

## Parish Candidate Forums: "Frequently Asked Questions"

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*Why are Catholic parishes encouraged to host candidate forums? Why now?*

On November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022, every Minnesota state house and senate seat will be up for election. Candidates who are elected will consider important issues of life and human dignity in future legislative sessions. The advocacy of the lay faithful has a massive impact in these areas, and as Pope Francis said, "A good Catholic meddles in politics, offering the best of himself, so that those who govern can govern."

*Why should we host a candidate forum at our parish?*

Many of your parishioners are active and engaged citizens who understand what is best for their community and would like to see it flourish. Hosting a candidate forum allows your parishioners to learn where the candidates stand on issues of life and dignity, voice their faith in the public arena, and serve as a resource for their future representatives.

*Shouldn't religious groups stay out of politics?*

No. The beauty of our system of government is that it allows different people, with different beliefs and visions, to come together and discuss how best to govern. The "separation of Church and State," refers to a prohibition on government meddling in the affairs of religion—not the other way around. Further, this is a non-partisan information event. For more information, feel free to reference the "[Guidelines for Parish and Church Organization Political Activity](#)," found at [www.MNCatholic.org/Townhall](http://www.MNCatholic.org/Townhall).

*What role does our parish play?*

Your parishioners bring an important perspective on the dignity of the human person and the common good of all into the conversation. Catholic advocacy is principled, not partisan, and this allows us to work with all parties and build bridges to further the common good. Given our unique position as "bridge builders" in the political process, it would be a disservice to our state and its people if we stayed home and stayed out of the public conversation.

*What are the practical benefits of hosting a candidate townhall?*

Parishioners will hear what candidates themselves have to say on issues of concern to your parish and the wider Catholic community. Candidates will hear about those same issues, perhaps for the first time, and will be compelled to give them more thought, and perhaps even commit to a position that promotes the life and dignity of the human person. As we need to be in ongoing dialogue with our public officials, the candidate townhall is a constructive first step in that process.

*When should we host our candidate forum?*

We recommend that you work with each candidate to find a time that would best work for all parties. After you have determined several times that would work for your parish, you can use our *Parish Communications Template* to reach out to candidates, found at [www.MNCatholic.org/Townhall](http://www.MNCatholic.org/Townhall), and suggest those times to each candidate. After each of the candidates has responded, determine a single time for the event to occur and let each candidate know of your decision.

*Where should we hold our candidate forum?*

You will want to host the candidate forum either at your parish or on Zoom. The decision as to which platform you should use is one that you must make based on your situation as a parish. If holding an in-person forum works for your parish, you may want to consider live streaming the forum and/or recording it for parishioners to view later. You can provide MCC with the link to the live stream or recording, and we will do our best to share it with our network members who are in your district.

*How many of the candidates in our district will attend the forum?*

We have provided the names and contact information of the candidates in both your House and Senate districts in our initial mailing to pastors. You have the opportunity to host two forums—one for the State House election and one for the State Senate election. When planning either townhall, we ask that you invite all of the candidates running for State House and State Senate.

*What policy issues will we discuss? How will the moderator know what questions to ask?*

We encourage you to discuss the policy priorities of Minnesota's Catholic bishops, which are found in the *Parish Candidate Forums: Preparation and Structure* document, found online at [www.MNCatholic.org/Townhall](http://www.MNCatholic.org/Townhall). Your parishioners will also have the opportunity to ask questions to each candidate, so be sure that they come prepared!

*How will we let our parishioners know about the candidate forum?*

We have created marketing materials for you to use at your convenience, found at <http://www.MNCatholic.org/Townhall>. These materials include flyers and posters that can be printed, social media graphics, and announcements for E-newsletters and bulletins. You may also consider creating a Facebook event or advertising the event through a mailing to your parishioners.

*Should parishioners register to attend?*

Registration is highly recommended, particularly for an online forum over [Zoom](#), so as to provide a private link to attendees via email. If you plan to hold the event in person, we recommend that you create an [Eventbrite](#) registration page to keep track of those who will be in attendance.

*Is my parish in danger of losing its tax-exempt status if we host a candidate forum?*

No. The forums are nonpartisan—sponsoring or participating in the event does not convey that your parish endorses a candidate or party. If your parish is hosting a candidate forum, be sure to invite all candidates listed in the initial mailing. If only one candidate attends, let the attendees at your candidate forum know that you had invited other candidates and that they were unable to attend.

*If one party's candidate decides not to participate, can we still hold the forum? Would the lack of participation by all parties impact our tax-exempt status?*

Yes, you can still hold the forum. So long as the invitation is made to all the candidates the event is nonpartisan, and the parish's tax-exempt status will not be affected.

*Where should I go if I have further questions?*

Please contact the Minnesota Catholic Conference with any questions at 651.256.7582.

Visit <http://www.MNCatholic.org/Townhall> for further resources and marketing materials.