

World & Nation

# USCC updates guidelines on Church's lawful role in politics

By Liz Schevtchuk

Washington (NC) — The Internal Revenue Service code separates the Church from partisan politics, but not from the church-state questions that frequently arise before America goes to the polls.

As another presidential campaign heats up, attorneys for the U.S. Catholic Conference have again developed guidelines on what Church political involvement is and is not acceptable under the law.

As tax-exempt organizations, the USCC and some 28,000 other Catholic entities cannot be involved in partisan politics without risking loss of that tax-exempt status.

Under the IRS code, tax-exempt groups are forbidden to "participate in, or intervene in — including the publishing or distributing of statements — any political campaign on behalf of — or in opposition to — any candidate for public office."

Thus, while they are not banned from the public-policy arena during election cam-

paigns, Church groups must proceed carefully.

The latest guidelines, developed by USCC general counsel Mark E. Chopko, say that Church organizations "remain free to address issues of concern to them and to their membership, even when such issues are relevant to the campaign ... However, such discourse must focus on issues, not personalities."

"In addition," Chopko noted, "exempt organizations must pay due regard to appearances, since IRS will consider complaints of citizens and other groups that an exempt organization is engaged in impermissible political campaign activity. Unfortunately, what constitutes prohibited political campaign activity can be a close question ..."

Questions — and complaints — have arisen, usually during presidential election years.

Drawing widespread attention, Cardinal Humberto Medeiros of Boston declared in a pastoral letter released four days before the September 1980 Massachusetts primary that "those who make abortions possible by law

... and those who promote, defend and elect these same lawmakers cannot separate themselves totally from the guilt which accompanies this horrendous crime and deadly sin. If you are for true human freedom — and for life — you will follow your conscience when you vote. You will vote to save our children, 'born and unborn.'"

That same year, one Catholic press editor, in an editorial headlined "To the IRS — NUTS," criticized other candidates and suggested voters remember that Ronald Reagan was the only presidential candidate "clearly" opposed to abortion.

Not long after that, Abortion Rights Mobilization filed suit against the IRS, demanding it revoke the Catholic Church's tax exemption because of allegedly improper Church political activity.

In 1984, the Reagan campaign caused Catholic editors headaches when it submitted a paid political advertisement showing Pope John Paul II with President Reagan. Some editors, wary of the ad's content, refused to print it.

Another furor arose in 1984 when then-Archbishop John J. O'Connor of New York said publicly that "I don't see how a Catholic in conscience could vote for an individual explicitly expressing himself or herself as favoring abortion." The archbishop later said he had not meant endorsement or criticism of any particular candidates.

The USCC's Administrative Board, composed of bishops, in its statement "On Political Responsibility — Choices for the Future," which is updated every four years, acknowledged the confusion that can follow Church involvement in public affairs.

"Unfortunately, our efforts in this area are sometimes misunderstood," the bishops' statement said. "We bishops specifically do not seek the formation of a religious voting bloc; nor do we wish to instruct persons on how they should vote by endorsing or opposing candidates." Furthermore, they added, "we hope that voters will examine the position of candidates on the full range of issues as well as their personal integrity, philosophy and performance."

## Cardinal Dearden, leader at Vatican II, dies of cancer at 80

Detroit (NC) — Retired Cardinal John F. Dearden of Detroit, one of the key U.S. churchmen at the Second Vatican Council and first leader of the U.S. bishops in the turbulent post-conciliar years, died of cancer August 1. He was 80 years old. The funeral was scheduled for August 5.

Cardinal Dearden was particularly noted in Detroit for his efforts to promote social justice and to improve race relations and ecumenical and interreligious understanding.

Archbishop-Uscc May of St. Louis, present NCCB-USCC president, called Cardinal Dearden "in many ways the key figure in helping the Church in this country to implement the reforms of the Second Vatican Council and in guiding the bishops' conferences to the role they currently play in the life of the Church."

The archbishop of Detroit from 1958 until his retirement for health reasons in 1980, Cardinal Dearden emerged during the Second Vatican Council, 1962-65, as one of the central figures of that worldwide assembly of bishops.

He enjoyed the nickname "the unobtrusive liberal," which he gained at the council by his efforts to promote the council's agenda of Church reform and renewal without alienating the minority that opposed many of the council's decisions.

As a member of the council's doctrinal commission, he had a hand in drafting and revising two of the central documents of Vatican II: the "Dogmatic Constitution of the Church" and the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World."

When the U.S. bishops formed the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and U.S. Catholic Conference in 1966, they elected Cardinal Dearden as the first president of their new national organizations.

He repeatedly stressed communication and reconciliation as the path to follow during those years of tension over the meaning and implementation of the council's decrees.

In a 1966 address to the National Council of Catholic Women he called communication the first step in building community. "After all, the crisis of communication, of which we speak so much these days, is basically a problem of community," the cardinal said. "One of the first evidences of a truly living community is a readiness on the part of all who constitute it to be open to one another. There must be a free movement of ideas in every direction."

In his final presidential address to the NCCB in 1971 Cardinal Dearden called reorganization of national structures to promote collaborative efforts among the bishops one of the most important achievements of the NCCB's first five years.

Among other major achievements of those years he cited the development of closer relations between the U.S. bishops and other national hierarchies, the establishment of the Campaign for Human Development, a nationwide Catholic anti-poverty program, and the formation of what is now called the National Advisory Council — a body of bishops, priests, religious and laity who advise the NCCB-USCC on concerns facing the bishops.

The advisory council, he said, allows priests, religious and lay people "to collaborate with us in decision-making to a degree that has been impossible until now."

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