



CATHOLIC ADVOCATE NETWORK

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

# Voter Registration & Absentee Voting Handbook

*Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls, South Dakota*



2006 Edition

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## Introduction

A voter registration and absentee voting drive is a wonderful opportunity to participate in the political process as encouraged in the statement from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* (2004). Parishes provide an ideal setting to encourage parishioners to embrace their right and duty to share in the political life.

Voter participation in a democratic society is essential in order to maintain a just society. Some studies indicate that fewer than 50% of self-identified Christians are registered to vote. If we expect issues crucial to our Catholic faith to be addressed in the public arena, then we must be willing to turn out at the polls and vote for candidates and ballot initiatives that most embrace the social teachings of our faith. We have the unique opportunity and privilege to engage in a democratic process, one that many people throughout the world do not enjoy. In order to participate, citizens must first register to vote.

Successful drives motivate and educate volunteers and make the process of registration and absentee voting as accessible and simple as possible, while keeping in compliance with South Dakota laws.

This Voter Registration & Absentee Voting Handbook is a resource for parish volunteers who are organizing and conducting these activities. You can access this Handbook, as well as links to other pertinent information, such as applications, on the [Handbooks & Advocacy Tips](#) page of the CAN website at:

[www.sfcatholic.org/can](http://www.sfcatholic.org/can)

### IMPORTANT

**The purpose of a Voter Registration & Absentee Voting Drive is to influence public policy and encourage civic involvement, fostering faithful citizenship activity. However, because the Church does NOT support or oppose particular candidates or political parties, it is neither Democrat nor Republican, nor any other party. It is political, meaning it has a right and responsibility to participate in the political process, working for the common good. But it is not partisan. Church teachings do not align with any particular political party, and as the law stands today, the Church cannot support or oppose a particular candidate for elective office. 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.**

# **PART I**

## **How To Conduct A Drive in Your Parish Community**

The first thing to remember is that everything you do must be in compliance with South Dakota law, as detailed in Parts II and III below. If you follow the guidelines contained in this Handbook, you should find the process fairly simple. As always, if you have any questions, please contact our office for assistance.

### **1. Meet with Your Pastor**

The first crucial step is to meet with the pastor of your parish and seek permission to carry out this project. Discuss the information provided in this Handbook. Be prepared for questions regarding the Church's ability to participate in activities such as this. Read the important direction contained in the Introduction. Encourage your pastor to contact our office with any questions you are unable to answer. Ask permission to submit bulletin or pulpit announcements and to hang up posters and other necessary informational items. Be sure to continue to keep your pastor informed about your activities, and thank him for his time and support of this diocesan wide effort.

### **2. Recruit Volunteers**

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. Remember to try to network with other people and groups to help you complete this important project. Word of mouth and face-to-face contact are often the best ways to recruit volunteers. Talk with the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic Daughters, the Catholic Advocate Network Legislative Liaison(s) for your parish, Directors of Religious Education, Religions Education Teachers, and others who are active in your parish.

#### 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 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
- Try not to pressure the prospective volunteer 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 volunteers sign up.

### **3. Visit Your Local County Auditor**

This is also a crucial step. Every county in South Dakota has an Auditor who is responsible for ensuring that the registration of voters, absentee ballots, voting, and other election activities are in compliance with South Dakota law. Attached to this Handbook is a listing of all the County Auditors in the State with their contact information. Find the county in which your parish is located and then make an appointment with the County Auditor's Office.

#### Your Visit With the Auditor:

- In general, use this meeting as an opportunity to explain what you are doing with this project, and ask the Auditor if there is anything they would like you to do to make sure everything is done correctly.
- Request a sufficient number of applications forms for your parish drive.
- Make sure that you discuss the applications with the Auditor and completely understand what is necessary to complete the forms in their entirety.
- Ask the Auditor for any tips or guidance on helping people complete the applications.

**Please Note: While we highly recommend meeting with your County Auditor, if you are unable to do so, please be sure that you understand the registration process fully, and if you have any questions, talk with the Auditor on the phone before proceeding with your Drive.**

## **4. Conduct Your Drive**

### A. Announce Voter Registration & Absentee Voting Weekend(s):

- Talk to your Priest and confirm the weekend(s) to conduct the drive at each Mass in your Parish. (See Part IV for details specific to this 2006 election year.)
- You will then want to contact the Parish secretary and give her bulletin inserts to place in the bulletin. Please keep in mind that parishes require announcements to be submitted by a certain day of the week. Find out when that deadline is and be sure to submit your announcements in a timely manner.
- An announcement should be read from the pulpit identifying the project and where the sign up tables are located. If you, or someone who is working with you, is comfortable speaking at Mass, you may ask your Priest if you can have a few minutes to explain this project after the general announcements are made. Otherwise, kindly ask the priest to announce it at the end of Mass.

### B. Organize Your Volunteers and Assign Duties:

- Contact your volunteers, get commitments, and assign duties for each Mass on the approved weekend(s).
- Your parish size and layout will determine how many volunteers and tables you will need at each Mass. But please try to have a table at each entry/exit point as this will help make sure that everyone is given the opportunity to register to vote.
- Your volunteers main responsibility will be to supervise the sign-up tables. This is an important task because this person is responsible for making sure that every part of the application is filled out completely and legibly.
- Meet with your volunteers prior to your Drive weekend(s), but after you have met with the Auditor, and instruct them on how to complete the applications correctly. Also share any additional information you received from the Auditor.
- Ask each volunteer to bring at least 5 pens with them so that several people can be filling out forms at the same time.
- People can now vote absentee without having to provide an excuse for doing so. Be sure to tell parishioners this when they register to vote as it may help ensure all who register actually vote this year. (See Part III below for more information on absentee voting.)

C. Instruct Your Volunteers on What NOT to Do:

- Do not instruct or encourage anyone to register with a particular party.
- Do not instruct or encourage anyone to vote for or oppose a particular candidate or party.
- Do not pressure anyone to register to vote.

D. Collect, Review and Turn In Completed Voter Registration & Absentee Voting Forms:

- Assist parishioners in correctly filling out the forms. (See Part II below for specific information on registering voters.)
- Collect all the completed forms from each of your volunteers.
- Review the forms and make sure all parts of the forms are completed legibly. If not, you or your volunteer will need to contact the person who filled out the form and have them complete it correctly.
- Make a copy of the forms, or create a list of the people who registered along with their phone numbers so that you can use this list to call and remind them to vote.
- On the Monday following the designated weekend(s), take the completed forms **to the appropriate County Auditor**. While most of the registrants should be from your County, you may have a few applications from another County. Be sure that each registration form is turned in to the appropriate County Auditor.
- Ask the Auditor to review the forms while you wait to make sure that they are all completed correctly.

E. Contact Parishioners Unable to Attend Mass:

- Contact the Parish nurse or other appropriate person and ask her for a list of parishioners who are unable to come to Mass because of sickness or ill-health. Be sure to include persons residing in a nursing home or an assisted living facility.
- Contact the persons on the list to see if they would like to complete a Voter Registration Application and/or Application for Absentee Ballot.
- Make an in-home visit with any who are interested and help them complete the form(s), keeping in mind the registration deadlines detailed in Part IV.
- Talk to parents of children 18 years or older who are attending college or are living away from home and have not registered to vote and/or who might be interested in voting by absentee ballot. Work with these individuals and help them complete a Voter Registration Application and/or Application for Absentee Ballot.
- Keep a list of names and contact information for those who registered, but did not apply for an Absentee Ballot, so that you can help ensure they are able to make it to the voting booth on election day. This may require you to arrange for transportation for those individuals.

## **5. Follow-up with Reminder Calls**

A day or two before election day, using your copies of the registration forms or the phone list you created, with the help of your volunteers, contact the people that were registered and remind them to vote. If you or a volunteer are able to arrange for transportation for people, be sure to ask if they need a ride. Remember that most of your fellow parishioners will reside in your neighborhood, and will likely need to go to the same polling place as you, but check to make sure.

## PART II

### Voter Registration Information from the Secretary of State

The following information on voter registration is taken from the South Dakota Secretary of State's website at [www.sdsos.gov/index.shtm](http://www.sdsos.gov/index.shtm). Please review this information carefully as you must comply with it when carrying out your Drive. Links to the forms can be found on the CAN website at: [www.sfatholic.org/can](http://www.sfatholic.org/can) on the Handbooks & Advocacy Tips page.

In helping someone register to vote, the first thing you must do is make sure that the person is eligible to register. The person must:

- Be a United States citizen
- Reside in South Dakota
- Be at least 18 years old on or before the next election
- Not currently serving a sentence for a felony conviction which included imprisonment, served or suspended, in an adult penitentiary system
- Not be judged mentally incompetent by a court of law

If this criteria is met, then have the person complete a registration form by LEGIBLY PRINTING in the requested information. You can download registration forms from the CAN or Secretary of State's website, or you can pick them up at the County Auditor's Office. In addition, a sample form is attached to this Handbook.

If a person does not want to register during your Drive, he or she can take a form and fill it out and send it in, or fill-out the form on-line, and then print it out and send it in, or register at one of the following locations:

- County Auditor's Office
- City finance office
- Driver's license station
- Public assistance agencies providing food stamps, TANF or WIC
- Department of Human Services offices which provide assistance to the disabled
- Military recruitment offices

In addition to using the Voter Registration Application to register to vote, you can also use the form to:

- Change your registration name or address
- Change your party affiliation

If someone is already registered to vote and is using the form to make changes, please also have them fill out the cancellation on the bottom of the form.

South Dakota has closed primary elections. To be eligible to vote in the primaries, voters must indicate their political party choice on the registration cards. Constitution, Democrat, Libertarian and Republican parties are the recognized political parties in South Dakota.

Tell the registrants (1) that you will be turning the forms in to the County Auditor's Office, (2) that they will receive a notice from the County Auditor that their registration has been

received, and (3) that if they do not receive this notice within 15 days, to contact their County Auditor.

The deadline for registration is 15 days before any election. This year, that date is:

**October 23, 2006**

**The registration form or card MUST be received by the County Auditor by this deadline or the registrant will not be eligible to vote in this election.**

### **PART III**

## **Absentee Voting Information from the Secretary of State**

Any registered voter may vote by absentee ballot. Absentee ballots are available for primary and general elections six weeks prior to the election. To receive a ballot by mail, a voter must file a written application for an absentee ballot with the person in charge of the election. The application must be mailed or hand delivered to the person in charge of the election. The application cannot be submitted by fax. The voter's signature on the application must be notarized or witnessed by an official who can administer an oath<sup>1</sup>. An alternative to notarization would be to send a photocopy of a valid form of identification with the application.<sup>2</sup> Notaries public are prohibited by law from charging a fee for notarizing an absentee ballot application.

The application can be filed anytime during the calendar year of the election. The application deadline is 3:00 p.m. on election day.

Voters who qualify to vote absentee may also go to the office of the person in charge of the election, complete an application, and vote in the office. This should be done prior to election day.

In the event of confinement because of sickness or disability, a qualified voter may request an absentee ballot in writing, naming an authorized messenger who will deliver the ballot to the voter. An application for a ballot by authorized messenger must be received by the person in charge of the election before 3:00 p.m. the day of the election.

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<sup>1</sup> The following officers may administer an oath:

- Notary Publics
- Supreme Court judges, circuit judges, magistrates, clerks and deputy clerks of the circuit court, federal judges and federal magistrates
- County auditor, county treasurer, register of deeds and their deputies
- Mayors, town board presidents, municipal finance officers and deputies, and township clerks within their municipality or township
- Any commissioned officer in the military service

<sup>2</sup> The following are acceptable forms of identification:

- A South Dakota driver's license or nondriver identification card;
- A passport or an identification card, including a picture, issued by an agency of the United States government;
- A tribal identification card, including a picture; or
- A current student identification card, including a picture, issued by an accredited institution of higher education, including a university, college, or technical school, located within the State of South Dakota.

The voter must sign a statement on the absentee ballot envelope prior to returning the ballot. All voted ballots must be returned to the person in charge of the election in time to be delivered to the appropriate polling place prior to the closing of the polls.

Uniformed and overseas citizens<sup>3</sup> may submit an application or request for absentee ballot by fax or emailed image to the person in charge of the election. Absentee ballot requests from overseas citizens need not be notarized.

Absentee Ballot Applications are available online on the CAN or Secretary of State's websites, and a copy is attached to this Handbook. Absentee Ballots for primary or general elections should be sent to the County Auditor, who is the person in charge of primary and general elections. (A contact list with the County Auditor addresses is also attached to this Handbook.)

## **Part IV**

### **Information Specific to the 2006 Election**

The diocese will be conducting its Voter Registration and Absentee Voting Drive the weekends of:

**September 30    October 1**  
**October 7    8**

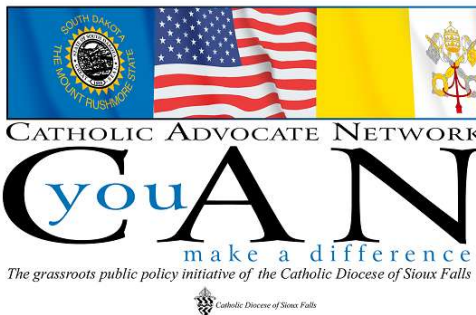
If your Parish is unable to conduct a drive on either of these weekends, then please schedule another weekend. However, keep in mind that the registration deadline is:

**October 23, 2006**

**The registration form or card MUST be received by the County Auditor by this deadline or the registrant will not be eligible to vote in this election.**

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<sup>3</sup> Citizens who are members of the Uniformed Services, merchant marine, commissioned corps of the Public Health Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the family members of the above and overseas citizens. Uniformed Services are defined as the U.S. Armed Forces (Navy, Army, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard), merchant marine, commissioned corps of the Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and family members of all of the above. Overseas citizens are defined as citizens who reside outside the United States.



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