



Massachusetts
Family Institute

Dedicated to Strengthening the Family

HOW TO: Host a church voter-registration drive

About half of U.S. churchgoers aren't registered to vote. That means millions of Christians are forfeiting their voice in elections that ultimately determine whether this nation honors biblical marriage, protects those in the womb and allows prayer in public schools. Help change that by hosting a church voter-registration drive.

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Ask

Get church leaders' permission so that you're under biblical authority. When asking, emphasize that voter registration is: **(1) Biblical.** "Part of pastoral responsibility is equipping the people of God to do their work in the world," say Father Frank Pavone of Priests for Life. He suggests having "Citizenship Sundays" that feature civic-responsibility sermons and voter-registration tables. **(2) Easy.** Recent federal laws have made voting registration easier than ever—there is a national registration form (available at <http://www.eac.gov/voter/Register%20to%20Vote>) that's accepted by Massachusetts. **(3) 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.

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Prepare

(1) Contact your town clerk's or secretary of state's office (617-727-2828 or 1-800-462-VOTE) 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. **(2) Schedule** registration drives at least three consecutive Sundays leading up to the month before the election. In Massachusetts, in order to vote you must be registered 20 days prior to the election. **(3) Advertise** your drive in church bulletins, newsletters and posters—that "nothing beats announcements from the pulpit," says Rick Scarborough, a former pastor and founder of Vision America. "As the pastor goes, so goes the church."

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Register

(1) Pews. Let ushers distribute registrations 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," Scarborough says, "which is the same reason people pass offering plates." **(2) Tables.** If your pastor prefers a more passive approach, set up booths in the foyer. Have refreshments and plenty of pens. Father Pavone offers these tips: **(a) Take the initiative.** "Stand up, don't sit, and don't just let people walk by. Speak to them. **(b) Provide assistance.** "Lead people step-by-step through the process so they don't feel like any question is stupid." **(c) Keep records.** Have sign-up sheets for people who want more information. This is a good starting point for forming an activist group. **(3) Personal contacts.** Telephone 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. Instead, offer to help them become a voter.

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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 Tips from Alliance Defense Fund:

- Emphasize registration, not politics.
- Allow people from every political party to register.
- Don't make issue statements that can be construed as endorsements.
- Don't tell people who you're voting for during registration.