



What Churches Can and Cannot Do in Politics

Each day the news demonstrates that there is an ongoing battle over religious liberties and our ability to live out our faith in our daily lives. And the willingness to speak out on issues of the day is critical when it comes to matters of government officials and public policies that impact our faith, our families and our values on a daily basis.

There is a lot of misinformation about what churches are allowed to do in the political arena – misinformation that is spread by liberals and groups that don't want to see conservative people of faith speak out and have an impact. They attempt to scare pastors from participating by claiming that, if they get involved, their church will lose its tax-exempt status. But the simple fact is that no church has ever lost its tax-exempt status over its participation in the political arena. Period. A good question to ask someone in the church who disagrees with "political" involvement is, "Where does 'politics' start and spiritual life stop??" While key issues may have been politicized, they are still spiritual.

Don't be intimidated and withdraw from the arena. Know the facts and have an impact! Here's a simple list of what churches can and cannot do in politics:

A Church Can:

- Conduct non-partisan voter registration drives
- Conduct non-partisan voter identification drives
- Conduct "get-out-the-vote" drives, encouraging members to vote
- Conduct petition drives regarding legislation or other issues
- Distribute non-partisan voter education information
- Educate church members on legislative and political matters
- Discuss doctrine as it applies to politics, legislative matters or candidate positions
- Introduce political candidates and allow them to address the congregation
- Host candidate forums where all candidates are invited and allowed to speak
- Lobby on behalf of specific legislation
- Support or oppose political appointments (such as judges or cabinet officials)
- Make expenditures on behalf of referendums
- Rent church member contact lists to favored lobbying groups
- Pastors may endorse candidates as individuals, but not on behalf of a church, (if title and church name are used, include a "title and affiliation for identification purposes only" disclaimer)

A Church Cannot:

- Endorse or campaign for candidates for elected office in the name of the church
- Contribute money or make "in kind" contributions, (such as resources or services), to a candidate, political party or political action committee
- Distribute materials that endorse a particular candidate or political party
- Allow candidates to solicit funds from the congregation (from the pulpit)
- Create a church political committee that would do any of the above

Of course the list of things that CAN be done in a place of worship is much longer than what cannot be done. The important thing is that churches don't avoid all political activity simply because some of it is prohibited. If churches and people of faith don't stand up and speak out for their values, then who will?