



Dear Pastors, Priests, and Other Congregational Leaders,

As employees and leaders in a U.S. recognized non-profit (called a 501(c)3 organization, referring to the relevant section of the tax code), you might be worried about what you can and cannot say and do during an election year. Many leaders mistakenly think they must avoid any engagement with the political process whatsoever.

**The truth is — there’s a LOT you can do.**

You have a wide range of legitimate ways to integrate your faith, vision, and values with our national and local politics. Yes, we want you to know what the limits are and carefully avoid wrongdoing, but we also want you to use your pulpit for what it was made for: **to bring moral wisdom, vision, and leadership to your congregation, community, nation, and world.**

So we urge you not to fall into the trap of “the white moderate” that Dr. King wrote about [ <https://charterforcompassion.org/images/socialjustice/birmingham.pdf> ]. Preach boldly about the political implications of “Love your neighbor as yourself,” or “Do not lie to one another,” or “As much you have done it to the least of these,” or “The Lord God . . . put the human in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it,” or “In Christ there is no Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free . . . male and female.” Preach that racism is a sin, and preach that we should vote not for personal interest alone, or party loyalty alone, or one single issue alone, but for the common good.

Here’s a short and simple summary:

**You can** encourage people to vote and educate them on values your faith tradition emphasizes.

**You can** preach and teach about specific issues important to your faith - however “political” they seem.

**You can not** support or oppose, with money, services, or words, any specific candidate or party.

**You can - and we believe you must** - speak out as an individual, not using church property or media, but using your own voice, your own first amendment rights, your own freedom as a moral human being, not “on the clock” of a tax-exempt organization. In other words, if you want others to express their faith in their politics in their personal lives (not on the job), you as a leader need to set an embodied example by doing so as an individual Christian and citizen in your personal life.



**Using your own feet, you can march.**

**Using your own personal social media channels, you can speak out.**

**Using your own computer and your own time, you can volunteer, express yourself, tell your story, volunteer for the campaigns of your choice.**

**Using your own front yard or car bumper or front window or tee shirt, you can send out your message.**

**Using your own time, you can volunteer for an organization or campaign you believe in.**

When you became a pastor, you did not cease to be a human being, or a citizen, or a neighbor with a share of power and responsibility in a democracy. So we urge you to stay within the bounds of what is legal and right, but also we urge you to use your freedom as an opportunity to seek the common good. Exactly how you will do that is a matter of your own personal prayer and discernment to be decided in consultation with those you trust. We are eager to help you in that process at [votecommongood.com/resources-for-pastors](http://votecommongood.com/resources-for-pastors)

Below you will find a list of specific activities you CAN and CAN NOT do from the pulpit, on a church-owned computer, on church-property, at a church-sponsored activity, etc.

In general, 501(c)(3) organizations **MAY** do the following:

- speak out publicly on issues that are important to your organization without endorsing a candidate
- lobbying, including work on ballot measures
- continue to advocate for its issues during an election year
- educate all of the candidates on issues important to the organization
- criticize sitting elected officials, especially if the organization has a history of doing so
- conduct nonpartisan public education and training sessions about participation in the political process or voting
- conduct nonpartisan get-out-the-vote and voter registration drives
- canvass the public on issues
- sponsor candidate debates
- work with all political parties to get your positions included on the party's platform

# Faith. Hope. Love.

for a change on *Election Day*



- conduct voter protection activities
- support or oppose ballot measures (and should count the cost against its lobbying limits), but should avoid tying its ballot measure messages to candidates or political parties.
- engage in individual electoral or partisan activity (off the clock, not using organizational resources)

In general, 501(c)(3)s organizations **MAY NOT** do the following:

- endorse candidates for public office in their official capacity
- make any campaign contributions (whether monetary or in-kind)
- make expenditures on behalf of candidates
- allow candidates to fundraise or otherwise campaign using your organizations resources
- ask candidates to sign pledges on any issue (for instance, ask candidates if they promise to support the DREAM Act if elected)
- increase the volume or amount of criticism of sitting officials who are also candidates, as election time approaches
- criticize sitting legislators or other elected officials by attacking their personal characteristics or attacking them in their status as a candidate, rather than focusing on a policy issue