

How to host a church voter-registration drive

By hosting a voter-registration drive, you can help Christians make their voices heard in elections that ultimately determine whether this nation honors biblical marriage, protects the sanctity of human life, and allows prayer in public schools.

1 ASK

Get church leaders' permission so that you're under biblical authority. When asking, emphasize that voter registration is:

Biblical. Part of pastoral responsibility is equipping the people of God to do their work in the world, says Father Frank Pavone of Priests for Life. He suggests having Citizenship Sundays that feature civic responsibility sermons and voter registration tables.

Easy. Recent federal laws have made voting registration easier than ever, with a national registration form that's accepted by most states. (Visit eac.gov and click on Register to Vote on the right side of the page.)

Legal. The IRS says church voter-registration drives are legal, and even encouraged, as long as they're nonpartisan and don't endorse or oppose candidates. (See Pastor's Legal Dos and Don'ts on the reverse side.)

2 PREPARE

Contact your county clerk's or secretary of state's office to obtain registration cards and learn collection procedures. Voters can mail their own cards. But it's more effective to collect them from parishioners and then volunteer to mail or return them in bulk. Some states, like Texas, require you to be deputized before doing that. For a list of state voter-registration policies and contact information, visit eac.gov and click on Register to Vote on the right side of the page.

Schedule registration drives at least three consecutive Sundays leading up to the month before the election. (Most states require voters to be registered 30 days before an election.)

Advertise your drive in church bulletins, newsletters and posters—though nothing beats announcements from the pulpit.

3 REGISTER

Pews. Have ushers distribute registration cards in the pews, allowing parishioners a few minutes to fill out the cards before they're collected. That way, you don't miss anyone.

Tables. If your pastor prefers a different option, set up booths in the foyer. Have refreshments and plenty of pens. Father Pavone offers these tips:

Take the initiative. Stand up, don't sit, and don't just let people walk by. Speak to them, saying, "Good morning, can I help you fill out this form?" and politely suggest that they fill it out at the booth.

Provide assistance. Lead people step-by-step through the process so they don't feel like any question is stupid.

Keep records. Have sign-up sheets for people who want more information on important issues that may be impacted by the next election.

Personal contacts. Call or visit parishioners who aren't registered. You can obtain that information by comparing church mailing lists with voter registration records, which are public information.

Don't put them on the defensive by saying, "You're not registered," instead, offer to help them become a voter.

4 FOLLOW UP

Contact those on your sign-up list a few days before the election and remind them to vote.

Send thank-you notes to church leaders and volunteers.

Legal DO s & DON Ts

The First Amendment of the Constitution was originally intended to guarantee, not take away, our freedom of religious expression.

Richard Land, president, For Faith & Family

LEGAL GUIDELINES

A frequently asked question when it comes to political involvement is this: Is that legal? There are legal limits to what a church may do, but your hands are not completely tied. In fact, you may be surprised at how much influence you can have. It can be confusing to sort through what is and is not legal given the IRS restrictions on political activity by churches and other tax-exempt organizations. While it is impossible to lay out a definitive list of do s and don ts since the IRS interprets what is and isn t legal, this resource is offered for general guidelines.

If you are contacted by any government official or private activist group on such issues, please call the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) immediately (800-TELL-ADF). The ADF attorneys will promptly review your situation and make every effort to defend your church s legal rights to speak freely. This list of legal do s and don ts is not represented as an exhaustive and comprehensive list. For a more complete discussion of the legal ramifications of the political process, visit CitizenLink.com/voter.

Activity	Church	Pastor
Endorse candidates for political office?	No	Yes
Personal endorsement can include church name for identification purposes only?	N/A	Yes
Engage in nonpartisan voter registration, voter identification, get out the vote, voter education?	Yes	Yes
Distribute voter guides?	Yes	Yes
Include statement in voter guides that candidate's position is/is not consistent with church's?	No	No
Make public comments concerning a candidate's position on any issue?	Yes	Yes
Allow candidates to speak on church premises?	Yes ¹	N/A
Use of church facilities by political candidates?	Yes ²	N/A
Rent list of church members to candidate for fundraising purposes (at fair market value)?	Yes	N/A
Establish a Political Action Committee?	No	Yes ³

For a full explanation of these legal guidelines, go to CitizenLink.com/voter

1 All candidates should be invited and given equal opportunity to speak. No fundraising allowed. No public endorsement of any candidate by church member at the event. This list was developed by James Bopp Jr., general counsel for the James Madison Center for Free Speech.

2 On same terms as other civic groups can use facilities, including rent.

3 Care must be taken to keep the PAC separate from the church and to not use church assets.



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