

WASHINGTON STATE CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

PRINCIPLES FOR CHURCH INVOLVEMENT WITH POLITICAL INITIATIVES

The Church's participation in public affairs is not a threat to the political process or to genuine pluralism, but an affirmation of their importance. The Church recognizes the legitimate autonomy of government and the right of all, including the Church itself, to be heard in the foundation of public policy.

Principle 1: The Washington State Catholic Conference is the ordinary group responsible for Church endorsement of an initiative campaign.

The Washington State Catholic Conference, as the public policy arm of the Catholic Church in Washington State, has as its specific responsibility to represent the Catholic community on behalf of the bishops. Its board and the bishops of the state make concrete determinations as to Church support of particular campaigns. Ordinarily, the WSCC will communicate whether the Church officially endorses or wishes to participate in an initiative campaign.

Principle 2: Each diocesan bishop may decide to commit his diocese in support of an initiative campaign.

Certain circumstances may prevent the state Catholic Conference from taking a position on an initiative. In such cases, it will always be the bishop's prerogative to take a position on any issue. However, it is the expressed intent of all of the bishops of Washington State to act in concert whenever possible. It would be an exceptional case for one diocese to assume a position on a state-wide issue without the cooperation of the other two.

Principle 3: In the absence of a specific endorsement, pastors and other Church leaders should exercise caution in becoming involved in initiatives.

Every political season brings with it a host of initiative campaigns with natural appeal to organizations promoting family values, justice for those who are poor, or the preservation of life in all its forms. The determination of whether, when or to what extent the Church becomes involved in such campaigns is made with both practical and philosophical considerations in mind. While some initiatives may have lofty motives, they may be inadequate vehicles to accomplish their task. A bad initiative campaign can sometimes set back an agenda more than no action at all. Some issues are dealt with more effectively at the level of the legislature.

At times, the limited resources of the Church will need to be directed to one particular issue. That will require that other campaigns, though honorable in intent, go unendorsed. Local church leaders should become informed as to why a particular campaign has not been endorsed before committing the resources of their parish or group.

Principle 4: The Church may not always wish to assume an official position on a given issue. The absence of an endorsement should not be viewed as opposition.

As stated above, the particular circumstances surrounding an initiative may prevent the Church from assuming an official position. That should not be interpreted necessarily as a lack of support for such causes. Individual Catholics should become as involved as possible in statewide issues.

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