

Teaching FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP

| Misty Poe |

As election season is right around the corner, and individuals start discerning who to elect as representatives and political leaders, it is important to recognize that as Catholics we have a responsibility to educate ourselves and our consciences to elect leaders who will enact laws that serve the common good. Furthermore, it is pivotal that our decisions are influenced by our faith and in accordance with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is in this specific piece of education and formation that our Catholic schools play a vital role for the students and families we serve.

While other schools teach history and patriotism, Catholic schools do so through the lens of our shared Catholic faith. The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (NSBECS), Standard 7, states that schools ought to offer a “...clearly articulated, rigorous curriculum aligned with relevant standards...and instruction for 21st century learning, provide students with the knowledge, understanding and skills to become creative, reflective, literate, critical and moral evaluators, problem solvers, decision makers, and socially responsible global citizens.” Foundationally, teachings on marriage, family, issues of life – from conception to natural death – justice and peace are part of our daily curriculum. From a young age, Catholic schools focus on guiding students to exercise their rights and duties as participants in our democracy and teach them to respond as both faithful Catholics and U.S. citizens, as urged by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

When a student steps into a Catholic school, they are welcomed and celebrated for who they are uniquely in Christ – this is fundamental in teaching our students that living out the Gospel of Life is to recognize the incomparable worth of the human person. Being pro-life means respecting and advocating for the dignity of every human being from conception to natural death. For we know that every one of us is made in the image and likeness of God.

I firmly believe that Catholic schools have a great advantage in living out the responsibility of forming children in wisdom and holiness; furthermore, Catholic schools create faithful citizens who actively exercise their civic responsibility. Here are a few ways in which our schools in the Diocese of Austin offer opportunities to form faithful citizens:



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Poverty Simulators - CCCTX

In partnership with Catholic Charities of Central Texas, schools offer poverty simulators to break down stereotypes by allowing students to step into the real-life situations of others. These lessons create empathy and instill understanding about the hardships that millions of Americans face every day.

Junior Year - Street Retreat

For some years now, St. Dominic Savio Catholic High School in Austin has offered students a unique pilgrimage opportunity. During their junior year, students experience a Street Retreat to facilitate an encounter with Christ in Austin's homeless community through genuine and personal interaction.

Texas Catholic Advocacy Day

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Austin are present at the rally outside of the Capitol every other year (when the Texas Legislature meets), giving witness of the faith they profess, and advocating for the common good for all. In addition, throughout the day students get the opportunity to participate in a mock trial, where they write out statements to publicly defend or reject pertinent issues using the Catholic moral principles imparted by their parents and their teachers.

All of these activities, in conjunction with individual service projects, present our students with opportunities for encounter and formation rooted in

their Catholic identity. These tangible moments are what students will remember long after graduation and what they will exercise when they go out into the world. When I think of the current generation of students we have in our schools, I think of the many changes they want to make in the world, their desire to live in a more just society, their call to charity and their

dedication to honoring the differences of others. It is imperative we use these motives, passions and dreams to send forth our students to be witnesses of Christ in the world. My prayer is that our schools continue to be centers of evangelization, forming citizens who will create a more just society. May God grant us the opportunity to witness this new generation lead us to a civilization of love.

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