

Political Activity: “Do’s & Don’ts” for Churches

Churches are charities that serve the common good. Our primary goal is what the government calls “advancement of religion.” The government has specific guidelines that outline the allowable political activities of charities. Some actions may put a church’s charitable status at risk. Churches must always be strictly “non-partisan,” meaning that they cannot endorse political parties or candidates (even if they are from your church). But churches can participate in “political activities,” including public awareness and advocacy on important social issues, if the activities are within the mandate of the church. It is hard to think of a social issue that the Bible does not speak to. This gives churches broad latitude to speak to issues from a Biblical perspective and even to encourage the congregation to participate through writing letters or signing petitions. There is a financial limit of 10% of the funds of the church being devoted to political activities.

The limits of church activity do not limit church staff, volunteers or members from political activity outside of the church, on their own time or with their own money.

Note that there are more specific rules about political activity during an election campaign.

A church may:

- Preach sermons and/or hold adult Sunday school classes that highlight important social issues that apply biblical principles
- Invite a politician to speak to the congregation
- Provide information on issues of concern that flow from Biblical teaching, as long as the church does not link its views to any party or candidate
- Encourage its members to engage in grassroots activism such as writing letters to or visiting a politician or signing a petition on a particular issue

A church may not:

- Promote hatred against individuals or groups based on personal characteristics such as race, ethnic origin, religion or sexual orientation.
- Promote violent confrontation over an issue.
- Promote or oppose one candidate or political party.
- Encourage its members to vote for a particular candidate or party.