



Guidelines for churches and pastors at election time

With each Election Day so important, forces that work against Judeo-Christian principles are intensifying their efforts to influence public policy on national and local levels. Many churches, however, are minimizing their community involvement and avoiding the electoral process entirely. While government places some restrictions, there are many ways for churches and pastors to help make their members responsible, informed citizens.

Following is a brief outline of “dos” and “don’ts” for churches and pastors, based on requirements by Federal Election Campaign Act and Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

What Churches May Do

- Conduct non-partisan voter registration/education drives.
- Host candidate forums where all are invited and treated impartially.
- Invite a political candidate to attend a church service or meeting. Should your church invite a candidate to a church service, remember 1) Other candidates for the same office, regardless of party, must also be given the same opportunity. 2) No church representative may endorse or solicit funds for any candidate.
- Distribute impartial voter’s guides.

What Churches May Not Do

- Endorse political candidates.
- Contribute to political candidates or political action committees.
- Participate in fund-raising projects for political candidates.
- Donate a mailing list to a political candidate.
- Sell a political ad at a discount rate if no other advertisers are offered discounts.
- Distribute a candidate’s political statements.
- Pay to attend a caucus for a state or national political convention.
- Make in-kind or independent expenditures in favor of or against candidates.

A special note to pastors

Despite limitations on churches, *pastors* have the same rights as all Americans to participate in the political process.

THE PULPIT INITIATIVE:

The Constitutional Rights of pastors and churches are actually far more extensive than the conventional wisdom highlighted above. The Alliance Defense Fund spearheaded an effort for pastors and churches to exercise their right to speak about candidates as they have throughout American history. You can find out more information on this effort at <http://www.adflegal.org/issues/religious-freedom/church>.