



Suggestions for Youth Ministers

In *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, the bishops of the United States remind us that “in the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is a moral obligation” (p. 8). The decisions we make as citizens about who leads us and what policies are enacted have important moral and ethical dimensions. The values of our faith should be our guide to public life.

This message is important not just for adults but for young Catholics as they learn about our faith tradition and its implications for how we live our lives. Parish youth ministry programs are important settings for sharing the Church’s teaching on civic responsibility. But it’s not always easy to translate this message into language appropriate for young people or to weave it into already crowded curricula. Below are some suggestions that may prove helpful. A variety of more detailed materials, resources, and session plans on *Faithful Citizenship* for youth ministry programs can be found at www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship.

Suggested Activities

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 class period or part of one, depending on how much time is available.

It is important for the young people to be familiar with some of the key ideas from Catholic social teaching that shape our approach to issues and

campaigns. If you have not done so already, share with them *Excerpts from Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*, a card and poster summarizing seven key themes of Catholic social teaching, or show the video, *In the Footsteps of Jesus*, which also summarizes these themes.

1. Ask young people to read the brochure, *The Challenge of Faithful Citizenship*. Then hold a discussion using the following questions:
 - Name examples of public policies from the past that were harmful to people (e.g., slavery, the Holocaust, and lack of voting rights for women or minorities). What does our Catholic faith tell us about those policies?
 - Name some issues being discussed in this campaign that have moral or ethical dimensions (e.g., abortion, poverty, war and peace, the death penalty, environmental protection, sweatshops, educational choice, gun control, and accessible and affordable health care). How would you apply Catholic teaching to those issues?
 - A follow-up activity might involve using an “Action Alert” from your state Catholic conference or from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship) to write letters to a legislator about a public policy issue.
2. Invite a young person (preferably from your parish) who is involved in social action issues to share his or her experiences with other young people.



3. Show the video, *Faithful Citizenship*, and then hold a discussion. The questions above or in the discussion guide enclosed with the video can help get things started. You may also want to invite your diocesan social action director or pro-life director to speak to the young people.
4. Use the sample *Faithful Citizenship* catechetical session plans for junior/senior high school students that are available at www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship.
5. To help parents discuss this with their children, and to make them aware of what is happening in youth ministry programs, send home a copy of the brochure, *The Challenge of Faithful Citizenship*, as well as the “Family Guide to Faithful Citizenship” available at www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship.
6. Use the “Faithful Citizenship Quiz” (www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship) to develop a game involving teams working to identify *and explain* the answers. Candy or treats can be used as prizes for each answer that is correct and well explained.

7. Ask each young person to identify a public policy issue in which he or she is interested. (Provide newspapers or magazines if necessary.) After receiving permission from their parents, ask each young person to write a letter to an elected official. Include the letters as an “Offering of Letters” during a parish mass.

General Suggestions for Youth Ministers

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 the “Ideas for Pastors, Parish Councils, and Parish Staffs” at www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship.

Make Use of Existing Resources

Many resources are available that are designed to help children and youth understand Catholic social teaching and its implications for public life. Go to www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship.

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 included in the “Ideas for Liturgists and Prayer Leaders” at www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship.

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.

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, too 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 (www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship).

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.

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 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 youth ministry programs.

Resources for Youth Ministers

To order these and other resources, call USCCB Publishing at 800-235-8722 or visit www.usccb.org/publishing.

Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility

(English, no. 5-561; Spanish, no. 5-894)

The 2003 bishops' statement includes teaching about civic participation, as well as the Church's position on issues such as capital punishment, education, euthanasia, family life, the environment, immigration, and the mass media.

The Challenge of Faithful Citizenship

(English, no. 5-562; Spanish, no. 5-895)

This two-color brochure summarizes the bishops' statement *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* and includes "Questions for the Campaign" for voters and candidates.

Faithful Citizenship Video

(No. 5-563)

A compelling summary of the bishops' statement in video format.

Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions

(English, no. 5-281; Spanish, no. 5-803)

This statement of the bishops of the United States urges that Catholic social teaching be incorporated into every Catholic educational program and identifies seven key themes of Catholic social teaching.

Excerpts from Sharing Catholic Social Teaching

(English card, no. 5-315; Spanish card, no. 5-815; English poster, no. 5-318; Spanish poster, no. 5-818)

Easy-to-distribute cards and posters summarizing seven key themes from Catholic social teaching.

In the Footsteps of Jesus: Catholic Social Teaching at Work Today

(No. 5-444)

A two-part video. The first part (9 minutes) provides a brief summary of seven key themes from Catholic social teaching. The second part (19 minutes) explores each theme in more detail through the testimony of people who have lived the theme.

Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics

(English, no. 5-300; Spanish, no. 5-809)

This statement calls U.S. Catholics to recover their identity as followers of Jesus Christ and to be leaders in the renewal of U.S. respect for the sanctity of life.

Living Justice, Proclaiming Peace: 2004 Youth Ministry Resource Manual

(No. 5-597)

This annual resource helps to plan youth ministry programs throughout the year around the theme of social justice.

Leader's Guide to Sharing Catholic Social Teaching

(No. 5-366)

Ideal for religious educators at the diocesan and parish levels, this guide was developed to assist parish ministers and other adults in their study of Catholic social teaching, either individually or in a group setting. It includes prayers and ten study sheets containing themes, quotes, scriptural foundations, and much more.

A Place at the Table: A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and to Respect the Dignity of All God's Children

(English: No. 5-519; Spanish: No. 5-880)

This pastoral reflection from the bishops will assist pastors, religious educators, teachers, youth ministers, and social justice coordinators to pray, reflect, and take action on the causes of poverty in the United States.

Making a Place at the Table

(English: No. 5-542, 8-panel brochure;

Spanish: No. 5-898, 8-panel brochure)

Use this brief and evocative brochure to challenge youth, young adults, and parish and diocesan leaders to respond to the call of faith to overcome poverty and defend human dignity. This summary of the bishops' statement *A Place at the Table* highlights what we can do as families and individuals, as members of churches and community groups, in the marketplace, and through governmental agencies.

Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice. A Pastoral Reflection on Lay Discipleship for Justice in a New Millennium

(English: No. 5-116; Spanish: No. 5-117)

The most important way Catholics work for justice and peace is through their choices and actions every day. In this document, the bishops highlight one essential dimension of the lay vocation that is sometimes overlooked or neglected: the social mission of Christians in the world.