

# Politics From the Pulpit: How Much is Too Much?

By Rollie Dimos, CIA, CISA, CFE

**N**ovember 6 is Election Day in the United States. The American people will help decide who will be president for the next 4 years, as well as who will represent us in Congress, and in our state and local governments.

Certainly, the officials we elect this year will impact areas that are important to you, not only as an individual, but as a church leader. The leaders we elect in November will have a say in our future education, healthcare, retirement, and taxation. And some ballot issues that affect your local community may clash head-on with your values and beliefs.

## Getting Involved

As a leader in your church, you are also a leader in your community. Are you aware of what role you can play in this election as a religious and community leader?

Certainly, it's no secret that the IRS has rules that forbid a church to engage in partisan politics. As stated in section 501(c)(3) of the federal tax code, a church that is exempt from federal income taxation cannot:

"Participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or opposition to) any candidate for public office."

*But what does this mean?*

Can the church host candidates and pass out voter guides? Can a pastor speak about political issues and provide guidance from a biblical perspective?

The short answer is yes—but you must proceed with caution. Educational activities, voter guides, and voter registration drives are allowed, as long as they don't promote one candidate over another. That means the activity cannot be biased in any

way. Further, churches can take a stand on specific issues of public policy, but the church should not endorse a particular candidate.

While this road may seem rocky, there are several resources that can help you navigate this path successfully:

- The Assemblies of God has established a website at [vote.ag.org](http://vote.ag.org) that provides information about voter registration and advice on evaluating candidates. The site also includes an article by Richard Hammar that provides a list of political dos and don'ts for churches and a video message from General Superintendent George O. Wood encouraging AG members to participate in this year's election.
- Churchsafety.com (a free and fee-based website by Christianity Today and Brotherhood Mutual) has compiled some [articles and tools](#) that explain how churches can be involved in politics without endangering their tax-exempt status.

## Consider the Consequences

One movement is encouraging pastors to take a stand on political issues and candidates. The Alliance Defending Freedom has declared October 7, 2012 as "Pulpit Freedom Sunday", and

*Continued on next page...*



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is asking 1,000 ministers to publically support a candidate from the pulpit and send a tape of their sermon to the IRS. This group believes the IRS's ban on campaign participation by churches is unconstitutional and wants to challenge it in court. They hope that a large, public protest from the pulpit will help move their challenge along. To dampen the fears those pastors who will participate may have, the group says that while the IRS threatens to revoke the tax-exempt status of a church that violates this IRS ban, they have never done so to a church that participated in the past.

However, I would caution you to think twice before joining this peaceful protest, because there are long-term ramifications to this one-day event. Under current law, the IRS certainly has the ability to revoke the church's tax-exempt status. If that happens, the impact to the church and its members is great. For example:

- The church will be subject to federal and state income taxation.
- The church may lose its property tax exemption and sales tax exemption.
- Donors will lose the deductibility of their contributions (which may require amendments to previous year's tax returns and additional taxes).
- Ministers' housing allowance may be affected.
- Organizational leaders may be personally liable for penalties.

Before jumping on the bandwagon, be sure the leadership of the church, including the board of directors, supports your decision because they will be accountable for the results of these actions as well.

## Next Steps

While I promote caution when it comes to politics and the pulpit, I am not suggesting that the church ignore injustice or remain silent on the social and moral issues facing its community. The church must be the voice of biblical truth and may need to address public policy issues affecting their community.

No matter what side you are on this upcoming election, there are 3 things I encourage you to do:

1. **Exercise your civic right and vote.**
2. **Pray for our elected leaders**  
(1 Timothy 2:1-2).
3. **Encourage others to do the same.**

Along these lines, the AG is launching a prayer emphasis in the days leading up to the election called the 7:14 Prayer Initiative. Based on 2 Chronicles 7:14, General Superintendent George O. Wood is urging members to take a moment each day at 7:14 am and 7:14 pm to pray for a spiritual awakening in the United States and God's guidance in our national elections. For more information, including suggested prayer topics, [click here](#).

See you at the polls on November 6!

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## About the Author:

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