

Dear Mr. President:

Sharing Our Values in the Public Square

Purpose

On the occasion of the Presidential election, participants will get a chance to think about how they would like the world to be based on their own hopes and dreams and the values of our Catholic faith. At the end of the session, participants will have an opportunity to write the new President a letter sharing these hopes, dreams, and values.

Session at a Glance

7:00 p.m. Welcome and Introductions
7:05 p.m. Opening Prayer
7:10 p.m. If I Were President...
7:25 p.m. An Almost Presidential Inauguration
7:45 p.m. Dear Mr. President

Extend the Session: Faithful Citizenship (90 minutes)

Extend this session into a three hour program by combining it with "Faithful Citizenship: Mixing Faith and Politics" a Youth Ministry Access session from Spring of 2008. Doing this together is a great way to get your youth engaged in the U.S. Bishops' document, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, and the presidential election.

Extend the Session: Letter Sharing (15 minutes)

When participants have finished their letters, invite them into groups of three and have them read their letters to each other. Have them discuss where they saw similarities and where they see differences.

Materials Needed

- Newsprint
 - Markers
 - Masking tape
 - Nametags
 - Bible
 - Podium
 - *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility* (see #1 in Prepare in Advance)
 - 8.5 x 11 inch paper, enough for each small group to have 5 or 6 pages to write their inauguration speech
 - Nice stationery paper, enough for each participant to have 3-5 pages for their letter to the President, and a matching envelope
 - **Handout 1, Presidential Letter Help**, one for each participant
 - "Lead Me, Lord" by John Becker (*Spirit & Song*, OCP)
 - "Letters to the President" by Hawk Nelson; play this song as individuals get started in writing their letters. Lyrics are available online. *Optional*
- Note to Leader: Hawk Nelson is a Canadian rock band so they mention sending "copies to the Parliament."
- CD player

Prepare in Advance

1. Read *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility* to prepare for the session. You can download the document in English or Spanish at: <http://www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/index.htm>. Pay special attention to paragraphs #64-88.
2. Create a prayer table using the multicolored table cloth, crucifix or cross, and candle.
3. On a sheet of newsprint, write down the following three pieces of instructions for the “If I Were President...” exercise. If you use PowerPoint, create a PowerPoint with these slides instead:
 - What promises do you make to the people of the United States?
 - What are your hopes and dreams for the country?
 - What do you ask of the people of the U.S.?
4. Have a copy of “Hail to the Chief” ready to play during the Inauguration. You can play a version from the Library of Congress by clicking the link: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihis/loc.natlib.ihis.100010434/default.html>. Select which format you would like to listen to on the left hand side of the website (MP3 format is a good standard).
4. Print **Resource 1, Seal of the President of the United States**, and trim off all the white edges. Tape it to the front of the podium for the inauguration ceremony. Consider having red, white, and blue balloons on either side of the podium to add an even more patriotic flair. The seal was downloaded from www.whitehouse.gov.
5. Recruit someone to act as the Chief Justice of the United States for the swearing in of the President. If possible, have them wear a black robe.
6. Ask for a volunteer to read **Resource 2, Excerpts from *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship***, for the closing prayer. Give him/her time to look it over and practice the reading prior to the start of the session.
7. Set up tables for refreshments (if you are serving any) and sign-in. Have one or two people at the sign-in table with a check-in sheet and nametags. (*Skip the nametags if participants know each other and you know them. However, if they wear nametags, you wear one, too.*) **Hospitality is important:** As the facilitator, do not use the gathering time before the session begins to take care of last minute preparations. Spend the time moving among the participants, greeting and speaking with them.

Welcome and Introductions (5 minutes)

Greet the participants as they arrive and give everyone a nametag. If there are folks that are new, allow them to introduce themselves and receive a warm welcome to the evening. Introduce tonight’s session by saying in these or similar words:

The election has taken place and undoubtedly there are people that we know that are excited and people that are disappointed. When we view this election through a lens of faith we may find ourselves with a mixed response no matter who won the election.

In *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility*, our U.S. Bishops teach us that as Catholics we are not to vote according to party politics, but according to principle (#44.) It is fair to say that <name the candidate that was elected> stands for many of the principles that we as Catholics hold as very important and stands for many things that we oppose.

Tonight we are going to spend some time writing to the President-elect to let him/her know those issues that we support and to encourage him/her to govern the country according to the values that are important to us.

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Turn everyone's attention to the prayer table and light the candle. Begin the prayer with the Sign of the Cross. Have a volunteer lead the opening prayer below:

Loving God, we thank you for the opportunity to live in a democracy where it is not only possible, but encouraged to write our leaders and share our views with them. May tonight be an opportunity for us to see more clearly the world that you envision for your people and to articulate that vision to our President-elect. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

If I Were President ... (15 minutes)

Form small groups of 5 to 6 and provide the following instructions:

In order to get into the mood for tonight's activity, we are going to start off by having an inauguration. Your group has been elected the President of the United States of America. Congratulations!

Since you are going to be inaugurated, you need to have an inauguration speech. Your task as a group is to come up with an inspiring inauguration speech using the three questions on the newsprint/PowerPoint as your guide. Write a brief speech and pick someone in your group to deliver your speech.

Give the groups the remaining time to work on their speech. While they are working on their speeches, prepare for the Presidential Inauguration by placing the podium with the presidential seal and balloons in a prominent place in the room.

An Almost-Presidential Inauguration (20 minutes)

When the speeches have been prepared, invite everyone to sit in front of the podium. Invite the Chief Justice to come forward to the podium and ask everyone to raise their right hand and repeat after you:

I do solemnly swear

Pause and allow the group to repeat the phrase.

that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States,

Pause and allow the group to repeat the phrase.

and will, to the best of my ability,

Pause and allow the group to repeat the phrase.

preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.

Pause and allow the group to repeat the phrase.

When the last phrase has been repeated, have everyone clap and then take a seat. Invite the first person to come forward and give their inauguration speech. As each person comes forward, play "Hail to the Chief." When they are done, encourage wild applause, invite the next person to give their speech and play "Hail to the Chief" again. When they are done, encourage wild applause.

Repeat this pattern for every speech; keep this exercise lighthearted and fun.

Dear Mr. President (20 minutes)

Introduce this next activity by saying something like:

Now that you have all been sworn in and feeling a little presidential, I am going to invite you to write a letter to the next President of the United States of America. Everyone who has run for President tries to share the vision that they have for the world. One of the great things about living in the U.S. is that our vision of the world matters too! As people of faith, our vision is formed by the values of the Gospel and we are called to share these values in a way that shapes a better world for everyone. Who better to share these values with than the most powerful leader in the world!

Distribute the stationery paper, an envelope, and a pen to each participant, along with **Handout 1, Presidential Letter Help**. Then choose option one or option two below.

Option One: Give a 5-10 minute presentation on the church's moral priorities based on paragraphs #64-88 in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (pp. 19-28). Do not feel as though you have to cover every paragraph in that section; rather, describe each of the four moral priorities and highlight a few examples from the text.

Option Two: If you do this session combined with "Faithful Citizenship: Mixing Faith and Politics," review the group work done on each moral priority.

Invite the participants to spread out in the room and find a comfortable place to write their letter. Make sure they are aware that you will be sending these letters to the President-elect so they should write legibly. Distribute scratch paper to anyone who would like to do a rough draft. If you have the song, "Letters to the President," play it while participants are writing their letters.

When they have finished their letters invite participants to gather around the prayer table.

Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

Gather

Prayer Leader: *(begin with the Sign of the Cross)*

God,

As we share our values with the leader of our country tonight, we remember that we are in your presence—the one who leads us in the ways of goodness and life. Amen.

Sing "Lead Me, Lord."

Listen

Invite the volunteer to read the excerpts from *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* in **Resource 2**.

Allow for a moment of silence after the reading.

Ask for two or three volunteers to share their letters aloud to the group.

Respond

Prayer Leader:

Our bishops remind us that as a people of faith we are committed to moral principles, the needs of the weak, and the pursuit of the common good. Tonight we have written letters to our future President to share our vision of what we would like the United States to be. I invite you to step forward and place your letters on the prayer table for a blessing.

When everyone has brought their letter forward, invite them to lift a hand in blessing over all of the letters and then lead the following blessing:

Loving God, bless these letters that we have written. We pray that the vision that we have shared in them is your vision. We pray that these letters may help to give a voice to the Gospel. May those who read these letters lead our country with values rooted in love, charity and justice. Amen.

Send Forth

Close prayer by having everyone gather in a circle, joining hands, and praying together the "Our Father."

Announcements and Refreshments (15 minutes)

Thank everyone for their participation in tonight's program. Serve light refreshments, and make any announcements that are needed.

Websites mentioned in this session were accessed successfully on May 31, 2008.

Another excellent website for additional ideas and information:

www.faithfulcitizenship.org

This session was written by Sean Lansing, Coordinator of Youth Ministry Services, Center for Ministry Development, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Resource 1

Seal of the President of the United States

Directions: Print this seal, trim off the white edges, and place it on the podium.

Resource 2

Excerpts from *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*

60. The Church is principled but not ideological. We cannot compromise basic principles or moral teaching. We are committed to clarity about our moral teaching and to civility. In public life, it is important to practice the virtues of justice and charity that are at the core of our Tradition. We should work with others in a variety of ways to advance our moral principles.

61. In light of these principles and the blessings we share as part of a free and democratic nation, we bishops vigorously repeat our call for a renewed kind of politics:

- Focused more on moral principles than on the latest polls
- Focused more on the needs of the weak than on benefits for the strong
- Focused more on the pursuit of the common good than on the demands of narrow interests

62. This kind of political participation reflects the social teaching of our Church and the best traditions of our nation.

This is the Teaching of our Church.

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Handout 1

Presidential Letter Help

Directions: As you write your letter, ponder the following questions, jotting down notes to help you formulate your letter.

1. What is it that you love about the United States?

2. What do you wish was different about the United States?

3. What are the values that are most important to you? What values from our Catholic faith should the president address in the coming years?

4. What would you like the President to do to shape the future for yourself and your classmates? (Remember your group's inaugural promises.)

Formatting your Letter

When you write your letter on the stationery, use the template below as a guide:

Your name

Your address

City, state, zip

President-Elect _____

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

In this first paragraph offer words of congratulations and introduce yourself. Be sure to include your name, age, the high school that you attend, and any other information that you would like to share. While there is no need to get too personal, a few details will help the President get a sense of who you are.

In this paragraph share with the President what your hopes and dreams are for the United States. Include some of the things that you love about the U.S. and the things you would like to be different. Try to be as articulate as you can and include the values that are most important to you – especially the values of our Catholic faith (look at your answer to question #3 on the **Handout, Presidential Letter Help**).

In this paragraph share what you would like the President to do to help create the United States you described above.

Close your letter with words of support and encouragement. You can even let the President know that you will pray for him/her.

Sincerely,

<sign your name>

Print your name

Mailing Your Letter

When you are done, fold your letter and place it in the envelope. Address it using the White house address above and be sure to include your return address. Hold on to your letter for the closing prayer. Don't be surprised if you get a response to your letter!