



Churches and Voter Drives: One Issue on Which the IRS is Clear

The Internal Revenue Service hasn't provided good guidance for pastors who want to know if their sermons regarding biblical morality and candidates for office violate the rule against church intervention in political campaigns. But the IRS has been remarkably clear on the issue of Voter Drives.

Churches have complete freedom to encourage their parishioners and other folks to vote, so long as it's done in a non-partisan fashion. In addition to passing out voter registration packets at services, churches can even do such things as have booths at fairs. That's actually one of the specific things the IRS says is OK in its [*Tax Guide for Churches and Religious Organizations*](#). The booth can use signs or banners containing the name of the church and slogans encouraging people to vote. But it cannot mention particular candidates or parties unless it is necessary for the registration process. For instance, if the registrant must choose a political party in order to register, the church may provide them with a list of parties from which to choose.

Another IRS-sanctioned technique for registering voters is using a phone bank to make calls to potential registrants. Once again, the Service cautions churches to be non-partisan. A church cannot, for example, only offer an opportunity to register to those who agree with the church's position on the moral importance of family issues because the incumbent candidate holds those same views.

This is one area of the tax code where common sense seems to prevail. Churches should be able to encourage people to fulfill their moral and ethical obligation to vote. They can even focus that message on Christians by, for instance, limiting their efforts to Sunday morning services. What they can't do is prohibit non-Christians from registering at their drive or act in a partisan manner.