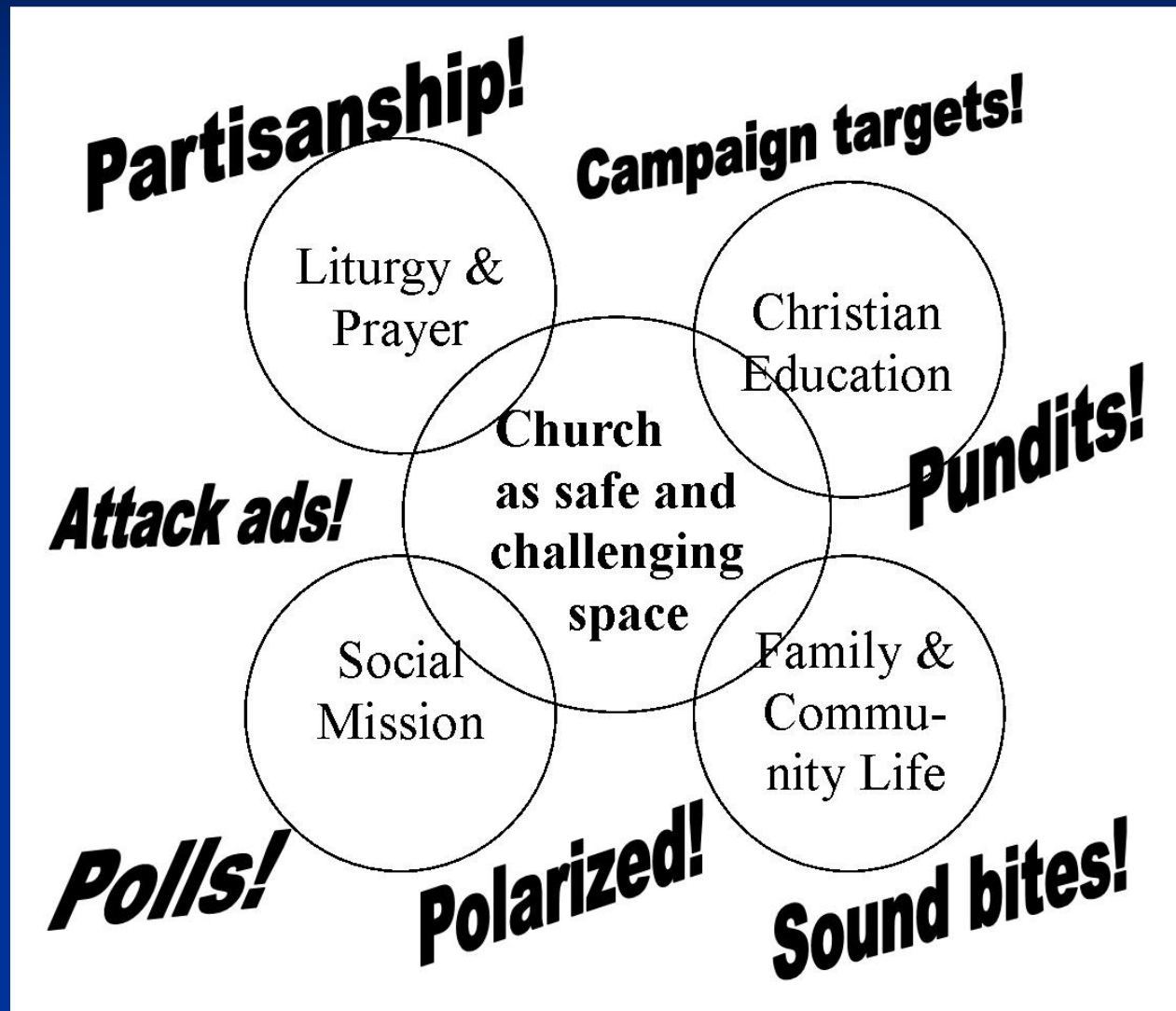
Twin Dangers for Pastoral Ministers

- Linking faith to issues runs the risk of appearing partisan, alienating parishioners.
- Failing to link faith to the major issues of our day makes faith seem irrelevant.

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World

- "One of the gravest errors of our time is the dichotomy between the faith which many profess and the practice of their daily lives." (#43)
- "At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the time and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task." (#4)
- "By its nature and mission the Church is universal in that it is not committed to any one culture or to any political, economic or social system." (#42)

The Church in the World



Three Tasks:

- Explore the role of the Church in the political process.
- Articulate the principles of the Church's social teaching and briefly examine specific issues of concern.
- Suggest appropriate ways for parishes to encourage faithful citizenship.

Faithful Citizenship is NOT:

- A New Idea
- Partisan Politics
- The UCSA
- A Religious Voting Bloc

Isaiah 10:1-3

Woe to you who enact unjust statutes
and who write oppressive decrees,

Depriving the needy of judgment and
robbing my people's poor of their
rights, Making widows their plunder,
and orphans their prey!

Luke 4:18-19

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

In man's inner dimension are rooted, in the final analysis, the commitment to justice and solidarity, to the building up of a social, economic and political life that corresponds to God's plan

No. 40

Deus Caritas Est

...charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as “social charity”.

No. 29

Catechism of the Catholic Church

...it is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person. ... As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life.

Nos. 1913-1915

Faithful Citizenship

In the Catholic Tradition,
responsible citizenship is a
virtue, and participation in the
political process is a moral
obligation.

No. 13

Founding Documents

...that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness....

Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776

Faithful Citizenship is NOT:

- A New Idea
- Partisan Politics
- The UCSA
- A Religious Voting Bloc

Deus Caritas Est

The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice... [T]he Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly... No. 28

Faithful Citizenship

In this statement, we bishops do not intend to tell Catholics for whom or against whom to vote. Our purpose is to help Catholics form their consciences in accordance with God's truth. We recognize that the responsibility to make choices in political life rests with each individual in light of a properly formed conscience, and that participation goes well beyond casting a vote in a particular election.

No. 7

Faithful Citizenship

As Catholics, we should be guided more by our moral convictions than by our attachment to a political party or interest group. When necessary, our participation should help transform the party to which we belong; we should not let the party transform us in such a way that we neglect or deny fundamental moral truths. (No. 14)

Faithful Citizenship is NOT:

- A New Idea
- Partisan Politics
- The UCSA
- A Religious Voting Bloc

Separation of Church and State

- Unfortunate phrase.
- U.S. Constitution:
 - Prohibits establishing a religion.
 - Guarantees the free exercise of religion.

Doctrinal Note

[The Church] “does not wish to exercise political power or eliminate the freedom of opinion of Catholics regarding contingent questions.

Instead, it intends--as is its proper function--to instruct and illuminate the consciences of the faithful, particularly those involved in political life, so that their actions may always serve the integral promotion of the human person and the common good.”

No. 6

Pope John Paul II Speech of December 18, 1987

When the church calls the state to task, it does not want to introduce a Christian state. It simply wants to promote a human state.

Faithful Citizenship is NOT:

- A New Idea
- Partisan Politics
- The UCSA
- A Religious Voting Bloc

Faithful Citizenship

Although choices about how best to respond to these and other compelling threats to human life and dignity are matters for principled debate and decision, this does not make them optional concerns or permit Catholics to dismiss or ignore Church teaching on these important issues.

No. 29

Faithful Citizenship IS:

- Sharing Catholic Social Teaching
 - Basic Themes
 - Avoiding Evil and Doing Good
- Engaging in Faithful Citizenship
 - Forming Consciences
 - Encouraging Voting
- Learning and acting on Issues in light of Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic Social Teaching

- Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- Call to Family, Community, & Participation
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- Dignity of Work & Rights of Workers
- Solidarity
- Care for God's creation

Catholic Social Teaching

- Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- Call to Family, Community, & Participation
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- Dignity of Work & Rights of Workers
- Solidarity
- Care for God's creation

Catholic Social Teaching

- Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- Call to Family, Community, & Participation
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- Dignity of Work & Rights of Workers
- Solidarity
- Care for God's creation

Catholic Social Teaching

- Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- Call to Family, Community, & Participation
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- Dignity of Work & Rights of Workers
- Solidarity
- Care for God's creation

Catholic Social Teaching

- Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- Call to Family, Community, & Participation
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- Dignity of Work & Rights of Workers
- Solidarity
- Care for God's creation

Catholic Social Teaching

- Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- Call to Family, Community, & Participation
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- Dignity of Work & Rights of Workers
- Solidarity
- Care for God's creation

Catholic Social Teaching

- Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- Call to Family, Community, & Participation
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- Dignity of Work & Rights of Workers
- Solidarity
- Care for God's creation

Faithful Citizenship IS:

- Sharing Catholic Social Teaching
 - Basic Themes
 - Avoiding Evil and Doing Good
- Engaging in Faithful Citizenship
 - Forming Consciences
 - Encouraging Voting
- Learning and acting on Issues in light of Catholic Social Teaching

Faithful Citizenship

- There are some things we must never do, as individuals or as a society, because they are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor. These intrinsically evil acts must always be rejected and never supported... (No. 22).
- Opposition to intrinsically evil acts also prompts us to recognize our positive duty to contribute to the common good and act in solidarity with those in need. Both opposing evil *and* doing good are essential (No. 24).

Veritatis Splendor

“...the fact that only the negative commandments oblige always and under all circumstances does not mean that in the moral life prohibitions are more important than the obligation to do good indicated by the positive commandments.”

No. 52

Living the Gospel of Life

We live the Gospel of life when we live in solidarity with the poor of the world, standing up for their lives and dignity. Yet abortion and euthanasia have become preeminent threats to human dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental human good and the condition for all others ... Direct abortion is never a morally tolerable option. It is always a grave act of violence against a woman and her unborn child.

Nos. 5, 21

Two Temptations

- Moral equivalence that makes no ethical distinctions between different kinds of issues
- Misuse necessary moral distinctions to dismiss or ignore other serious threats to human life and dignity

Nos. 27-29

Faithful Citizenship IS:

- Sharing Catholic Social Teaching
 - Basic Themes
 - Avoiding Evil and Doing Good
- Engaging in Faithful Citizenship
 - Forming Consciences
 - Encouraging Voting
- Learning and acting on Issues in light of Catholic Social Teaching

Deus Caritas Est

The Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest.

No. 28

Faithful Citizenship

...this begins with a willingness and openness to seek the truth and what is right by studying Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church as contained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is also important to examine the facts and background information about various choices. Finally, prayerful reflection is essential to discern the will of God (No. 18).

Prudence

Prudence enables us “to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1806). Prudence shapes and informs our ability to deliberate over available alternatives, to determine what is most fitting to a specific context, and to act decisively.

No. 19

Difficult Choices

- A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who takes a position in favor of an intrinsic evil, such as abortion or racism, if the voter's intent is to support that position. No. 34
- There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate's unacceptable position may decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons. No. 35

Prudential Judgment

- These decisions should take into account a candidate's commitments, character, integrity, and ability to influence a given issue.
- In the end, this is a decision to be made by each Catholic guided by a conscience formed by Catholic moral teaching. **No. 37**

Not Single Issue

As Catholics we are not single-issue voters. A candidate's position on a single issue is not sufficient to guarantee a voter's support. Yet a candidate's position on a single issue that involves an intrinsic evil, such as support for legal abortion or the promotion of racism, may legitimately lead a voter to disqualify a candidate from receiving support.

No. 42

Faithful Citizenship IS:

- Sharing Catholic Social Teaching
 - Basic Themes
 - Avoiding Evil and Doing Good
- Engaging in Faithful Citizenship
 - Forming Consciences
 - Encouraging Voting
- Learning and acting on Issues in light of Catholic Social Teaching

Human Life

- Abortion, euthanasia, cloning, destruction of human embryos
- Genocide, torture, direct targeting of noncombatants in war and terrorist attacks
- War and peace (preventive use of military force)
- Nuclear, chemical, biological weapons
- War in Iraq
- Use of the death penalty

Family Life

- Marriage
- Family wages
- Right to choose education of children
- Protecting children and families from harmful media

Social Justice

- Just wages, right to work, right to organize
- Economic freedom and initiative
- Reducing poverty
- Rightful role of faith-based institutions
- Social Security
- Affordable health care and housing
- Sustainable agriculture and food security
- Immigration
- Environment and climate change

Global Solidarity

- U.S. leadership
- Global poverty and underdevelopment
- Humanize globalization
- Religious Liberty and human rights
- United Nations
- Refugees
- Regional Conflicts
- Israel-Palestine
- Iraq and Afghanistan

To Learn About Issues

Visit the Website of the
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

www.usccb.org

Pro-life

Justice, Peace & Human Development

Education

Migration

Suggestions and Resources for Parishes

www.faithfulcitizenship.org

- Homily Suggestions
- Ideas for Liturgists and Prayer Leaders
- Ideas for Social Concerns and Respect Life Committees
- Educational materials for youth and adults
- DOs and DON'Ts
- And More

Do's and Don'ts

DO:

- Address the moral and human dimensions of public issues.
- Share church teaching on human life, human rights, and justice and peace.
- Apply Catholic values to legislation and public issues.
- Conduct a non-partisan voter registration drive on church property.
- Distribute unbiased candidate questionnaires covering issues of human life, justice, and peace that have been reviewed and approved by your diocesan attorney.
- Check with your diocesan attorney if you have any questions about what is appropriate.

Do's and Don'ts

DON'T:

- Endorse or oppose candidates for political office.
- Distribute partisan campaign literature under church auspices.
- Arrange for groups to work for a candidate for public office.
- Invite only selected candidates to address your church-sponsored group.
- Conduct voter registration slanted toward one party.
- Distribute a biased candidate survey.

Non-Partisan Voter Education

- Excerpts from Catholic Social Teaching (CST) in bulletins
- Distribute cards with seven themes of CST
- Host discussion groups on CST using the video, *In the Footsteps of Jesus*
- Sponsor an adult education session using the video, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*

Non-Partisan Voter Education

- Distribute the brochure version of Faithful Citizenship.
- Encourage small faith sharing groups to use adult education materials on CST and Faithful Citizenship.
- Encourage youth to visit the youth section of www.faithfulcitizenship.org.

Protect the Parish's Non-Partisanship

- Don't distribute materials from outside groups.
- Bulletin Notice: We strongly urge all parishioners to register, to become informed of key issues, and to vote. The Church does not support or oppose any candidate, but seeks to focus attention on the moral and human dimension of issues. We do not authorize the distribution of partisan political materials on parish property.

Suggestions for Liturgies

- Introductory comments
- Choice of preface
- General intercessions
- Selection of music
- Homily
- Announcements after communion
- Bulletin quotes from *Faithful Citizenship*

Suggestions for Homilists

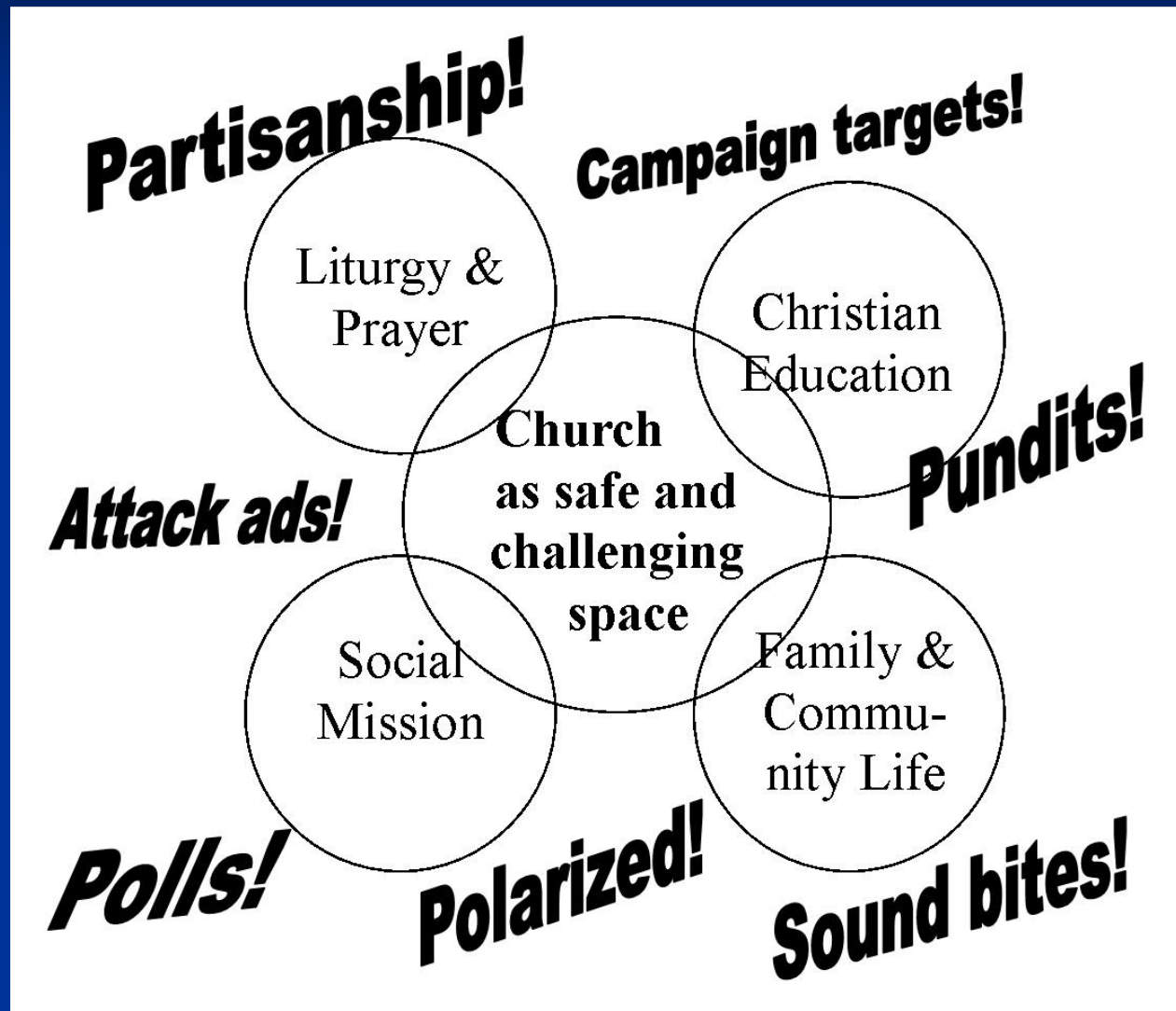
- Highlight the tradition
- Connect to real life experiences
- Promote participation in public life
- Ask questions rather than providing answers
- Avoid selective orthodoxy
- Avoid partisanship
- Tell people *to* vote, not *how* to vote

Specific Homily Suggestions

- July 6, 2008 – Fourth of July weekend
- September 21, 2008 – As summer ends and voters focus on the campaign
- October 26, 2008 – Two weeks before the election

www.faithfulcitizenship.org

The Church in the World



The Role of the Church

- Fostering a renewed kind of politics:
 - Focused more on moral principles than on the latest polls
 - Focused more on the needs of the weak than on benefits for the strong
 - Focused more on the pursuit of the common good than on the demands of narrow interests

“God, therefore, makes the choice to align himself in defense of the weak, the victims...we, too, must know which side to choose...that of the humble, the least, the poor and weak.”

Pope Benedict XVI

December 7, 2005