



Legal Rights of Pastors and 501.c.3s:

According to the Internal Revenue Code, a 501.c.3 organization may “not participate or intervene in (directly or indirectly, including the publishing and distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office.”

What a pastor may do:

- Engage in voter registration activities that abstain from stressing any one candidate or particular political party.
- Distribute educational materials to voters (such as voter guides), but only those that do not favor a particular political party.
- Conduct candidate or issue forums where each duly qualified candidate is invited and provided an equal opportunity to address the congregation.
- Invite candidates or elected officials to speak at church services. Churches that allow only one candidate or single party’s candidate to speak can be seen as favoring that candidate or party. No candidate should be prohibited from addressing a church if others running for the same office have been allowed to speak. Exempt from this are candidates or public figures who may speak at a church, but must refrain from speaking about their candidacy.
- Engage in lobbying activities as an individual and circulate petitions. A church may spend no more than an insubstantial amount of its annual budget (5% is a safe amount) on direct lobbying activities.
- Endorse candidates in their capacity as private citizens and may allow their title to be used in that endorsement. Although a pastor is an employee of a church, it in no way limits his right to free speech as a citizen of the United States.
- Participate in political committees that are independent of the church.
- Have ushers distribute voter registration forms and pick up completed forms.

What a pastor may not do:

- Endorse candidates on behalf of the church.
- Use church funds or services (such as mailing lists or office equipment) to contribute directly to candidates or political committees.
- Permit the distribution of material on church premises that favors any one candidate or political party.
- Use church funds to pay fees for political events.
- Set up a political committee that would contribute funds directly to political candidates.
- Allow candidates to solicit funds while speaking in a church.