



why bother?

*In their 1996 document *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching*, the Bishops Conference of England and Wales said: 'All Catholic citizens need an informed "social conscience" that will enable them to identify and resist structures of injustice in their own society. This will especially be the case at the time of heightened political activity, for instance when [...] a general election is in prospect.'* (The Common Good, 41)

This session encourages your group to consider their involvement in the upcoming General Election. It will help them to reflect on their participation in the political process, and will challenge them to think about the implications of their faith on political decision-making.

This session is an introductory session to a range of election-themed resources, which examine various (though not exhaustive) themes from Catholic Social Teaching within the current political perspective. You can find all these resources available to download from www.whybother2010.org



introduction

This section of the session is aimed at encouraging your group members to discover ways in which politics affects their everyday lives. It begins by exploring their existing attitudes towards politics, and then uses case studies to give them the opportunity to consider the wider range of political issues affecting young Catholics.



ACTIVITY: AGREE OR DISAGREE SPECTRUM

This activity is a simple way to begin exploring your group's perceptions of the political world. It enables them to share opinion without necessarily needing to articulate their ideas. It also enables the group to discuss their thoughts with each other in a relaxed manner.



You will need: chalk or tape to mark the line
A set of the questions below

For this activity you need to mark a line (with chalk or tape) down the middle of the room. You then need to assign one end of the line as "agree" and the other end as "disagree". Explain to the group that they are going to hear a series of statements and they need to place themselves along the spectrum (line) according to how much they agree or disagree with the statement.

After each statement ask a few members of the group to explain why they stood where they did.

- All political parties stand for the same things.
- All politicians 'fiddle' their expenses.
- Politics have a big affect on my life.
- Voting is a waste of time.

It can help to set the tone for your evening if you say a group prayer together at the start. You might like to use a written or well-known prayer, such as the 'Our Father' which will allow those who are not used to praying to feel included.

- Politicians make a difference for the poor.
- By using my vote I can influence how the UK is run.
- By using my vote I can influence how my local area is run.
- Politics conflicts with my faith/beliefs.
- Only old people should be able to vote.
- I have as much political influence as my parents.
- My political views are important.
- It is important that everyone who is able to vote does so.
- I must have the same political views as my parents/carers.
- It makes no difference who I vote for.

You may wish to add some of your own statements once you have used the suggestions above.



ACTIVITY: IN ONE MINUTE...

**You will need: Flipchart paper (1 sheet per group)
Flipchart pens (at least 1 per group)
Blu tack or drawing pins**

The group should be split into small groups of no more than 10. Each group should then be given a piece of flipchart paper and some pens. In one minute (timed by the facilitator) each group needs to write down all the ways they can think that politics affects their lives.

To encourage the wider group to converse with people they don't know, you might like to choose a final trivial 'agree or disagree' question (such as 'pizza is nicer than burgers'), and split the group depending on where they stand on the spectrum.

The facilitator should now ask one or two representatives from each small group to come forward and explain to the whole group the ideas they have thought of and if possible attach their sheets to the wall. This (if time permits) can naturally lead on to a discussion about the issues raised.



DISCUSSION: CASE STUDIES

Following on from the activity above each small group should be given one of the case studies in Appendix A to read and discuss. The group should think about:

- What is happening in the situation?
- Can we relate to this case?
- Do we agree with what is being said?
- What could be done about the situation?

Each small group should then choose one or two representatives to feedback a summary of their case study and ideas. Once all the groups have given feedback the facilitator should ask:

- Does anyone still feel politics does not affect their life?
- Are there anymore ideas anyone would like to add to their 1 minute task sheets?
- What can young people do to influence politics?



This section of the session begins to encourage your group to make some decisions about their political priorities. It will help them to unpack what they think is important for the next government to tackle, by offering them the chance to develop (and argue for!) their own political agenda and examine what existing parties' policies are.



ACTIVITY / DISCUSSION: MAKE A DIFFERENCE

You will need: paper and pens

The idea of the game is for young people to develop an election manifesto based on three priorities they would address if they were the country's leader.

This game can be adapted depending on the size of the group. If the group is small then each individual should compile their own



It is important that this activity is not a party political broadcast! Groups don't take on the names of any existing political parties, in order to avoid confusion.

three priorities to present to the group. If the group is large then split it into small groups of equal size. Each group can then decide, after discussion, on their three priorities and choose one person from the group to act as leader and present the ideas to the wider group.

Suggested areas for young people to consider for their priorities are:

- Climate Change
- Family
- Immigration – Integrating society
- International Development
- Life and its value
- Tackling international debt
- UK youth poverty

When each individual/group has presented their manifesto everybody should vote. Each young person should be given a voting paper and they need to privately vote for the person they want to elect. Two members of the group should count the votes and the result be declared.

If time is available once the election is complete, have a discussion with the young people about why they voted the way they did and which were the most important priorities that were raised.



If possible, you should make note of these issues and refer to them as you work through this session and to follow up later – each area named above has further session plans and activities throughout the 'Why Bother?' resource pack



ACTIVITY: THE POLITICS QUIZ

You will need:

1 copy of Appendix B1 (faces sheet) per person

Enough copies of Appendices B2 (parties) and B3 (roles) for the group to be able to see one easily.

Pens

Hand out the faces sheet and pens to your group, and ask them whether they can you match the name to the face? They should write the answer they think underneath each picture.

Now read aloud the names of the political parties on Appendix B2, and spread out copies so that everybody can see one. Ask them if they can sort which party the face belongs to. Do the same with Appendix B3, and ask them whether they can match the role to the face.

Once everybody's had a go at the quiz, you can read out the answers from Appendix B4.



CREATIVITY: PRESENT THE PARTY

Using the briefing sheets in Appendix C, split into small groups and prepare a presentation on one of the main political parties, and their policies on some of the key issues. If you have a large group, you may want to give each party to two small groups, and see whether they focus on different areas of policy.

You might like to start sticking up the posters around the wall for the next activity whilst the groups are working on their party presentations. This will save you time later on!

If your group are finding it hard to convey the policies in a presentation, they might like to design a poster that summarizes some of the key issues from the party they are looking at.

The reflection element of this session involves looking at what Church and Faith have to do with the political process. How does Catholic identity inform our decision-making, and does the Church have anything relevant to say about our current political situation? Before you begin this section, you should read Appendix D, which is a short summary of Catholic Social Teaching on engagement with politics.



ACTIVITY: A RELEVANT VOICE?

You will need:

Printed out pictures from Appendix E

Printed out quotes from Appendix F, stuck onto the back of the relevant picture with blu-tack

Blu-tack, to stick quotes onto the reverse of relevant pictures, and then to stick pictures on the wall

Begin by asking your group to take a look at the pictures that are stuck up around the room. Ask them to consider:

Which of these people/issues do you think what the Church has to say is most relevant to?

and to go and stand next to the image that they have chosen. If you have time, ask the group to explain why they have chosen this particular image. Now ask them:

Who would you be most surprised to hear the Church speaking positively about?

Again, they should stand next to the image that they have chosen (they might stay in the same place). Again, a chance to feed back enables conversation to flow between the group.

Once each person has had a chance to share their opinion, ask them one at a time to take the image off the wall and read aloud the quote on the reverse of the image. How might this demonstrate that the Church is willing to engage with a wide variety of social issues?

Once you have looked at all the different quotes, ask for them to be stuck on the wall, and as a final exercise, ask the group to go and stand next to the quote that they would most like to see in a political manifesto. Again, they should be willing to explain their decision.



PRAYER: PART OF THE BODY

You will need:

A copy of the Bible - an easy-to-understand translation (such as Goodnews, or New Living Translation)

A packet of 'Celebrations' chocolates or something similar, with a variety of choices

Ask the group to form a circle, and explain that you are going to have an opportunity to reflect on all that you've discussed in a moment of prayer. Thank them for their participation in the session so far, and say that to celebrate their participation, you have a variety of chocolates to choose from. Ask them to take a chocolate, but not to eat it until you say so.

Pass around the box (you might need to keep hold of it, so people don't grab a handful!), and make sure everybody has had a chance to choose. Ask them to put their chocolate on the floor in front of them.

Explain that each person has chosen a different chocolate because they have different tastes and different preferences. If there wasn't a variety of chocolates, the packet wouldn't suit everybody, but because there is variety, it makes for a better present.

Ask one of the group to read 1 Corinthians 12:14-27.



Playing some gentle background music, dimming the lights and moving to a different space can all help maintain a prayerful atmosphere if your group struggle to focus during quieter times.



You can abbreviate the Bible reading to verses 14-20 if you think the passage is too long for your group.

Say that St Paul here is trying to describe why each of us is different, yet indispensable. Like the different chocolates, we each have a unique contribution to make - whether we're aware of it or not. A Snickers bar wouldn't be much of a Snickers bar if it tried to lose all its peanuts just because the Kit Kat didn't have any. In the same way, we should recognise the unique combination of gifts that each one of us brings to life.



Making the sign of the cross, finishing with the 'Glory Be' or saying a resounding 'Amen' can help your group know when the prayer is over, and avoids any awkwardness

Invite the group to unwrap their chocolate, and let it melt in their mouths. During the time it takes for the chocolate to melt, ask them to consider what unique gift they bring to life - no matter how small. Invite them to say thankyou to God for their gifts, and ask for him to use them more.

Once everybody has had their chocolate, tie the prayer into the session more closely, by reminding the group that in the same way that the box of chocolates would be incomplete without the full range of chocolates, so society's political process isn't complete without the engagement of each individual. Conclude your quiet time with a prayer - either a formal prayer that the group are familiar with, or another prayer which you can make up if you feel confident to do so.

respond



DISCUSSION: HOW TO BE BOTHERED

Gather your group together, and ask them to think of ways in which they can be involved with making a difference in the political process, on the basis of what you've looked at through this session. You might like to have a sheet of flipchart, or some post-it notes available, so that people can write their ideas down in a central space. Familiarise yourself with the following key points, and if there are some that remain unspoken, you might want to offer them as examples to compliment those already given by the group.



If your group are finding it difficult to share ideas in the wider group, break them into 2's for a minute, and ask them to chat with their partner. Often, they'll have much more confidence to share with one other person than with the whole group.

Engagement as an individual or a group

Help: Do you know someone – or a group of people – who you can support? Is there any existing community action that you can get involved in?

Tell: How can you raise awareness of these issues? What can you do in your school, parish or community get others thinking about these issues?

Stand-up for: How can you stand in solidarity with others? What protest can I make? How can your school, parish or community protect the equal value of all people? What can you do to help this happen?

Engaging with the Political Process: Before and During the Election

Ask: Be prepared with a question for a hustings, if a candidate knocks on your door or is campaigning on the streets of your locality. Make note of a question based on this session.

Turn up: When there are community meetings or consultations to discuss local issues, turn up. Local authorities are obliged to take note of the opinions of local people in local decision making – have your voice heard and make your local area more just.

Persuade: Not old enough to vote yet? Nag others – make sure people who can vote are aware of the issues that matter and the consequences of inaction or a misguided vote.

Vote: Make sure you are registered, know when polling day is and cast your vote.

Hold your MP to account!

Getting involved in the General Election is only the first step in political engagement. You also need to ensure that the MPs you elect at the General Election are held to account for what they do on your behalf in Parliament. And this is not something to be done only once every five years! Real accountability requires a commitment to regular and ongoing dialogue.

Fortunately, there's a resource available to help you do this. Please consider whether your group (or your church or school) could join the MP Accountability Network.

Visit www.church-poverty.org.uk/2010election to find out more about the network and sign up – it's free!

Groups who are members of the Network make a commitment to meet regularly with their MP. You'd need to ask all your PPCs to pledge that if they're elected, they will meet with you again six weeks after the election, and then again on a regular, ongoing basis in future.

As a member of the Network, you'll receive a briefing three times a year to help you continue your engagement with your MP. Each briefing will include background information and suggested questions to help you explore particular issues with your MP. The content will be supplied by Church Action on Poverty, members of the livesimply youth network, and other partners of the MP Accountability Network.

Ongoing Engagement with the Political Process

Keep turning up: This is just the start, keep engaged, keep turning up and keep asking questions.

Someone has to keep the politicians true to their promises and commitments: It may as well be you

Write: Let your representative know your concerns whenever new legislation that poses a threat to the common good.

Meet: Turn up for your Member of Parliament's surgery and make your point face-to-face.

Organise: Whether through Facebook, a petition, demonstrations or direct action then promote your concerns alongside other likeminded souls.

Stand: Be prepared to stand for election at any level of government in order to draw attention to the need for a fairer world. (As a general guide if you can vote you can be a candidate)

Invent: There is little need to stick to the standard methods of political engagement – be creative and use your own skills to get your views heard or make your protests.

Join: Find a party the aims of whom you broadly concur with and join – you can still campaign for policy change from the inside on those points you are less sure of.

Election 2010 Resource Writing Group



www.paxchristi.org.uk



www.ycwimpact.com



www.cafod.org.uk



www.salesians.org.uk



www.fmverbumdei.com/uk/



www.boscovolunteeraction.co.uk