

Pastor's Notes: The Chattanooga Civics Website and Podcast - Part 2 of 2

April 4, 2021

The run-off election for Chattanooga Mayor and City Council will be April 13, and early voting is open from March 24 to April 8. On March 17, I interviewed Nathan Bird, a Basilica parishioner who is engaged in understanding local politics, and the founder of the Chattanooga Civics website and podcast, at ChattanoogaCivics.com. The conclusion of our interview is presented here, and the video and full transcript are available on the Basilica website.



Fr. Carter: You mentioned subsidiarity as a standard principle for the Catholic social teaching, but there's also the principle of participation in public life.

Nathan Bird: You are right, that is an explicit teaching of faith. And as we are talking to other parishioners and other Catholics about why they should be interested, that will definitely play a role. Even if this is not something like me, where I am this big nerd trying to figure out what is happening in local politics, if that doesn't come naturally to you, understand that the Church does encourage us to be actively participating in our civic life.

Fr. Carter: What are some upcoming things that people who hear this interview might be interested in, on the local level of politics?

Nathan Bird: The most immediate thing is there is a runoff for the Mayor seat, as well as the Council seats in District Two and District Five. And that is going to be on April 13. And early voting is going to be starting in a week, I believe. So that is the most immediate thing. And I have interviews with most of those candidates on my podcast and on my website. The runoff is between Tim Kelly and Kim White who are running for mayor. And then in District Two, it is between Jenny Hill and Thomas Lee. And then in District Five, it is between Dennis Clarke and Isaiah Hester. And I was not able to interview Isaiah Hester. But I have interviews with all those other candidates available on the website for people to get involved and say, the Mayor does a lot. Your city council person does a lot. It is important to go vote for these positions because they have a very direct impact on how our city operates day to day. Like you said, much more on a day-to-day level, they have a lot more impact than the President or your Congressman. So, I really encourage people to get active and educate themselves on this runoff and go vote on April 13.

Fr. Carter: Where can people go to educate themselves about the important issues for our community?

Nathan Bird: There are several different resources. I have tried to aggregate as many as possible on my own website, which is ChattanoogaCivics.com.

Fr. Carter: Well, let's look at your website, then, while you mention that. You have on there a lot of resources, including a podcast, your podcast that we were talking about.

Nathan Bird: Yes. The homepage will take you to most of the major podcast apps as well as my social media page. If you want to email me, if you are feeling very generous and want to donate to support the project, it is really a labor of love on my part, but I do accept donations. That is just my introductory paragraph as to why I started the project. And then at the top, you can see the tabs for the mayor's race and city council race. I link to their websites, and then that is my interview that I have done with them.

Fr. Carter: "Find your District" - I think that is a great resource, because most people don't know what district they live in.

Nathan Bird: I believe the Basilica is on the far western edge of District Eight, that piece that juts out into District Seven.

Fr. Carter: Yes, this part right here. That's really cool to see that, and to see who is in the city. I noticed this little pocket, Red Bank, is not in there. I know that I have heard people say that: Oh, I live in Red Bank. I can't vote in those elections. Or East Ridge. There are incorporated cities that are not part of the city of Chattanooga.

Nathan Bird: Yes. If you see that little island in District Nine, as well, there's a little community called Ridgeside that incorporated back in the early 1900s and has remained independent this entire time. It is interesting looking at how the city has grown.

The "Other Resources" tab is up at the top right: That is where I link to registration to vote. There is a great website where somebody broke down all the financial disclosures of all the mayoral candidates and put them in a very easy-to-read format. The Camp House does a great podcast. They have interviewed a lot of candidates. There are some other resources - voter guides; the Times Free-Press and WRCB did candidate interviews. I really want to try and provide a well-balanced look at these candidates and issues. I do not want to be the only voice talking about these things.

Fr. Carter: It sounds like you have put together a great resource to help people go through the door and explore these issues that affect us. And faithful people should be interested in this, because we were called to participate in the life of society. And we are supposed to respect that principle of subsidiarity that says that things that happen on the local level are very important for us to be attentive to, so that we are not just focused on huge issues from people far away, or just get insulated in our own island unto ourselves, but that we're truly part of a community. Nathan, thank you so much for taking the time to tell us about this awesome project that you got going. We will pray for its success and spread the word so that everybody can be informed about the things going on in Chattanooga.