

# **“Your Church and Politics”**

*or “How to be appropriately, faithfully, politically active while keeping the IRS away.”*

There is growing confusion and fear about the church’s participation in the political arena. The church taking an active role in issues and legislation is not only permissible but an important part of our baptismal promise to strive for justice and peace among all people. There are legal boundaries, however and everyone should know the “cans” and “can’ts”. So here are the simple facts:

## **WHAT YOUR CHURCH CAN DO:**

- \*Your church CAN take positions on policy, including positions on specific pieces of legislation.
- \*Your church CAN urge its members (and others) to vote for or against a specific ballot measure.
- \*Your church CAN encourage its members to vote and speak to values and positions on issues they believe people should consider when entering the voting booth.
- \*Your church CAN conduct a voter registration or “Get Out The Vote” drive as long as it’s open to anyone, regardless of party.
- \*Your church CAN invite *all* candidates to a debate for your members or the community at large -- as long as nothing about the debate favors any one candidate.
- \*Your church CAN invite individual candidates and elected officials to speak to its members. However, if you invite one candidate, invite all candidates, under similar circumstances; provide the candidates with opportunities to address a similar audience for a similar length of time and in the same general time period relative to the election. It is important that whenever an official or candidate appears at your church that it be publicly stated that the church does not support or oppose this or any candidate.
- \*Your church CAN invite candidates or elected officials to events for reasons unrelated to their candidacy for office ... but make it clear they are not appearing in their role as candidate.
- \*If your church regularly allows civic organizations to use your facilities for meetings, you CAN allow candidates to do the same. However you must charge the same fee, if any, as other groups and all candidates must have equal access to the opportunity to use/rent space.
- \*Your church CAN distribute unbiased questionnaires that cover a range of issues and publicize the answers *without comment on whose answers are better/worse*.

## **WHAT CLERGY CAN DO**

- \*Clergy and other religious leaders acting as *individuals* and not as representatives of their houses of worship may publicly endorse candidates. However, they must make clear that the endorsement is not on behalf of their denomination or congregation and should not be made using any official facility of the church.

## **WHAT YOUR CHURCH CANNOT DO**

- \*Your church CANNOT allow candidates to raise campaign funds on church property UNLESS the candidate is renting church space for a fundraiser on the same terms that all other candidates are permitted to rent.
- \*Your church CANNOT explicitly or implicitly endorse a candidate, potential candidate, party, third-party movement or candidate draft effort. This includes church leaders speaking in their official capacity.
- \*Your church CANNOT make a donation or loan to a candidate, party, or political action committee.
- \*Your church CANNOT permit political signs favoring a candidate or party to be posted on its property.
- \*Your church CANNOT focus voter registration or other election-related activities to specific geographic areas selected because they are key districts or wards that will determine the outcome of the election. (However, you can focus activities because it's in your geographic location or the residence of members)
- \*Your church CANNOT ask a candidate to pledge support for your denomination's position on an issue or publicize a candidate's independent decision to support or oppose your denomination's position.
- \*Your church CANNOT provide anything of value including space, equipment, mailing lists, staff time, without charging full market value and allowing equal access to opposing candidates.
- \*Your church CANNOT provide space for the distribution of partisan materials on its property.

**For more detailed information, see The Interfaith Alliance Foundation publication:  
"A Campaign Season Guide for Houses of Worship"  
available free online at [www.e4gr.org/doc/TIAFGuide](http://www.e4gr.org/doc/TIAFGuide)**

**Another excellent online resource is the Pew Forum's "Politics & The Pulpit 2008" at  
[www.pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=280](http://www.pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=280)**

**For more on What One Person and Congregation Can Do to be appropriately politically active,  
join the Episcopal Public Policy Network at [www.episcopalchurch.org/eppn](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/eppn)**

**To be kept updated on What One Can Do to raise your voice for those living in extreme poverty, check  
the advocacy page of the Episcopalians for Global Reconciliation website  
[www.e4gr.org/action/advocacy.html](http://www.e4gr.org/action/advocacy.html)**