

## Doesn't political involvement of the Church or its members violate rules for tax exempt organizations?

The Federal Income Tax code prohibits exempt organizations from participating or intervening in political campaigns on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for political office. Members of the church, however, are free to participate fully in the political process when they are acting as an individual and not as a representative of the Church. Indeed, it is their right and obligation as citizens to do so.

The Catholic Bishops have consistently urged broad participation in the political process by all segments of the population. The Bishops themselves have a unique role as teachers and pastors that involves them in educating on Church teachings, analyzing the social and moral dimensions of issues participating in public policy debate, and speaking out on issues involving human rights and social justice.

The Church has a responsibility to engage in political debate in a non-partisan way. That is, it should not favor any one political party or candidate. Nevertheless, participation in the public debate on important issues inevitably overlaps with positions taken by certain candidates. Such issue-oriented speech is protected by the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution and is entirely proper.

The United States Catholic Bishops offer the following guidance on the topic of political responsibility:

*We urge citizens to avoid choosing candidates simply on the basis of narrow self-interest. We hope that votes will examine the positions of candidates on the full range of issues, as well as their personal integrity, philosophy and performance. We are convinced that a consistent ethic of life should be the moral framework from which we address all issues in the political arena.*

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# FAITH AND POLITICS

## Why and How Catholics are Called to Political Action

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What is the connection between faith and politics? This is a question that frequently evokes confusion and misunderstanding of both religious and constitutional principles. For example, there is a commonly-held misconception that the constitutional principle of “separation of church and state” means there should be no connection between religion and politics.

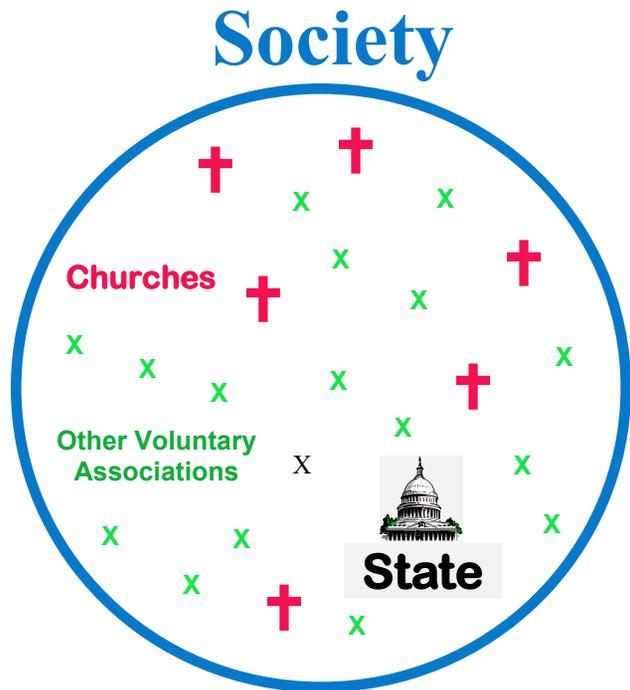
The “separation of church and state” has a very specific and limited meaning. This principle holds that religious organizations should expect neither discrimination nor favoritism when they enter the public arena. It does not mean that churches are prohibited from speaking out on questions of public morality and public policy.



Perhaps the most important key to understanding this question is to realize that the state is not the same as society. The state is a part of the larger community which we call society. (See graphic on page 2.) While accepting the separation of the church from the state, we should reject the separation of the church from society. For that would mean a silent church.

Many of the social, economic and political issues that are at the heart of public debate are also moral issues. The Church may not be excluded from debating these issues just because it is a religious institution. That would be a form of unjust discrimination. Indeed, the Constitution guarantees that religious institutions have the right to participate in this kind of public debate that takes place in society.

On the other hand, the Church should not receive any special treatment. It would be against our constitution, for example, to have Catholicism declared as the state religion or to give it any other special status. In sum, then, the “separation of church and state” means that religious institutions would receive neither discrimination, nor favoritism, but the freedom to function.



*The state is not the same as society; it is only one part of society.*

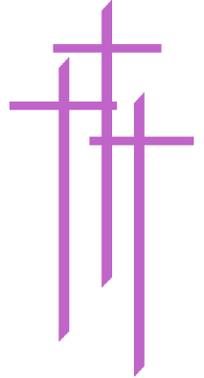
*Society includes many distinct voluntary associations such as churches, parent-teacher associations, labor unions, youth groups, athletic associations, civic groups, etc.*

*Churches have the same right to help shape society as do other groups.*

## What's the theological basis for linking Christian beliefs and political involvement?

Asserting that religious values and voices have a legitimate place in the public arena is not enough. We must ask why this connection between faith and politics is not only legitimate but necessary.

Here we can begin by listening to Vatican II. The Council said that the task of the church in society is to protect the dignity of the person. The reason the church is interested in the political process is because the church is interested in people. The protection of this dignity is not an extra-curricular activity for the church. It is not optional. It is not marginal or accidental. It is at the heart of the church's mission.



Vatican II said that Catholics are to enter the political order because of what they believe about the dignity of the human person. For the person is not only sacred; the person is also social. The design of the social context and the social system, therefore, can decisively affect whether or not persons will be able to realize the dignity that is inherent in each of them.

It is in the political arena where society decides how it will treat every human person. It is one of the arenas where the fate and future of the human person are determined.

Therefore, our faith requires us to take political action in the defense of human life, human dignity, human rights. This call stems not from some social movement of the moment, not from some ideological or political preference, but from the Gospel and the teaching of the Church. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “It is a part of the Church's mission ‘to pass moral judgments even in matters related to politics, whenever the fundamental rights of man requires it.’”