

will have a two-minute opening statement. The moderator flips a coin to determine who goes first.

- ♦ The moderator clearly states the topics and the exact amount of time allotted for each topic.
- ♦ The moderator announces that there will be time for a two or three minute closing statement by each candidate. Timeline and rules will be strictly followed and the session will end promptly at (a specific time).
- ♦ The moderator will ask the initial question, signaling the topic of interest. Each candidate may give a one-minute response, no rebuttal. The opposing candidate will have one minute for rebuttal. The order will be reversed at the end of each cycle. The moderator may either ask a follow up question or open it to the floor.
- ♦ Questions from the floor must be stated as a question in thirty seconds – no speeches! All questions must be asked respectfully without personal attacks. The moderator is the judge of the appropriateness of any question and is the timekeeper. The audience is asked to respect the moderator's decisions. Each candidate has one minute for response, and a thirty-second rebuttal. The moderator determines who answers first on each question.
- ♦ At the specified time, the facilitator asks each candidate to give his or her closing statement.
- ♦ At the end of the program the moderator thanks the candidates and wishes them luck.
- ♦ The moderator closes by reminding everyone of his or her privilege and duty to vote.

It is vitally important that all – audience, moderator and candidates – participate positively in the forum. There should be no outbursts or displays of inappropriate behavior. Basic belief in the dignity of each person must bring a disciplined civility to our public debate on issues and candidates.

Each campaign must take home all surplus materials. The parish cannot agree to take or distribute any. Candidates/campaigns are not permitted to sign up individuals for contributions or campaign volunteers at these events. If one candidate declined to participate, you must indicate to the audience that an invitation was extended and declined. Please have back up written documentation for this fact. If a candidate or campaign declined to attend, but asked that information be made available or a statement read, organizers should comply.

5. Conclusion

Political forums such as described are informative, important and can be enjoyable. Parishes are strongly encouraged to start a local tradition to be repeated every election year! It is at once a great way to meet current and aspiring government representatives, to involve and educate parishioners, and to offer a community service.



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Guidelines for Candidate Forums



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November 2003

Guidelines for Candidate Forums

Parish sponsored public forums on issues and/or candidates for elected public office assist our Catholic people, and the community at large, to more fully and responsibly participate in the democratic process. Hopefully, this involvement will set a positive example for all, particularly the young, in our communities.

When sponsoring or hosting political forums, the *Guidelines for Pastors and Parishes on Lobbying and Political Action* issued by the California Catholic Conference (CCC), should be followed to assure that there is no involvement in activities that could be interpreted as partisan. While the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the California Catholic Conference believe that Catholic involvement in the political process is vital, there should be no partisan political activity by organizations or individuals in an official capacity.

The appropriate office of your (arch) diocese, e.g., Justice & Peace or Social Action, and the CCC are available to assist you in any of the stages of this process:

1. Planning

- ◆ Gather a group of concerned parishioners who are committed to implementing this event in a non-partisan, and respectful manner.
- ◆ Confirm plans with appropriate local authorities, e.g., pastor, administrator, councils, boards, or committees.
- ◆ Inform the appropriate arch/diocesan office of your intentions; ask their advice.

- ◆ A forum such as this provides an excellent opportunity for ecumenical efforts with other churches and religious organizations, who share our interest in some of the issues. Check with other Church/community groups as to their interest and willingness to support this program.
- ◆ Through local discussion and consultation with the appropriate (arch) diocesan office select the issues, initiative and/or candidate races to address.
- ◆ Establish your policy on a fair display of campaign materials. Choose an appropriate place for the display.

2. Preparation

- ◆ Formally and in writing invite all candidates in the races or representatives of initiatives you have chosen. Assure them that the event will be fair, respectful and non-partisan. Explain the format. Assure them that they may choose to participate in person or through a representative.
- ◆ Arrange for quality publicity through your parish, other churches, and local media.
- ◆ Choose an articulate moderator and together develop leading questions to be addressed to each candidate or representative, who must be asked the same initial questions.
- ◆ Give equal time to all participants.
- ◆ Send the written rules and the leading questions to each campaign in advance.

Please contact your appropriate (arch) diocesan office for assistance in choosing topics and preparing questions. There should be a variety of significant topics.

The questions must be focused, fair and factual. Since many parishes cross district boundaries, the CCC or (arch) diocesan office can provide you with consultation on which races to choose for your area.

3. Event

- ◆ Arrange the room appropriately for the audience, and in a “debate format” for the participants.
- ◆ Register all attendees at the door, and distribute nametags.
- ◆ Clearly designate the campaign materials’ tables.
- ◆ Greet the candidates personally and hospitably.
- ◆ Welcome everyone publicly and open the event with an appropriate prayer.

The facilitator reads the following:

“Our parish is pleased to host this forum. We do so as a service to our members and this community. We engage in this activity with a commitment to fair and respectful public dialogue. We ask all assembled here to join us in this commitment. Please strictly observe the rules as I describe them. This parish community does not support or oppose any particular candidate. We wish to thank those candidates (and representatives) who are here presenting themselves for public office (or expressing their opinion of issues.)”

4. Rules

- ◆ The timelines should be adjusted to the number of candidates/races involved. Be realistic. Observe the rules and timelines strictly. Don’t let anyone dominate time. Each candidate