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St. Thomas Catholic Church Priest Calls on Faithful to Support Re-election of President Trump, Angering Some Parishioners

Politics / **Published On September 28, 2020 06:40 AM /**

Staff Consortium **September 28, 2020**

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Reverend Eduardo Ortiz Santiago, Pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, on St. Thomas.

ST. THOMAS — A St. Thomas Catholic parish has apparently broken ranks with tradition and is openly encouraging its parishioners to support the re-election of President Donald Trump.

The endorsement by Reverend Eduardo Ortiz Santiago, the pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish (OLPH) — nestled high on the hills of Mafolie — is unlike other Catholic parishes and churches in the territory which have traditionally shied away from politics, citing separation of church and state.

According to several parishioners who reached out to the Consortium Sunday concerned, and in some instances, angered by the political endorsement, a four-page letter of endorsement was distributed to parishioners at three weekend services on Saturday and Sunday. The Trump endorsement centers around the sitting president's pro-life or anti-abortion stance.

One parishioner questioned why the church would become so involved in presidential politics especially when the vote for president is not extended to Virgin Islanders. "Whose agenda is being advanced here, and what is the end game," the parishioner said.

According to America Magazine, a Catholic publication, the Johnson Amendment, passed in 1954 (named after then-Senator Lyndon B. Johnson), says that churches and other organizations that are free from government taxation (commonly called 501(c)(3) organizations) "are absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office." Mr. Trump promised to "get rid of and totally destroy" the Johnson Amendment in February 2017, and in May 2017 signed an executive order, the Presidential Executive Order Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty, which limited the way the amendment was enforced. "In December 2017, the Republican effort to repeal the Johnson Amendment was quietly dropped from that year's tax reform bill. It was something of a moot point, because the Johnson Amendment had almost never been enforced," says America Magazine.

There were no political discussions at other Catholic parishes on St. Croix, St. Thomas or St. John this weekend. The Trump endorsement by the OLPH parish came in the form of a printed document entitled, "Catholic Voters Have Many Reasons to Support President Trump." The letter is a reprinted commentary published on September 23 by Father Frank Pavone, National Director, Priests for Life.

The documentary's preface reads, "As we enter the last 50 days before Election Day, we are seeing more and more awareness and enthusiasm for the long and record-breaking list of accomplishments of the Trump Administration, and how those accomplishments deserve the gratitude of all Catholics."

The documentary credits Mr. Trump with advances in affordable health care, prayer in schools, coronavirus response, immigration, energy independence, ending ISIS and continuing anti-terrorism efforts, maintaining law and order, and standing up against socialism. The documentary also condemns mainstream media while praising Fox News Channel and the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN). On the president's anti-abortion position, the documentary reads, "Catholics, because we speak for the unborn, are grateful for the President's efforts to protect unborn children, the most defenseless and innocent among us."

The entrance of a Virgin Islands Catholic Church in presidential politics comes at a time when the leadership of the local Catholic diocese is in flux. Two weeks ago, Bishop Herbert Bevard [resigned suddenly](#) citing unanticipated medical conditions. A Washington D.C. archbishop was named to oversee the administration of the Catholic Church in the Virgin Islands until a permanent bishop is named. An announcement made during a live broadcast of services from Sts. Peter and Paul Cathedral Sunday said Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory made a whirlwind visit to the territory on Friday, meeting with church leaders and visiting parishes on St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix prior to returning to the nation's capital Saturday.

The church has previously estimated that there are about 30,000 Roman Catholics in the Virgin Islands.

