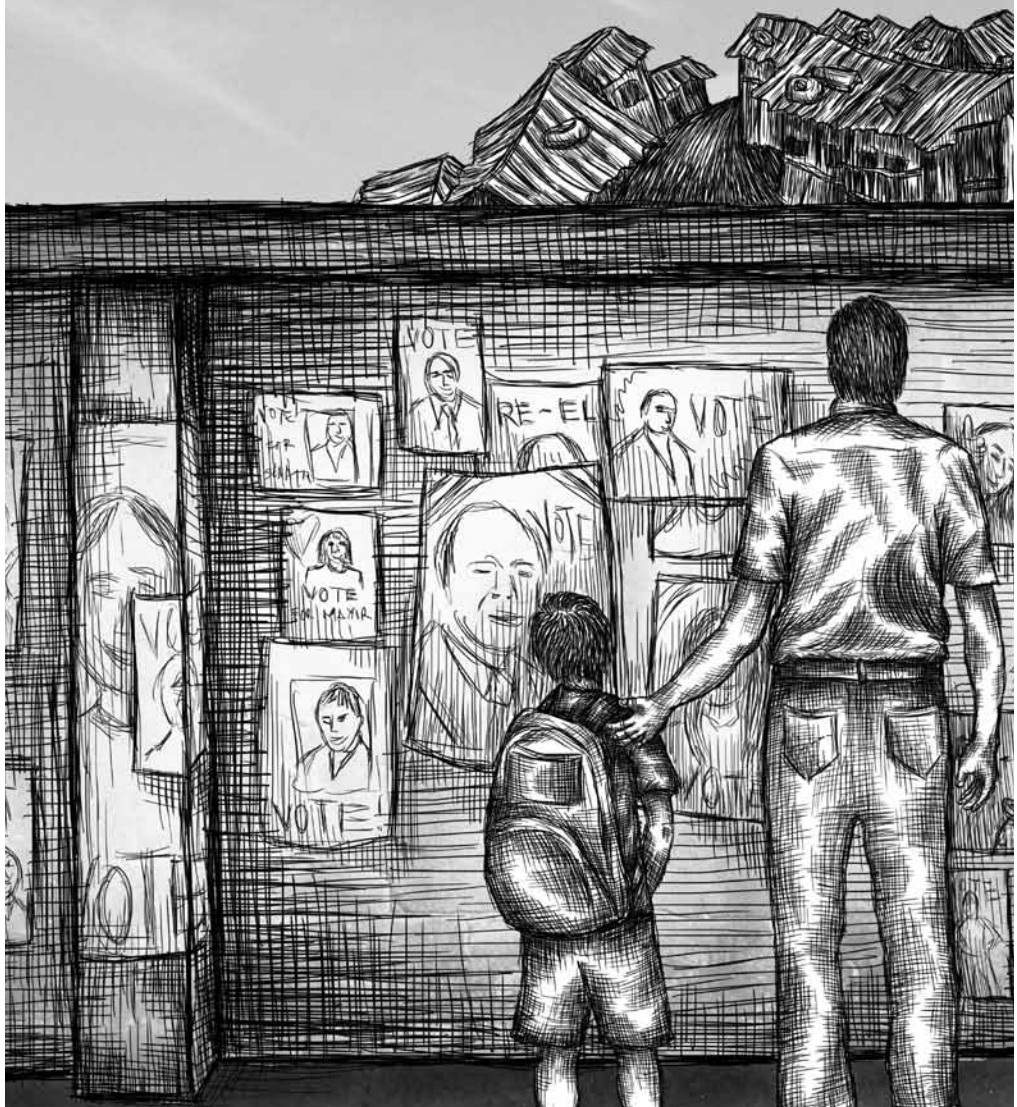


CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING ON
Political Participation





Introduction

To participate in politics is hardly new for Christians. Jesus himself engaged in politics when he denounced the hypocritical leaders of his time. When he started preaching, he knew that he was sent to announce freedom to captives, healing to the sick, and liberation to the poor. The injustices and miseries suffered by these unfortunate people were by-products of rampant exploitation by those who wielded power at that time. Bringing the Good News to the excluded also meant confronting the powerful and engaging in the political life of the community.

Following Jesus, we are called to do the same. Political participation, however, does not have a “good name” in the Christian tradition. On the one hand, there were popes and bishops who connived with kings and queens not only to “civilize and evangelize” but also to exploit and subjugate the colonies. Even in our times, Christian leaders collude with ruthless politicians in the shameless and endless schemes of political corruption. This makes well-meaning Christians avoid politics as it is perceived to be a dirty game.

On the other hand, there have been some devout Christians who have openly advocated violent means to bring down corrupt leaders and rulers. Political participation in this manner never found favor with some people, however, because such an approach was and is not the way of Jesus. Jesus, they say, never advocated violence. He brought forgiveness and peace.

Is there another alternative? This is an important question because non-involvement is not an option. The Christian faith has a saving

dimension. The message of Jesus proclaims salvation. And Christians, in their following of Jesus, need to do the same. They are not the only ones who bring good news but they should also do as Jesus did. Jesus wanted us to announce the Good News in season and out of season. If we fence-sit and do not participate, we also allow the defenseless victims of power to be “led to the slaughter” while the rest of us watch them die.

Political participation, then, is an essential element in our mission as Christians. What this concretely means in our times shall be the topic of this module.

General Objectives

At the end of this module, participants will be able to:

1. Clarify the meaning of politics and political participation;
2. Gain a better understanding of the methods employed in political participation and in empowering the community or society;
3. Understand the current political situation and to recognize the barriers to participation that they can mitigate;
4. Reflect on the principles of the social teaching of the Church that may guide Christians in their political participation; and
5. Identify concrete ways to meaningfully participate in politics.

Contents

The module is divided into six (6) parts. Part I dwells on the meaning of political participation. It also presents the significance of political participation in the development of persons and society. Included in this part are the forms or methods for its realization. Part II explores some of the obstacles that people experience in actively participating in politics. Part III elucidates the role of the Church and the basic principles and tasks of Christian involvement in the political sphere. Part IV identifies what Christians can do to actively participate in the political tasks towards the attainment of the common good. In Part V, the key points of the module are summarized. Part VI aims to briefly evaluate the module.

Outline

- I. What is Political Participation?
- II. Obstacles to Political Participation
- III. Principles from the Social Teaching of the Church
- IV. Political Participation on the Ground
- V. Summary
- VI. Evaluation

Time-Frame

It is estimated that a total of 8 hours is needed to finish the module and its various activities.

Participants

Anyone with an interest in the issue of Christian participation in politics may join the seminar. To effectively facilitate the flow of activities, however, it is advisable to limit participants to 30 for every session.

The Seminar-Workshop

WHAT IS POLITICAL PARTICIPATION?

Politics

► Activity: “Politics and Participation”

OBJECTIVE: To enable the participants to express their understanding of the words *politics* and *participation*, and to cite ways to put these into practice within their communities

TOOLS: metacards, Pentel pens, masking tape

METHOD: metacards

TIME: 10 minutes

STEPS:

1. Provide each participant with 2 metacards and a Pentel pen.
2. Give the instructions:
 - a. Each participant will think about their answers to the following questions:
 - In one or two words, what comes to mind when you hear the word *politics*?

- In one or two words, what comes to mind when you hear the word *participation*?
 - b. The participants will write their answers to each question on each of the metacards.
3. Draw two columns on the board. Write the word *politics* as column heading on the left and the word *participation* as heading on the right.
 4. Tape the metacards with responses on the appropriate columns.
 5. Group answers that are similar.

Reminder to the Facilitator: Process first the answers under the politics column.

Many words related to *politics* will likely be given, some of which would be:

- Government
- Politicians (senators, *barangay* captain/chairman/head, congressman or congresswoman, etc.)
- Guns, goons and gold
- Political dynasty
- Power

Gaining a Deeper Insight

Definition of Terms

The word *politics* comes from the Greek “*polis*” (city-state)—a social structure in Greece some hundred years before the time of Jesus. The *polis* is an ideal community where all the free citizens are actively engaged in the deliberation and governance of their political body. In the *polis*, everyone was considered equal and each voice was heard. It is this ideal context that is brought to mind when we talk about politics today.

Political governance is the art or science of management, organization and leadership. This refers to planning, guiding, influencing and resolving social issues, including contradictions in various ways. Also included here is the management of the resources of society such as taxes, public lands, structures and others such that



citizens are able to receive basic services and benefits due them for healthy and sustainable living and to enable them to live in dignity.

Politics encompasses many things. Often, it underlies the many problems of the world stemming from political leadership, voters, people and issues in any community or country. A political scientist defines politics as “who gets what, when and how” (Harold Lasswell).

Quite often, many of us ordinarily consider politics in a negative way, like patronage politics, dynasty of political clans, graft and corruption—all familiar features of politics in Philippines. Indeed, in every province or city, political clans are easily identifiable. For instance, Olongapo is always associated with Gordon; Camarines Sur with Villafuerte; San Juan with Estrada; Laguna with Ejercito; Davao with Duterte; Zamboanga with Lobregat, to cite a few examples. Though there is no assurance that they will win in an election, these “political names” exert powerful influence in their respective territories. Most of these people have amassed wealth through various means and are prominently involved in interlocking economic and political interests.

It is possible that the word *participation* will evoke relatively fewer terms than *politics*. They will likely refer to its definitions and associations like “taking part,” “voting” or “taking a share,” and others.

Participation is often related to getting involved or taking a part in a task or activity from its conception, implementation to evaluation. *Participation* may take various forms—from active participation in a community association; networking, consultation, membership in a barangay committee; volunteering in a communal task, fund-raising or civic project, and so on.

Political Participation

From the above exercise, we can surmise that political participation refers to people’s involvement in governance, in organization and leadership, and in community activities. Most often, it refers to actions of individuals or groups as they take part in activities related to government affairs. However, doing seemingly simple tasks with the larger community in mind is also a political act.

► Activity: “How political are you?”

OBJECTIVE: To enable the participants to identify the indicators or aspects of political participation

TOOLS: metacards, Pentel pens, masking tape

METHODOLOGY: Metacards

TIME: 20 minutes

The following are written on each of the metacards:

- Volunteering in the local government like in Lupong Tagapamayapa
- Singing in a videoke party
- Reading newspapers
- Watching TV or listening to the radio for news
- Voting in the national or local elections
- Participating in a poll watch organization

- Being a poll watcher
- Commenting on articles about socio-political issues in the Internet
- Writing opinion pieces in the papers
- Avoiding entering or shopping in malls responsible for cutting down trees, violating the zoning ordinance, etc.
- Picking up small pieces of trash and putting them in proper containers
- Using the pedestrian lane and following traffic rules
- Helping to manage traffic
- Volunteering to serve as treasurer of a civic organization
- Keeping abreast of current events
- Sharing important news on Facebook
- Being gender sensitive
- Recognizing and respecting other political beliefs
- Paying taxes
- Being a public school teacher
- Being vegetarian and involved in advocating animal rights and welfare
- Participating in meaningful protest actions in community and school
- Joining political rallies to advocate a cause
- Supporting a student council's fund-raising projects by buying their displayed products
- Participating in the barangay's basketball league
- Calling or initiating barangay meetings
- Becoming Hermano Mayor during fiestas
- Participating in one's barangay's project, like the "Cleaning and Greening" of parks and streams
- Courageously volunteering to take the witness stand for a crime witnessed
- Informing authorities of any anomaly by government officials or public servants
- Participating in the boycott movement during an election
- Taking custody of a rape victim
- Feeding members of the NPA
- Helping wounded soldiers

STEPS:

1. Provide each participant with one metacard with one of the above labels.
2. Designate one side of the room for the “Agree” group and the other side for the “Disagree” group.
3. If a participant thinks that what is on his metacard connotes political participation, he goes to the “Agree” side of the room.
4. If a participant thinks that what is on her metacard is not related to political participation, she goes to the “Disagree” side.
5. As you read each activity aloud, ask the participants to explain their position (agree or disagree) about it.

Reminder to the Facilitator: To ensure a lively discussion, participants may be prodded to defend their answers particularly on the more controversial examples of involvement. In this way, the participants will have a deeper appreciation of the subject.

► **Processing**

The participants may have different opinions. Most of them may look at political participation as those activities related to government concerns. Others might consider that doing civic-oriented tasks like picking up small trash or performing duties like paying taxes may also constitute political participation.



Gaining a Deeper Insight

What it Means to be Politically Active

Participation in politics is not limited to voting or campaigning during the election period. Networking, consultation and immersion in the day-to-day life of citizens are also considered activities showing

political participation. In general, political participation refers to the right and responsibility of citizens to govern their own lives. It includes the right to speak out and assemble, to take part in public affairs, to run for public office at all levels, monitor government processes, protest against unjust laws, educate people on social issues, and many others.

There are different categories, levels of participation and tasks related to political involvement. The table below provides the gist of how citizens may participate in politics.

CATEGORY	PARTICIPATION	CONCRETE TASKS
Voting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most popular political role of ordinary people • deeper political education on active and responsible voting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • voting in the local and national election; “Go Out and Vote” campaign; voter’s registration and voter’s education campaign • monitoring election processes and performance among elected officials in both local and national levels
Getting one’s candidate or oneself elected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strategic plan to influence the key political players by supporting a candidate; or running for an elective position in the government • formation, strengthening and participation in political parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leading the campaign for a candidate, political strategizing, formation of machinery for the election platform • putting into practice the principles of good governance in party politics; responding to social and political challenges; strengthen political parties in order to ensure effective democratic institutions

CATEGORY	PARTICIPATION	CONCRETE TASKS
Doing civic Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formation of democratic organizations or membership in political groups in the community • assistance to local government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • membership in civic groups with political, economic, cultural and ecological agenda; joining Church groups on social concerns • monitoring the use of public funds; volunteering in the delivery of basic services; lobbying for the passing of laws; policy advocacy to advance political and economic reforms
Joining cause-oriented organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • this aims to advance the socio-economic or political interest of the community and to influence the process of development • advancing reforms for development, active participation, and people's rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in education on various issues; solidarity with valid and legitimate protest issues in the form of petition-signing, demonstrations and rallies, boycott of products destructive to the environment, etc. • participation in political education on good governance, formation of people's party, responsible voting and other related matters.

Participation in politics happens in various fields and sites. It could happen at home, in one's community, in the local government, and in the national level.

Conditions change continually. The people or groups may express their collective "dreams and aspirations" and realize these through a process of social transformation. For this to happen, citizens have to be aware of issues and participate conscientiously in the civic life of the community and the nation.

Why is there a need to participate in politics?

Reasons for Political Participation

To an ordinary citizen who is content with a well-paying job and a relatively peaceful life, untroubled by the woes and misery of other people, participation in political affairs may not be quite appealing. With corrupt politics as part of everyday experience, one often hears these questions coming from ordinary people:

- Why would you run as Barangay Captain if you don't have the money to buy votes?
- Why do you have to vote when you know that only the influential and powerful can win?
- Why should you pay taxes when you know that it will only be embezzled by people in the government?

These questions tend to deepen the attitude of frustration and apathy among citizens and de-motivate them from asserting their right to participate in political affairs. Why do some people refuse to participate in political life?

For now, let us mention three reasons: (a) prevalence of corrupt practices; (b) apathy or indifference; (c) tyrannical system of governance.

First, the reasons referred to above are prevalent in Philippine politics; such a situation can hardly entice someone to join political activities.

Second, some people are totally indifferent to the plight of others, especially the poor. Their self-sufficient lives and self-centeredness do not lead them to work for the common good.

Third, in situations of tyranny and dictatorship, many people refuse to participate either as a sign of protest or as a strategy for survival. For instance, they boycott elections, refuse to pay taxes and practice civil disobedience as a courageous political act. We will discuss this some more in the next section.

But why do some people actively participate in politics? Let us mention three reasons: (a) self-fulfillment; (b) self-interest; (c) sense of responsibility.

First, there are people who find joy and fulfillment in public life. In politics, one establishes friendships and new connections. Others are thrilled about the political activity itself. They find it challenging to be of service to others.

Second, people join politics out of self-interest. Central to politics is the use or management of power, that is, the control of resources and people for the good of society. However, some politicians use power for their own personal agenda and economic gains. The Philippine political scene is rife with scandals revolving around graft and corruption practices; disbursement of pork barrel funds and kickbacks for personal use; rampant cronyism; detrimental effects of political dynasties, and many others. Unfortunately traditional politicians, aptly referred to as *trapos*, are still very much in a position to monopolize resources and influence and to manipulate power for their own selfish ends.



Third, there are people who commit themselves to politics out of a sense of responsibility and duty. In whatever level of participation they are involved, they know an active citizenry is needed for the whole society to develop. Without an active citizenry, society crumbles. It is not absolutely accurate that the people are without power. Power resides in the people, but is often suppressed, dispersed, divided, concealed and unused.

It is said that politics is governance comprising of the claim-making role of citizens, of the duty-bearing government whose primary role is to provide for the basic needs of citizens, and the social enablers—like civil society organizations—whose role is to help to bridge the gap between the two or to build consensus for the welfare of all. But when the citizenry is silent, inactive and indifferent, the culture of governance is overpowered by the culture of impunity.

How long will the people remain in the margins of power? How can citizens reclaim power that is rightfully theirs? When people start to appreciate the use of this power and wield it for the collective good, a new social consensus is being achieved and a more democratic political culture is being shaped.

Let us explore next the deeper implications and obstacles should people decide to actively participate in politics.

OBSTACLES TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

► Activity: “Discover the Barrier”

OBJECTIVE: To enable participants to identify the barriers that prevent people from actively participating in politics and to recognize such gap in their own attitudes and behaviors given current political realities

TOOLS: 5 sheets of manila paper, 5 Pentel pens, masking tape

TIME: 30 minutes

STEPS:

1. Form five groups of 6 participants each.
2. Each group will discuss among themselves a guide question: “What could be the causes for the timid and hesitant participation in civic and social action among ordinary people at family, community and country levels?”
3. Each group lists down the probable causes and classify them according to the following categories: political, economic, cultural and religious.
4. Each group will prepare their presentation using the matrix below:

	Family	Community	Country
Economic			
Cultural			
Religious			
Political			

5. Groups take turns presenting the highlights of their discussion during the plenary session.

► Processing

The following are possible responses from the participants:

	Family	Community	Country
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty
Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of compassion • Lack of patience • Anger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservative or traditional orientation • Discrimination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abuse of power
Religious	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservative orientation • Non-involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservative orientation • Limited to literal understanding of the Bible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservative orientation • Limited to literal understanding of the Bible
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of appreciation • Dynasty/Clan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anomalies • Graft and corruption • “Trapo”

Gaining a Deeper Insight

The first set of obstacles is economic. When people are literally hungry and very poor, it is difficult for them to enter and be responsibly involved in the political arena. If they are present in political rallies,



many are recipients of political favor and or have been herded to the venue. In these conditions, people can hardly be active and responsible participants in a politically liberating experience.

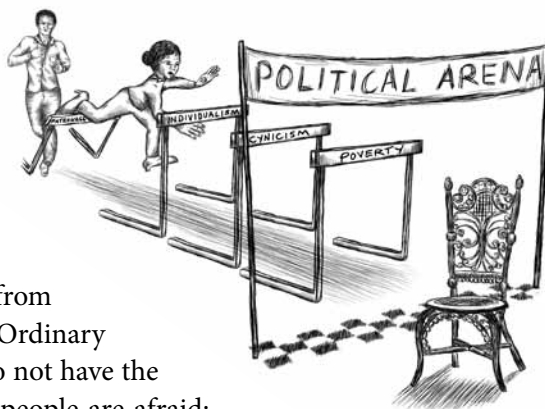
During elections, for instance, what will be the most decisive factor in

choosing a candidate? Shall people choose a candidates based on real principles or bribe money?

Another factor is cultural. There is the traditional mindset that only the popular, the educated, the rich and the powerful can join the political race and win. The rest psychologically and culturally feel unworthy as they do not belong to prominent families. And those belonging to familiar political clans or popular actors or actresses feel they have a duty to run for office and ‘serve the people.’

Religion can also be an obstacle to political participation. For instance, there is a prevalent belief that prayer is the only solution to all our problems; that politics is dirty and we better leave it to “worldly people.” Politics is “too worldly” and has nothing to do with our spiritual salvation.

The obstacles to political participation are not limited to structural causes and differences in beliefs and ideologies. There are also subjective or psychological obstacles which prevent people from participating in politics. Ordinary citizens may feel they do not have the capacity to lead. Other people are afraid; some are just indifferent.



What can we do to remove these blocks and transform such a way of thinking? Bringing these out into the open and discussing them together might help encourage people to discover the actual situation, to realize one’s duty and capacity, and to engage favorably in active citizenship or political participation.

Reminder to the Facilitator: Starting from their responses and personal experiences, the facilitator may lead the participants to concretely identify the most prevalent/prominent reasons for non-participation in the local community.

If the Catholic Christian needs to participate in politics, what are the basic principles of this involvement?

THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF THE CHURCH ON POLITICS

► Activity: “Paint me a Portrait”: The Messiah in Society

OBJECTIVE: To enable the participants to express their views on the messianic calling of Jesus

METHOD: Group drawing

MATERIALS: manila paper, Pentel pen, coloring pens, crayons, sheets of paper in different colors, glue or paste

TIME: 10 minutes

STEPS:

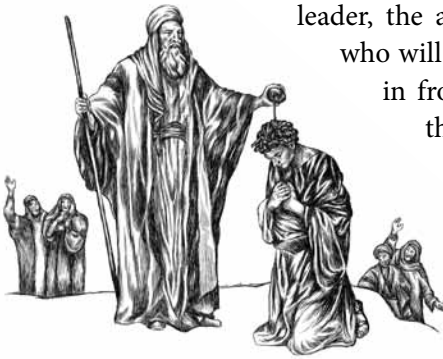
1. Divide the participants into groups of five. Instruct them to paint a portrait of “Jesus the Messiah.” They can use any of the materials provided.
2. The groups need to explain why they have portrayed Jesus in the way they have. Is there a biblical passage or image to support their portrait?
3. Depending on their drawing, the groups will have different explanations. Examples of responses can range from “a king with robes and sceptre” to the “anointed one” or the “suffering servant” and all images in between.
4. The facilitator jots them on the board and attempts to highlight the contrast between the “king-perspective” from the “servant-perspective.”
5. After all the reports, the facilitator asks the participants what they have learned about the image of Jesus being the Messiah from the presentations.

Gaining a Deeper Insight

The Old Testament

The anticipation of the coming of the “messiah” is very ancient in Jewish culture. It has been a basic belief of traditional Judaism. The term *messiah* did not originally mean “savior” who dies for us, in order to liberate us from our sins. It was only the Christians who introduced such an idea.

For the Jews, the messiah was the anointed political leader that descended from King David. When Jesus was met with praises while riding on a donkey as he entered Jerusalem, the people were shouting “Hosanna to the Son of David” (Mt 21: 1–11). What was in their minds was that messiah.



The Jews had been waiting for a great military leader, the anointed one, the righteous judge who will re-establish the greatness of Israel in front of all peoples. He will rebuild the Temple and re-establish Jewish worship. He will gather all the scattered children of Israel and establish God’s rule forever as Isaiah has long ago prophesied.

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people ... He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth. (Is 11: 10–12)

David was considered the greatest of Israel’s kings. God promised that a descendant of David shall rule Israel forever (Psalm 132: 11–13).

But many of Israel’s rulers were either weak or wicked. In the context of this oppression and dissatisfaction with their rulers, there emerged among the Jews a longing for a “Messiah” — a hope for a real leader who “will govern with wisdom and act in justice;” a true shepherd of the people; a bringer of peace (CSDC, 377–78). It is in this

political context that Jesus came. People saw in Jesus God's Messiah, the one who will liberate them from oppression.

The New Testament

But what kind of Messiah was Jesus?

First, Jesus denounced the hypocritical and oppressive leaders of the church and society at the time—including the scribes and teachers of the law. Thus, it can also be said that his death is the consequence of his 'politics.'

Second, Jesus did not also give in to the prodding of the Zealots to establish the Kingdom by force and violence (Mk 12: 3–17).

Instead, he preached to his disciples; his was a kingdom of humility and compassion (Mk 10: 45). In order to prove this, he led them to Jerusalem where he was crucified.

Third, Jesus did not only promise a "spiritual" community at the end of time. The Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed is where God's love and justice reign in the whole of society—in the Church and in the fields of economy, culture and politics. Being his followers, we are called by Jesus to help him build his Kingdom "in the world."

Politics is an important part of our human existence. The human person is a social being—living, working, and interacting within a social group. Thus, every person in society is the foundation and purpose of politics. Because of this, politics has moral and spiritual dimensions. The main purpose of political life is to always search for the common good. It seeks to defend and promote social justice and service. Political action also aims to empower people, especially the poor and marginalized sectors of society.

Vatican II and Beyond

Vatican II continues to affirm the way of Jesus in relation to politics. *Gaudium et Spes* recognizes a notion of political leadership based on



human rights, the right to organize and the freedom of expression, active participation of the people, and others. It calls on all the leaders and citizens to exercise their respective rights in order to attain the common good. This includes the “good of all and every individual” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38). This is the “fullness of social life that is given to everyone, every home, and organizations, the ability to achieve a whole and fruitful realization” (GS, 74). Hence, the need to concentrate on the political task not only for the realization of individual interest, or the family, social class or a political party but the realization of the common good for all.

In 1971, the Synod of Bishops issued *Justice in the World* which states that “action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel” (JW, 6). The word “constitutive” is crucial and controversial. It means “essential.” This means that when the Church is not doing something to promote justice or is not involved in the transformation of economics, politics and culture, it is not doing its work of preaching the Gospel. Later, the Church also endorsed the kind of democracy that respects human dignity, participation in choosing leaders, power sharing, and others (cf. CSDC 406–416).

► **Activity: “Priests in politics?”: Basic Principles on the Christian Participation in Politics**

OBJECTIVE: To enable participants to discern the basic principles and criteria for the Church’s involvement in political affairs

METHOD: Debate

TIME: 40 minutes

STEPS:

1. Divide the participants into 2 camps to represent the affirmative and negative positions, respectively, on this question: “Is it good for priests to hold elected positions in order to better help the community?”

2. Each group shall chose two debaters, the first to present their main points, the second to lead the rebuttal of the other group's arguments.
3. The groups meet and explore ideas to support their respective positions. From this discussion, the speakers will compose their main points.
4. Each speaker from both sides has 8 minutes to present their main points.
5. After the two presenters, the second set of speakers will give their rebuttals.

► **Processing**

1. Summarize the main points made by the debaters.
2. Try to highlight the different circumstances that produce these different positions (for instance, a priest might be forced to run since there is no one else in the local community who can stand up to the threats posed by a politician; or his reason is to be able to help the poor through the possibility of re-directing social services to them, etc.).
3. The facilitator does not have to resolve the issue. Let the participants judge it by using the principles below. Go back to these reasons after explaining the guiding principles.

Gaining a Deeper Insight

To understand the foundations of the Church's action in the political field and to direct us in our future initiatives, it would be helpful to consider the following basic principles and guidelines for political participation:

Integral Evangelization

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) insists in their Statement entitled *Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Politics* (1997) that it is part of our Christian mission to proclaim the Gospel by giving special attention to the fight for justice, to discernment and humility in the field of politics. In many documents of the Church, this is

called “integral evangelization.” It considers the person in his/her totality. Should the Good News be preached, this is for the salvation of the whole person (not only of the soul) and for all peoples (not only for a few).

Like politics, the Church also seeks the path of common good. The Church, thus, takes a prophetic stand against political policies and positions detrimental to some groups of people, particularly the poor.

This would need the formation of structures where people and their leaders freely participate and share in the responsibility (*Centesimus Annus*, 46) towards empowerment of citizens. These structures are needed so that people can take part in the decision-making processes, and enjoy equality in the field of politics, economy and democratic participation (PCP II, 326).

Reminder to the Facilitator: Give examples of “structures” that will encourage and enable people’s participation.

The Church as Teacher and Learner

As principal messenger of the Gospel, the Church serves as both teacher and learner. As teacher, the Church guides the people towards a life of justice, peace and development. As learner, it is willing to draw lessons from experience as it listens to the voice of the people from all classes, genders, cultures, and regardless of age or color.

As teacher, for instance, the church guides the people in understanding the different systems of governance. As learner, it pays close attention to people’s concrete experiences on how these systems impact on their lives, especially in the spheres of politics, economics and culture. The decision, however, is always supported by access to sufficient and substantial information, and done through a process of consensus building.

Separation of Church and State

The Church recognizes its autonomy from the State. However, many understand this to mean that the Church should not be involved in political issues, or with politicians and public policies. This is not the meaning of the separation of Church and State.

What really is the meaning of this separation? There are three main ideas:

- a. The State has no official religion;
- b. The State should not discriminate against any religion;
- c. The Church should not control or dominate any religious group, the police or armed unit of the State.

The principle of the separation of Church and State is a reaction to some medieval arrangement of church-sponsored religions or a State persecution of some undesirable religions. This modern principle intends to respect the autonomous roles of both Church and State in society.

In order to respect the autonomy of the Church, the State shall not establish one religion as the religion of the State. It shall not favor one religion over the other. It shall foster the freedom of all religious beliefs and should not interfere with their practices unless these actions become detrimental to public order. For instance, unless a religious group starts violating the lives and basic freedom of its members, the State should leave it free to practice according to their beliefs.



In order to respect the autonomy of the State, the Church prohibits its ministers and priests to run for public office or, if they do, they should resign from their ministry as priests. This is also done in order to guard the Church's role as agent of unity as exemplified in a community of different political persuasions.

This does not mean, however, that the Church and its ministers cannot take a stand on social, economic and political issues affecting the welfare of the people. And, if taking sides on these issues necessitates choosing one candidate over another, the Church can encourage its members to pursue their own options to address the situation according



"ACTION ON BEHALF OF JUSTICE AND PARTICIPATION IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD FULLY APPEAR TO US AS A CONSTITUTIVE DIMENSION OF THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL..." (JUSTICE IN THE WORLD, 6).

to its moral values. In the end, it is the individual Christian who decides based on his or her own conscience, not its leaders and ministers.

People have issues that only the political community can resolve. They also have needs that only the Church can respond to. Between the political community and the Church, a bridge is necessary in order to achieve the common good and realize the Kingdom of God.

Principled Politics

As explained above, the Church mandated its ministers (bishops, priests, nuns and religious functionaries) to shun partisan party politics because this can be a source of division among believers. Masses and other spiritual activities should not be used to forward a partisan political agenda.

However, lay people in the Church are enjoined to participate in party politics according to their conscience and based on principles of the Church's social teaching (*Lay Participation in Politics and Peace*, 2009).

It might help to look at what really happened at People Power I at EDSA (1986). This event clearly exemplified Church intervention in political affairs. The Church actively participated in the revolution to overthrow the oppressive dictatorship of then President Marcos. Martial law produced thousands of victims: people were “salvaged”; political enemies were detained; human rights were violated. What was very clear in that situation was the outright violation of justice and morality. Thus, the Church stepped into the political field in order to help bring about justice.

Beyond protests, however, there is a need to sensitize our people to organize themselves as responsible agents in the political field. In the context of a weak party system in the Philippines, lay people need to engage themselves in principled politics so that we choose our political leaders not based on personality or political clout, but on their programs and performance.

Our Christian Mission

Like Jesus, it is the mission of every Christian to proclaim the Kingdom of God where justice, peace and unity reign as we search for the common good. Christian politicians are encouraged to proclaim their faith in the public sphere. It is part of their mission.

Active participation in politics among the lay people is based on the following concrete guidelines (PCP II, 351):

- That the goal to achieve the common good (and not to pursue one's own vested interest) be the basis of participation;
- That the participation is focused on the promotion and popularization of justice;
- That service to others is the guide and motivation of participation;
- That participation is the result of one's preferential option for the poor; and
- That empowerment of the people is a crucial part of a process and the objective of political involvement

CONFRONTING CORRUPTION

► **Activity: An Experience of Corruption**

OBJECTIVE: To encourage participants to share and reflect on a first-hand experience with corruption in their personal life and/or the life of their local community

METHOD: Small-group sharing

TIME: 30 minutes

STEPS:

1. Divide the participants into groups of 5.
2. Ask them to answer these questions: What is your first-hand experience with corruption? Did you do something to prevent/refuse it? If yes, what? If no, why not?
3. To process this activity in the plenary, ask the whole group this question: What are the reasons that deter us from doing something to curb corruption?
4. Jot down the answers on the board and highlight some through other examples.

Gaining a Deeper Insight

Political engagement in the Philippines can be shown in the way we confront the problem of corruption which is considered the foremost cause of poverty and misery in the country.

Corruption is defined as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”. Further, “[p]olitical corruption is a manipulation of policies, institutions and rules of procedure in the allocation of resources and financing by political decision-makers, who abuse their position to sustain their power, status and wealth.” (From Transparency International). The phenomenon of corruption can happen within high-level transactions; it can also very well be present in everyday life. Usually prevalent in the political arena, corrupt practices are also widespread in business, schools, churches and other areas of society.

Corruption in the Philippines

In the Transparency International 2015 survey including 160 countries, the Philippines is ranked 95th among the most corrupt. While not a position we can be proud of, this is already a big improvement from its ranking in 2011, at 129th, and in 1998, at 141st.

Corruption in the Philippines occurs in many forms: bribery and extortion, tax evasion, vote-buying and selling, malversation of public funds, abuse of power, and many others. There were big-time graft and corruption cases that led to the downfall of previous presidents of the country: Marcos, Estrada and Arroyo. Some legislators are under investigation or being charged for plunder. But small-time public officials also extort businesses for their share in the ventures. Official documents for personal use, business permits and licenses are not signed by government offices without red tape. Policemen and their cohorts receive various amounts from drivers and sidewalk vendors who want to pay their way out of a traffic ticket, legitimately imposed or otherwise. Big companies have creative ways to deal with government agencies to obtain licenses for mining and logging, often without regard for the need to conserve our natural resources. The examples are endless.

The Philippine bishops have said: “Graft and corruption—in the plainest of language, stealing from the public through the misuse

of influence or position—has become, to our shame as a people, an ordinary fixture of our nation’s public life” (CBCP, *Thou shall not steal*, 1989).

Principles to Address Corruption

We single out four principles that might help us address graft and corruption within ourselves and in the society at large.

Personal and Social Sin

Sin is both personal and social. What happens inside us has consequences in the society. Sin is always a personal act since it is an individual exercise of one’s freedom. But what is practiced in the community is learned by individuals early on. A small child learns corrupt practices from his or her family or surroundings. It is also the structures of sin around us that cause us to sin. Sin is also social.

Some sins, by their very matter, constitute a direct attack on one’s neighbor and more exactly, in the language of the Gospel against one’s brother or sister. They are an offense against God because they are offenses against one’s neighbor. These sins are usually called social sins (*Reconciliatio et Poenitentia*, 16).

Corruption is so deeply embedded in the fabric of the whole Philippine society that many find it difficult to eliminate. From the politicians to the *barangay tanod*, from the manager of big businesses to the market vendor, from the church sector to media, corruption stares us in the face.

But if it starts as a personal act of freedom, it can also be rooted out in a decisive act of freedom in each one of us.

The Common Good

People say that the Filipino culture is too family-oriented and clannish that we have forgotten the good of all. Sometimes, regardless of a politician’s performance, we vote for him because he is a relative or he comes from our hometown. Political dynasties with all the resources concentrated in one or two families or clan prevent the rest

from contributing to society. This neglect or disregard of the common good proves to be a main cause of corruption.

It is a cardinal teaching of the Church that the political community exists for the common good. Political activity then should be directed precisely not at the triumph of the interests of the individual, a family, a social class, or a political party but the attainment of the universal good of all. (CBCP, *Thou shall not steal*, 18).

Retributive Justice and Reconciliation

Retributive justice believes that those who commit wrongful acts, in our case, corruption, deserve proportionate penalty. Forgiveness is a Christian virtue. But it presupposes remorse and retribution.

Pope Benedict XVI says; “Forgiveness in no substitute for justice.” Though he said this in the context of the child abuse perpetrated by clerics, this is also applicable to perpetrators of corruption and injustice.

Pope Francis is more direct to the point: “You might say that sinners acknowledge their weakness and know that their sin is open to forgiveness, whereas corruption blocks it entirely. God is always ready to forgive, but corrupt people substitute their own abilities for God... Sinners live in hope of forgiveness but the corrupt do not, for they cannot imagine that they are sinners. After all, they are triumphant.” (Jorge Bergoglio, “Sin Can be Forgiven but Not Corruption”)

“Sinners live in hope of forgiveness but the corrupt do not, for they cannot imagine that they are sinners.” (Jorge Bergoglio)

As Matthew exclaimed in front of Jesus and the crowd: “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much” (Lk 19: 8).

Authority as Service

Authority is a calling to serve others. During the last meal with his disciples, Jesus washed their feet and said, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” (Jn 13: 12-14).

Corruption is the total opposite; it is an act to serve one's interest. Pope Francis tells the political leaders at his visit to Malacañang: "Reject every form of corruption which diverts resources from the poor" (16 January 2015).

Note to the Facilitator: For details of the section on corruption, please refer to Ehem! and Ehemplo in the bibliography section of this module.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION ON THE GROUND

► Activity: "Dream of a Political Life"

OBJECTIVES:

1. To enable the participants to build a dream community through mural-making
2. (Based on number 1) To make a program of action to achieve it, also incorporated in the mural

TOOLS: manila paper, pencil, Pentel pens, crayons, paint or water colors, masking tape; cloth or wide cardboard and other useful material for murals

METHOD: mural-making

TIME: 60 minutes

STEPS:

1. Go back to the previous grouping.
2. Give the instructions:
 - a. Each group will discuss then answer the following questions:
 - How can meaningful people's political participation be illustrated—on the level of the family, of the community and of the country?
 - What are the measures or steps that can be taken to achieve this meaningful political participation?

- b. Each group will present their answers to the first question in the form of a mural or large drawing/illustration. The mural's theme is "an active and responsible political community."
 - c. Each group will write their answers to the second question and write it on a separate sheet. They will post it at the side of their mural.
3. Once all groups are done, they will post it on the walls of the room. All are invited to go around and each group will discuss what they have done.
4. Other participants are encouraged to express their reactions toward the murals.

► **Processing**

It is important to clarify what people wish for or want to achieve when they decide to participate in political life. It should also be emphasized that the dream of strengthening people's participation in politics is not easy to achieve. It would need various actions like networking and alliance-building with other groups and the broad sectors of society. Due consideration must also be given to the continuing challenge of the Church to realize the Kingdom of God in the here and now.

Gaining a Deeper Insight

Initiatives

There are various ways that can be pursued in order to actively participate in politics. Some were mentioned earlier. There are still other possible initiatives like the following:

1. Joining and actively participating in civic or non-government organizations (NGOs) which provide training and seminars on human rights, responsible voting, principled leadership, monitoring and evaluation of elections;
2. Monitoring the implementation of government programs and services, or participating in advocacy work like lobbying for just policies, laws, rules or processes helpful to the total development of persons and society;



3. For lay people in the Church, they may consider direct participation in partisan politics like running for public office or campaigning for a good and honest candidates.
4. It is also possible to participate in organizing or strengthening of political parties that will advance the principle of the social teaching of the church.

SUMMARY

In this module, the meaning of politics and political participation was clarified as empowerment of the people for governance. Power, if used wisely, will lead to the development of people and society towards the common good.

However, the module also presented some obstacles found in the current political situation. Philippine politics is riddled with anomalous practices stemming from vested interests of some people who dominate government. Therefore, people's participation in politics is encouraged in order to assert the rights and dignity of citizens. As we have seen, political participation is not limited to merely voting or supporting a candidate, but also includes involving oneself in civic action and in partisan political organizations.

The stories from the Bible also showed how Jesus denounced the oppressive leaders of his time. He emphasized the importance of compassionate service, care for the poor and working for the well-being of all. The Church has continued to observe this mission, then and now. Through shifting socio-economic situations, the Church recognizes the need for education so that people may actively participate in the political life of the community and of the country. It is hoped that through these formative sessions, many more will participate in principled politics.

EVALUATION

Conduct an activity where the participants will be able to express what they have learned, including their recommendations to improve this seminar-workshop.

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