

The Election Is Coming Up! Is Your Ministry Prepared?

HAS THE IRS TARGETED THE SERMONS OF SOME CHURCHES?

The Freedom From Religion Foundation filed a lawsuit in an effort to limit the political activity of churches. The Internal Revenue Service reached a “settlement” with this organization. As part of the settlement agreement, the IRS agreed to monitor some church sermons for political activity that is not allowed.

What’s more, the Freedom From Religion Foundation presented a letter to the Justice Department claiming that ninety-nine churches “merit high priority for examination.” No one knows for sure exactly how the Department of Justice used this information.

Please join the attorneys of the Christian Law Association as we pray for America.

CAN CHURCHES PUBLISH A POSITION PAPER ON THEIR FAVORED CANDIDATE?

Pastor Will had prayerfully considered the two leading candidates for mayor in his city. In his mind, it was completely clear which candidate was better. He knew



that he could not endorse a candidate from the pulpit, but he wondered whether his church could issue a position paper.

Because he was uncertain, he called the Christian Law Association. He learned that churches are not allowed to publicly endorse candidates for office, even if they use a written statement for that purpose.

CAN OUR CHURCH INVITE POLITICAL CANDIDATES BEFORE THE ELECTION?

Pastor James wanted his church members to be educated about candidates in the upcoming election, and he wanted to invite the candidates running for city council to his church. Knowing there are strict limitations on how churches can be involved in politics, he called the Christian Law Association for guidance.

He was happy to learn that he could invite the candidates, and they could address the congregation while they were there. In order to make this work, he had to provide equal access to all candidates, make sure no political fundraising took place, and refrain from endorsing a particular candidate.

CAN YOUR CHURCH PROMOTE VOTER REGISTRATION DURING ELECTION SEASON?

Most people understand that churches are not allowed to publicly endorse candidates or contribute money to political campaigns, but Pastor Doug wanted to do what he could to actively encourage the members of his church to vote in the upcoming election.

Unsure of whether the church could be in legal trouble if it sponsored a voter registration drive, he called the

Christian Law Association. He learned that, within certain guidelines, it was completely acceptable for him to promote voter registration.

CAN OUR CHURCH HOST A PUBLIC FORUM FOR THE CANDIDATES IN THE UPCOMING ELECTION?

Pastor Dale had a strong desire for his church members to be educated about the views of the candidates running in a local election, and he wondered if he could host a forum in his church where the candidates were questioned.

Needing some guidance, he called the Christian Law Association. We explained there are a number of rules that must be followed—including having a moderator who does not show his approval or disapproval for certain candidates—but that he was absolutely allowed to host the forum.

CAN CHURCH LEADERS MAKE POLITICAL STATEMENTS AS PRIVATE CITIZENS?

Pastor was careful to separate his church from political activity because he knew this was a requirement for the church to remain tax-exempt. But he didn't think his role as a pastor should prevent him from making political statements as a private citizen.

Fortunately, he called the Christian Law Association for clarification. Our attorneys told him that he could not make political comments in official ministry publications or at official ministry functions. But, if he clarified that his comments reflected his personal beliefs, not the position of his church, he was able to participate in the political discussion.



CAN MY CHURCH ENDORSE A GODLY POLITICAL CANDIDATE?

Christians are rightly concerned about supporting candidates who share their same biblical worldview, and as private citizens, they can vote according to their conscience.

Churches, however, have to navigate IRS rules. If they verbalize support for one candidate over another, they absolutely may lose their tax-exempt status.

Churches are not allowed to contribute to someone's political campaign fund, even if they deem that person to be a Godly candidate they wholeheartedly support. They cannot allow one candidate to use their facilities unless they give equal opportunity to all candidates.

CAN OUR CHURCH SET UP A VOTER REGISTRATION BOOTH AT THE STATE FAIR?

While there are restrictions about how churches may be involved in political activity, they are absolutely allowed to promote voter registration drives—as long as they remain neutral.

For example, one church set up a booth at a state fair where citizens could register to vote in the upcoming election. All the signage around the booth gave only,

- The name of the church
- The date of the next election, and
- The notice of the opportunity to register.

The church's booth made no reference to a political party or a certain candidate—and all this was absolutely legal for the church.

ARE CHURCHES ALLOWED TO PROVIDE VOTER GUIDES TO THEIR MEMBERS?

Pastor Mark had been praying about the upcoming election, and he wanted to do what he could to promote Godly candidates. He knew that he could not choose his favorite candidate and publicly endorse him, but he wondered if he would be allowed to provide a voter guide for his church members.

Pastor Mark called the Christian Law Association for clarification. As it turns out, churches can provide voter guides, but they have to be written in a neutral way. As you might imagine, voter guides can be written in many different ways, and not all of them are acceptable.