



CATHOLIC ADVOCATE NETWORK

Cyou**AN**

make a difference

The grassroots public policy initiative of the Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls

Legislative Liaison Handbook

Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls, South Dakota



2004 Edition

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Preface

This handbook was written by Travis and Kelly Benson for our Legislative Liaisons and other Catholic Advocate Network (“CAN”) members. Travis is the Director of Catholic Charities, and we are the Co-Directors of the Respect Life Office. We are also both licensed attorneys and registered lobbyists for the Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

By creating the Catholic Advocate Network, we hope to build on the foundation of past lobbyists and many other committed individuals who have given their time to professing our Catholic faith in the public square, and work in union with the other departments and ministries of the diocese, such as the Education Office, Catholic Family Services, the Good Shepherd Center, parishes, and many others, to create a solid network of citizens committed to building a culture of life. Through this network, we can then educate, inform, alert, and inspire participation in state and national legislative processes, which, in our country, is the most direct and effective way of ensuring that our families, communities, states, and nation are structured on sound moral principles.

Therefore, the goal of this short handbook is to provide our Legislative Liaisons and other CAN members with a basic knowledge of what the Church teaches with regard to our political, legislative, and public policy responsibilities, and how we can use the gifts of time, talent and treasure to further the work of our Lord and profess the truths of our faith through community and civic involvement.

IMPORTANT

The purpose of this Catholic Advocate Network is to influence public policy and encourage civic involvement. This means that this network is directed only to influencing, supporting, or opposing legislation and governmental activity, NOT to supporting or opposing particular candidates or political parties. The Church is neither Democrat nor Republican. It is political, but not partisan. Its teachings do not follow any particular political party, and as the law stands today, cannot support or oppose a particular candidate for elective office. The key to remember is that anything you do must be issue-based, and must relate to a governmental act. If you have any questions, or you are requested to do something you feel may not be in line with this direction, please contact our office before proceeding.

Introduction

Parts I & II of this handbook contain words of our Bishops on the call to faithful citizenship and the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. They are quotes directly from the 2003 edition of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (“USCCB”) Statement, *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*. (You can view and print this document from the USCCB website at: www.usccb.org.) Parts II through V expand on those words, describing the importance of legislative networks and how, practically, to set one up and be successful in our efforts.

PART I: Our Bishops’ Call to Faithful Citizenship



A Call to Faithful Citizenship

“One of our greatest blessings in the United States is our right and responsibility to participate in civic life. Everyone can and should participate. Even those who cannot vote have the right to have their voices heard on issues that affect their communities.

The Constitution protects the right of individuals and of religious bodies to speak out without governmental interference, favoritism, or discrimination. Major public issues have moral dimensions. Religious values have significant public consequences. Our nation is enriched and our tradition of pluralism is enhanced, not threatened, when religious groups contribute their values to public debates.

As bishops, we have a responsibility as Americans and as religious teachers to speak out on the moral dimensions of public life. The Catholic community enters public life not to impose sectarian doctrine but to act on our moral convictions, to share our experience in serving the poor and vulnerable, and to participate in the dialogue over our nation's future.

A Catholic moral framework does not easily fit the ideologies of "right" or "left," nor the platforms of any party. Our values are often not "politically correct." Believers are called to be a community of conscience within the larger society and to test public life by the values of Scripture and the principles of Catholic social teaching. Our responsibility is to measure all candidates, policies, parties, and platforms by how they protect or undermine the life, dignity, and rights of the human person – whether they protect the poor and vulnerable and advance the common good.

Jesus called us to "love one another".³ Our Lord's example and words demand care for the "least of these"⁴ from each of us. Yet they also require action on a broader scale. Faithful citizenship is about more than elections. It requires ongoing participation in the continuing political and legislative process.

A recent Vatican statement on Catholic participation in political life highlights the need for involvement:

Today's democratic societies . . . call for new and fuller forms of participation in public life by Christian and non-Christian citizens alike. Indeed, all can contribute, by voting in elections for lawmakers and government officials, and in other ways as well, to the development of political solutions and legislative choices which, in their opinion, will benefit the common good.⁵

In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is a moral obligation. All believers are called to faithful citizenship, to become informed, active, and responsible participants in the political process. As we have said, "We encourage *all citizens*, particularly Catholics, to embrace their citizenship not merely as a duty and privilege, but as an opportunity meaningfully to participate [more fully] *in building the culture of life*. Every voice matters in the public forum. Every vote counts. Every act of responsible citizenship is an exercise of significant individual power."⁶ Even those who are not citizens are called to participate in the debates which shape our common life."

PART II: Key Principles of Catholic Social Teachings

"The Catholic approach to faithful citizenship begins with moral principles, not party platforms. The directions for our public witness are found in Scripture and Catholic social teaching. Here are some key themes at the heart of our Catholic social tradition."¹⁶

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, each person's life and dignity must be respected, whether that person is an innocent unborn child in a mother's womb, whether that person worked in the World Trade Center or a market in Baghdad, or even whether that person is a convicted criminal on death row. We believe that every human life is sacred from conception to natural death, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it protects and respects the life and dignity of the human person. As the recent Vatican statement points out, "The Church recognizes that while democracy is the best expression of the direct participation of citizens in political choices, it succeeds only to the extent that it is based on a correct understanding of the human *person*. Catholic involvement in political life cannot compromise on this principle."¹⁷

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The human person is not only sacred, but social. The God-given institutions of marriage--a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman--and family are central and serve as the foundations for social life. Marriage and family should be supported and strengthened, not undermined. Every person has a right to participate in social, economic, and political life and a corresponding duty to work for the advancement of the common good and the well-being of all, especially the poor and weak.

Rights and Responsibilities

Every person has a fundamental right to life--the right that makes all other rights possible. Each person also has a right to the conditions for living a decent life—faith and family life, food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing. We also have a duty to secure and respect these rights not only for ourselves, but for others, and to fulfill our responsibilities to our families, to each other, and to the larger society.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

Scripture teaches that God has a special concern for the poor and vulnerable.¹⁸ The prophets denounced injustice toward the poor as a lack of fidelity to the God of Israel.¹⁹ Jesus, who identified himself with "the least of these",²⁰ came to preach "good news to the poor, liberty to captives . . . and to set the downtrodden free."²¹ The Church calls on all of us to embrace this preferential option for the poor and vulnerable,²² to embody it in our lives, and to work to have it shape public policies and priorities. A fundamental measure of our society is how we care for and stand with the poor and vulnerable.

Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's act of creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers, owners, and others must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and choose to join a union, to economic initiative, and to ownership and private property. These rights must be exercised in ways that advance the common good.

Solidarity

We are one human family. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Pope John Paul II insists, "We are *all* really responsible *for all*". Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that "if you want peace, work for justice."²³ The Gospel calls us to be "peacemakers."²⁴ Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we be "sentinels of peace" in a world wounded by violence and conflict.²⁵

Caring for God's Creation

The world that God created has been entrusted to us. Our use of it must be directed by God's plan for creation, not simply for our own benefit. Our stewardship of the Earth is a form of participation in God's act of creating and sustaining the world. In our use of creation, we must be guided by a concern for generations to come. We show our respect for the Creator by our care for creation.

These themes anchor our community's role in public life. They help us to resist excessive self-interest, blind partisanship, and ideological agendas. They also help us avoid extreme distortions of pluralism and tolerance that deny any fundamental values and dismiss the contributions and convictions of believers. As the Vatican's statement on public life explains, we cannot accept an understanding of pluralism and tolerance that suggests "every possible outlook on life [is] of equal value".²⁶ However, this insistence that there are fundamental moral values "has nothing to do with the legitimate freedom of Catholic citizens to choose among the various political opinions that are compatible with faith and the natural moral law, and to select, according to their own criteria, what best corresponds to the needs of the common good".²⁷

PART III: The Importance of our Catholic Advocate Network (CAN)

In an effort to embrace a faithful citizenship, and assist fellow Catholics in fulfilling their duty to participate in building a culture of life, dioceses across the nation are developing legislative networks. As you can see from the cover page of this handbook, our diocesan network is called the "Catholic Advocate Network." We use its acronym as part of our slogan: "You CAN make a difference." This title was chosen for several reasons.

First, an advocate is somebody who supports or speaks in favor of something, or acts or intercedes on behalf of another. Those who participate in CAN will be doing just that – supporting and speaking in favor of public policy that is in line with the teachings of our Catholic faith, and also interceding on the behalf of those who choose not to participate, or are unable to, such as the poor and vulnerable, and our unborn children.

Second, as you will soon see, you really can make a difference. When we first came to work for the diocese and spent time with Bishop Carlson discussing our responsibilities as lobbyists for the diocese, he shared his story of initiating a calling tree and having legislators phoning him and telling him to "call off the dogs." It is amazing how far a message can be disseminated, and how many people can be reached in a short period of time, especially when an email tree is used. A simple example better illustrates this. If one of our Legislative Liaisons has 20 people signed up for their CAN email network, and each of those 20 people pass an email on to 10 more people, over 200 people have already been reached. If those contact persons in turn pass the information on to even 5 other people each, we have reached well over 1000 people!

Legislative networks can help us bring valuable assets together in a more effective advocacy for justice. They provide a particularly important example of putting "the consistent ethic of life"

into action. And they are an opportunity for Catholics to work for the common good, despite limited time and energy, given the many priorities of family, parish, and careers.

Most importantly, if made up of dedicated members, legislative networks are effective at influencing public policy.

PART IV: How CAN Operates Across our Diocese

As our office reads and analyzes bills, researches issues, meets with legislators and other interest groups and lobbyists, and develops a list of relevant bills (i.e., bills on which the diocese is going to take a position), we will pass information on to our Legislative Liaisons. While we may not have full participation this first year, our goal is to have a Legislative Liaison at each parish, Catholic school, college or university, and any other participating organizations and groups. And while CAN will be used heavily during the South Dakota legislation session, we will also implement it throughout the year for state, national and local public policy concerns.

A. The Legislative Liaison

The Legislative Liaisons are the initial contact persons whose main responsibility is implied in the title – to act as a liaison between our office and CAN members. In general, a Legislative Liaison’s responsibilities include (but are not limited to):

- Recruiting CAN members;
- Creating and activating email and calling trees;
- Maintaining current information on recruited CAN members;
- Keeping pastors and any organization or group leaders well informed of CAN activities;
- Educating yourself and others on church teachings, legislative issues, and effective advocacy;
- Contacting legislators and other influential persons (including the media);
- Passing on the information as it is received from our office to CAN members;
- Submitting pertinent information for publication in bulletins and other media outlets; and
- Attending educational events or functions relating to CAN activities.

B. CAN Members

A CAN member’s main responsibility is to graciously receive information from the Legislative Liaisons and carry out the action alert. Similar to the Legislative Liaisons’ responsibilities, CAN members will also:

- Assist the Legislative Liaisons in organizing and maintaining CAN;
- Encourage others to become CAN members;
- Educate themselves on church teachings, legislative issues and effective advocacy;
- Read action alerts and other information carefully and ask questions, if necessary; and
- Contact the requested individuals by email, telephone or letter.

If all goes as planned, hundreds of interested citizens will be informed of the issues facing our state and nation, legislators and other influential individuals will receive hundreds of contacts from their constituents, and the laws and public policies of our state and nation will reflect the values and morals of our Catholic faith.

PART V: How to Set Up Our Catholic Advocate Network

This first year, it will take approximately two to three weeks to get the network fully functional in your parish or organization, and each network may need to adapt our suggestions to fit their particular situation and needs. Do not be afraid to try different approaches, and never hesitate to contact our office for assistance. The following are suggested steps to be implemented.

1. Meet with Your Pastor or Supervisor

The first crucial step in setting up your CAN is to meet with the pastor of your parish (or for organizations, your supervisor or leader) and seek their permission and blessing to carry out the network. Discuss the information provided in this handbook. Be prepared for questions regarding the Church's (and other non-profit organizations') ability to participate in activities such as this. Read them the important direction contained in the preface. Encourage them to contact our office with any questions you are unable to answer. Ask permission to submit bulletin or pulpit announcements, and to hang up recruiting posters. Be sure to continue to keep them informed about your activities, and thank them for their time and support of your efforts.

2. Recruit CAN Members

Recruiting can take place through sign-up tables after Mass, through mailings and e-mailings, phone calls, or other personal contact. You will need to decide which method(s) would be most effective for you and your parish or organization. We have included a sample sign-up form and recruit letter at the end of this handbook. Remember to try to network with other people and groups to help you work on this important project. Word of mouth is often one of the best ways to recruit members.

Some recruiting pointers:

- Share information regarding our Catholic call to faithful citizenship, such as a quote or paraphrase from Pope John Paul II or the USCCB.
- Try not to pressure the prospective member to sign up. Empower them so that they want to get involved, not feel like they have to. This will help ensure that only persons who intend to follow through with their responsibilities as members sign up.
- Recruit volunteers to help with your recruiting.
- Put your contact information on the enclosed posters and hang them in places where potential members will see them and become interested.

- The goal is to obtain names, addresses, phone numbers, and, most importantly, email addresses of people who would like to be CAN members.
- Tap into existing email or calling trees.
- Tell potential members that we need people who are able and willing to contact state legislators or congresspersons about urgent public policy matters, but that a strong legislative background or gifted ability for public speaking is NOT necessary.

Mass sign-ups:

Mass sign-ups are a successful way to recruit your CAN members. They can be conducted at daily and/or weekend Masses, and in a variety of ways: at visible tables in convenient locations, in the pews during announcements, at coffee & doughnuts after Mass, or some other means. No matter what, an announcement should be placed in the bulletin and read from the pulpit. Keep in mind that many parishes require announcements to be submitted a week in advance. If you or someone who is working with you is comfortable speaking at Mass, and especially if you plan to use the “pew method,” you should ask your pastor if you can have a few minutes to explain CAN after the general announcements are made.

If you plan to have the sign-up sheets in the pews, it may be more successful if you coordinate the effort with the pulpit announcement. Have volunteers or ushers hand out the forms during the announcement, and then have them help collect the signed forms at the exits of the Church, or have clearly marked boxes or baskets for collection.

Mailings:

If your parish is planning a mass mailing, or you have a budget for stamps, you may wish to send a recruiting letter to all parishioners, or those you feel would be most interested. The attached sample letter can be used as a template or guide.

Also have a letter similar to the sample member thank-you letter to hand out (or mail) to the members who sign up. If you choose to draft your own letter, be sure to thank them for their commitment. Include a copy of the Guidelines for CAN Members included in this handbook. Be sure to also provide them with your contact information in case they have any questions.

3. Set Up Email and Calling Trees

Once you have a list of members, you must organize them into an email and/or calling tree. It is our recommendation that every effort be made to create an email tree. Email is the most efficient and cost effective way to disseminate information, and most people, especially legislators, are comfortable sending and receiving information this way. However, if a person does not have access to a computer or email, give them the option of participating through a calling tree. Therefore, you will likely be responsible for coordinating and activating separate email and calling trees.

Email tree set-up:

Make sure your CAN members write their email addresses clearly. If you are unsure of a spelling, kindly ask them to verify it. Place your CAN members in an exclusive group in your address book so that you do not have to search through a larger list each time you activate the tree. Please add our email addresses (kbenson@sfcatholic.org & tbenson@sfcatholic.org) to your list so we can receive feedback on which Legislative Liaisons have activated CAN. Be sure to tell your members to check their email several times a day, at the very least, every night during legislative session or other key times throughout the year. Don't forget to do the same. And don't forget to have them pass the action alerts on to as many people as they can. Because one person (the Legislative Liaison) is able to reach literally hundreds of people with the click of a mouse, email trees are not as detailed or structured as calling trees.

Calling tree set-up:

As mentioned above, because calling trees are more time consuming to carry out, a structured tree is often helpful. We have included one design in this packet. Please feel free to design your own. No matter what, you will need to ask certain CAN members to act as Team Captains of their branch of the tree, under which other CAN members can be listed, and also have calling responsibilities. Once you get the tree organized, be sure to send a copy to all persons who are required to call someone else. That way, if someone is unable to carry out their branch of the tree, another member (or substitute) can take their place. The size and structure of your tree will depend on the number of CAN members that sign up.

4. Activate CAN

When you receive an email from our office, activate your email or calling tree (i.e., pass it on)! We will provide in the action alert email whether the contact is to be made to legislators in each district, or if there are key legislators or other public officials that are to be contacted, regardless of district.

IMPORTANT

Because this network has been developed as an initiative of the diocese, we trust that it will only be used for official diocesan activities through the CAN network. Please do not activate the network on your own, or at the direction of anyone except a representative of our office. If you are unsure of the direction you are receiving, please double check with us.

Occasionally, Liaisons and CAN Members may not agree with all the Church's public policy positions. If you receive an action alert that you do not support, we ask that you pass the message along as received, and if you choose to contact a legislator or other public official with a position contrary to that taken by CAN, we ask that you do not represent yourself as part of CAN, and that you do not pass your position on to the other CAN members.

Part VI

Other Important Information

We are in the process of developing and updating our CAN website. There will be a link to it on the diocesan website at www.sfcatholic.org. The direct address of the CAN website is <http://sio.midco.net/can> (notice the absence of “www”). Action alerts, contact information, this handbook, and much more will be available for your review and use to help make CAN a success. Please visit this website often, and refer other CAN members and parishioners to it as well.

For state legislation, we will be relying on the South Dakota Legislative Research Council’s website for much of our own research and updating. The direct web address is: <http://legis.state.sd.us/index.cfm>. There will also be a link to it on the CAN website. On this website you will find everything you need to follow the actions of the South Dakota legislature. You will also find district maps, Senate and House rosters, contact information, and even an option to set up your own legislative research account. Set up is very simple, and you can choose to receive daily email updates on the bills that you list in your account. We highly recommend trying out this wonderful feature.

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This handbook is subject to change as we learn from experiences, hear from our Legislative Liaisons, and receive input from other sources.