

Romanian Church issues strict guidelines for priests amidst 2024 elections



The Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church has issued a comprehensive statement regarding the 2024 parliamentary and presidential elections, building on previous decisions dating back to 1996. The statement clarifies the Church's position on political involvement and electoral participation.

The core of the directive maintains that while priests are encouraged to participate in civic life and promote the common good, they must remain politically neutral during electoral campaigns and express their political choices only through secret ballot. The statement explicitly prohibits clergy members, including bishops, priests, deacons, monks, and nuns, from engaging in partisan politics, joining political parties, running for parliament, supporting candidates, or holding public office positions.

The Synod emphasizes that any violation of these rules by clergy members will require them to choose between their religious vocation and political career, with violations to be judged by Diocesan Consistories. The statement concludes by

reminding political parties not to recruit from clergy or use church resources for political purposes, while emphasizing that the Church does not endorse any particular party or ideology but encourages citizens to vote based on the country's wellbeing and Christian values.

Read the Synod's full statement:

In view of the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2024, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, building on [previously adopted] positions... with the desire to make the position of the Romanian Orthodox Church regarding political life and electoral campaigns clearer, decides:

1. In his capacity as a citizen of the homeland and spiritual father of all his parishioners, regardless of their political orientation, the priest has the freedom, blessing, and duty to participate in civic life from his position and through his specific spiritual means, supporting activities meant to promote the common good and opposing any measures or activities that prove to be in contradiction with Orthodox Christian teaching and morality. In order to respect the political choices of his faithful, the priest is obligated to maintain neutrality during electoral campaigns, both in public statements and practical activities, regarding issues of political nature. The priest's political choice will be expressed only through personal secret ballot.
2. Maintains synodal decision no. 1676 from March 6, 2008, which, in accordance with the Holy Canons (Canon 6 of the Holy Apostles, Canon 7 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, Canon 10 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, Canon 11 of the Local Council of Carthage), stipulates that among activities incompatible with clerical service and dignity is "taking upon oneself worldly offices or occupations," and bishops, priests, deacons, monks and nuns of the Romanian Orthodox Church are forbidden:
 1. to engage in partisan politics;
 2. to be a member of a political party or an organization that can be considered equivalent to a political party;
 3. to run for parliamentary elections;

4. to participate in electoral campaigns as a supporter;
 5. to hold positions as dignitary/high public official at central or local level, in the Romanian State or other states.
3. A cleric or monk who involves himself in party politics as a member or candidate, or by supporting a candidate, violates the oath taken at ordination (*"I will not engage in activities contrary to priestly calling and will not participate in works and gatherings that harm the Church,"* Synodal decision no. 4670/2008), the provisions of the *Regulation of Canonical Disciplinary Authorities and Courts of the Romanian Orthodox Church* (2015) and the *Regulation for Organizing Monastic Life and Administrative and Disciplinary Functioning of Monasteries* (2003) and will have to choose between political career and clerical mission/monastic life. Such violations will be judged in the Diocesan Consistories.
4. The Holy Synod reminds political party leaders in Romania not to allow recruitment of members from among the clergy nor use of church persons, spaces, services, and symbols for political purposes.
 5. The Holy Synod reiterates that the Romanian Orthodox Church does not recommend supporting any political party or political ideology, but encourages all citizens to make choices based on criteria aimed at achieving the country's wellbeing and promoting Christian values in society.