

5 MYTHS ABOUT PULPIT POLITICKING

MYTH #1: Pulpit politicking is legal.

Under federal law, tax-exempt, non-profit groups are barred from intervening in elections by endorsing or opposing candidates. This includes houses of worship.

PROJECT FAIR PLAY

FIND OUT MORE AT
projectfairplay.org

MYTH #2: The American people support church electioneering.

Poll after poll has shown strong opposition to churches engaging in partisan politics among church-goers as well as clergy. Opposition sometimes reaches 80 percent.

MYTH #3: Americans are accustomed to hearing partisan sermons in churches.

Increasingly, Americans are telling pollsters that they don't view houses of worship as centers of partisan politics, and most clergy say the same thing. People join faith communities for spiritual and relational reasons; not to get orders on how to vote.

MYTH #4: Houses of worship are being muzzled and sermons are being censored.

Religious leaders and organizations can – and many do – speak out on a wide range of spiritual, social, and political issues. But if houses of worship want to keep their tax exemptions, they cannot endorse candidates or use congregational resources to intervene in partisan campaigns.

MYTH #5: The Internal Revenue Service never enforces the no-politicking law against religious groups.

In 1995, the IRS revoked the tax-exempt status of a New York congregation that took out newspaper ads opposing a presidential candidate. TV preacher Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network lost its exemption for two years and paid a monetary penalty for partisan politicking, and the late Jerry Falwell's Old Time Gospel Hour suffered the same fate.

5 MYTHS ABOUT PULPIT POLITICKING

MYTH #1: Pulpit politicking is legal.

Under federal law, tax-exempt, non-profit groups are barred from intervening in elections by endorsing or opposing candidates. This includes houses of worship.

PROJECT FAIR PLAY

FIND OUT MORE AT
projectfairplay.org

MYTH #2: The American people support church electioneering.

Poll after poll has shown strong opposition to churches engaging in partisan politics among church-goers as well as clergy. Opposition sometimes reaches 80 percent.

MYTH #3: Americans are accustomed to hearing partisan sermons in churches.

Increasingly, Americans are telling pollsters that they don't view houses of worship as centers of partisan politics, and most clergy say the same thing. People join faith communities for spiritual and relational reasons; not to get orders on how to vote.

MYTH #4: Houses of worship are being muzzled and sermons are being censored.

Religious leaders and organizations can – and many do – speak out on a wide range of spiritual, social, and political issues. But if houses of worship want to keep their tax exemptions, they cannot endorse candidates or use congregational resources to intervene in partisan campaigns.

MYTH #5: The Internal Revenue Service never enforces the no-politicking law against religious groups.

In 1995, the IRS revoked the tax-exempt status of a New York congregation that took out newspaper ads opposing a presidential candidate. TV preacher Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network lost its exemption for two years and paid a monetary penalty for partisan politicking, and the late Jerry Falwell's Old Time Gospel Hour suffered the same fate.

Some DOs and DON'Ts to Keep in Mind:

HOUSES OF WORSHIP **MAY**

- ✔ Discuss public policy issues.
- ✔ Sponsor non-partisan voter registration and encourage voting as good civic behavior.
- ✔ Sponsor candidate forums as long as all candidates are invited and a broad range of issues is discussed.
- ✔ Urge congregants to communicate with candidates and make their concerns known to them.

HOUSES OF WORSHIP **MAY NOT**

- ✘ Issue statements (including biased "voter guides") endorsing or opposing candidates.
- ✘ Donate money to a candidate.
- ✘ Offer church space to one candidate and refuse another.
- ✘ Sponsor campaign rallies for candidates in church.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED:

- Write a letter to the editor in your local news publication
- Report violations of the IRS code online at www.projectfairplay.com
- Join Faith Leaders United and stand with people of all faiths (email Bill Mefford at mefford@au.org)

Some DOs and DON'Ts to Keep in Mind:

HOUSES OF WORSHIP **MAY**

- ✔ Discuss public policy issues.
- ✔ Sponsor non-partisan voter registration and encourage voting as good civic behavior.
- ✔ Sponsor candidate forums as long as all candidates are invited and a broad range of issues is discussed.
- ✔ Urge congregants to communicate with candidates and make their concerns known to them.

HOUSES OF WORSHIP **MAY NOT**

- ✘ Issue statements (including biased "voter guides") endorsing or opposing candidates.
- ✘ Donate money to a candidate.
- ✘ Offer church space to one candidate and refuse another.
- ✘ Sponsor campaign rallies for candidates in church.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED:

- Write a letter to the editor in your local news publication
- Report violations of the IRS code online at www.projectfairplay.com
- Join Faith Leaders United and stand with people of all faiths (email Bill Mefford at mefford@au.org)