

## SPECIAL ISSUE

**PAGE 1** Church risks losing tax exempt status

**PAGE 2** Advice on dealing with local candidates

**PAGE 2** Cautions on social media and streaming

**PAGE 2&3** Waymarks bullets offer best advice, things to avoid, acceptable activities

**PAGE 3** Spirit of Prophecy and early leaders counsel

**PAGE 3** Contact Religious Liberty with questions

**PAGE 4** Guidance from the Bible

**EDITOR:** Sheila Elwin  
religiousliberty@southernunion.com

2024 | Special Edition

**It is every member's duty to protect the Church's tax-exempt status. Veering from saving souls to promoting politicians harms all.**



## Election Year Warning: Politicizing in Churches Could Lose 501(c)(3) Status

The year 2024 finds us in a presidential election cycle. Now is the perfect time to remind you that it is every member's duty to be cautious and protect the Church's 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America has intentionally decided that our churches exist for the spiritual and not the political. We urge churches to continue to obey these rules.

### Specific prohibitions from the IRS:

- Under IRS code all 501(c)(3) organizations (churches) are prohibited in a very strict manner from participating either directly or indirectly with any political campaign on behalf of any candidate or elected public official. This includes any official running in local, state, or federal elections.

- Prohibition goes beyond candidate endorsement. Prohibition includes contributions to campaign funds, as well as public statements of position, either written or verbal, in any media format.

- Allowing a candidate to use the Church's assets or property (facilities) is also prohibited.

- Church leaders cannot make partisan statements in publications (including websites or social media connected with the church office) or at functions.

- In an election year, always check the IRS rules for specific issues involving candidate appearances in your church.

- The IRS rules detail what is permissible and prohibited.

This is not an exhaustive list of prohibitions. The church only has one tax exemption. We all share it; every church, pastor, and member is connected. It is important to remember that when you violate any one of these rules, you risk jeopardizing the Church's tax-exempt status. If you have questions, you can always contact the Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty or check the IRS website at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).

This entire issue of *Waymarks* is dedicated to the seriousness of this subject. Learn more inside.

# Use These Tips for Dealing with Requests from Politicians

The following are suggestions for the most common issues you may face during a campaign election cycle.

## **What if an official or candidate shows up and asks for time up front?**

It is always best to be prepared. In some areas, the potential for campaigners to show up at church unannounced is a regular occurrence. Be prepared before that happens. The church board should meet and decide the best approach to this issue. Remember that you cannot promote or endorse any candidate as a church, nor may the leaders of the church. Make sure your church greeters are prepared to be diplomatic, kind, and welcoming when politicians show up unannounced. Prepare one head greeter with the procedure your board has decided on for when a campaign candidate visits.

## **What if you receive a request from a political candidate to speak to your church?**

Our elected officials are part of our community. They are leaders in our community who give back in ways of service in their elected leadership roles. For that reason, you never know when you will need to have a friend in your community. This fact alone makes it difficult for some to say no to politicians who show up to church asking for time up front. However, being prepared and talking about the approach to these requests before they happen can help lessen the chance of burning bridges that may need to be maintained for the future.

When a politician or political candidate approaches your church, be sure to have a lead person who will act as chaperone once they make themselves known. Be polite and inviting. Encourage

them to stay and worship with the congregation. In a kind and loving way, let them know you appreciate their service to the community (if they are an incumbent) or their willingness to serve the community if they are running.

Political candidates know that many churches may turn down the request to allow them time up front. It is perfectly fine to explain that Sabbath is a sacred time, and the worship service is a time relegated to worshipping God. If the individuals decide to stay and worship, it is also acceptable to welcome your visitors, including that individual from the front of the church during welcome and announcement time. And, let your members know to be sure to meet and greet all the guests after service. This is good advice on any and every Sabbath.

# Social Media, Streaming Make Church Services Public

What happens in church does not stay in church. With social media and streaming services now the standard in most churches, what happens on the church platform can literally be seen around the world. Keep that in mind during an election year.

Pastors and church leaders on the platform are representing the church at that moment. Personal campaign signs, buttons, or clothing items must be removed before any participant goes onto the platform. An individual has the right to refuse to remove

campaign paraphernalia, but, in doing so, will need to be replaced in the service line-up that day.

This is never meant as a punishment, but we want to be sure we are focused on Jesus and not mixing common fire with sacred in church on the Sabbath.

## **The Best Advice**

- *Concentrate on the spiritual realm rather than the political realm when at church.*
- *Consider this: While churches can extend invitations to those running for office, you must do so for ALL candidates and in a non-partisan manner. However, this can easily cause bad feelings in your church. Be prepared for complaints from both sides.*
- *Our best advice is to forego invitations to ANY campaigning official — including your own fellow member who may be running for office — to the church.*

## **Other Things Your Church Must Not Do**

- *The church should never place a political bumper sticker on any church vehicle.*
- *The church cannot endorse their own members who are running for an elected position.*
- *Do not give your church membership lists to any political party or campaign.*
- *Do not distribute voter guides that are partisan or one sided.*

# Further Counsel Provided by Early Leaders, Spirit of Prophecy

Ellen G. White speaks strongly to gospel workers, teachers, and pastors about becoming involved in party politics in their church roles, and running for public office. At other times, she speaks about our duty as citizens and being a part of the system where we live. Other early Church leaders have also shared their counsel.

Sometimes people are confused by the different contexts regarding Mrs. White and voting, especially the differences between our representation of our Church vs. our lives as private citizens. You are encouraged to dig deeper into these quotes to gain a fuller understanding of the context in which they were written, and to understand both sides of the messages presented.

• “Resolved: That in our judgment, the act of voting when exercised in behalf of justice, humanity and right, is in itself blameless, and may be at some times highly proper; but that the casting of any vote that shall strengthen the cause of such crimes as intemperance, insurrection, and slavery, we regard as highly criminal in the sight of Heaven. *But we would deprecate any participation in the spirit of party strife.*” (Third Annual Session of the General Conference, Battle Creek, May 17, 1865)

• “Gospel workers who ignore this counsel should

lose their denominational credentials and positions of employment,” *GW* 393-395, 484. (Ellen G. White)

• “Ministers who do this dishonor God, thereby doing their hearers grievous wrong, by mingling common fire with the sacred,” *TM* 337. (EGW)

• “If a brother chooses to vote, we cannot condemn him, and we want the same liberty if we do not,” *R&H*, Aug. 21, 1860. (James White)

• “It is entirely proper, consistent, and even obligatory for a Christian to cast his ballot in favor of certain issues .... We are to support ‘by voice and pen and vote...,’” *GW* 387, 388. (EGW)

• “Shall we meddle in politics? No ... but we may deposit a ballot quietly in the box on behalf of freedom, and as quietly give a reason therefore,” *R&H*, Dec. 14, 1876. (Joseph Clarke)

• “We cannot with safety vote for political parties; for we know not whom we are voting for,” *FCE* 475. (EGW)

• “Keep your voting to yourself. Do not feel it your duty to urge anyone to do as you do,” *2 SM* 337. (EGW)

• “The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not seek to dictate to its members as to how they shall vote or whether or not they

should vote at all. It is left for each one to act on his own judgment in the fear of God...,” *R&H*, Sept. 13, 1928. (F.M. Wilcox)

• “We cannot labor to please men who will use their influence to repress religious liberty and to set in operation oppressive measures to lead or compel their fellow men to keep Sunday as the Sabbath .... The people of God are not to vote to place such men in office, for when they do this they are partakers with them of the sins which they commit while in office,” *FCE* 475, *LDE* 127. (EGW)

*FCE: Fundamentals of Christian Education*  
*GW: Gospel Workers*  
*LDE: Last Day Events*  
*R&H: Review and Herald*  
*SM: Selected Messages*  
*TM: Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*

## Acceptable Campaign Year Activities

- *Non-partisan voter registration drives are permissible.*
- *Church members who are not on the platform may wear campaign paraphernalia. But, please remember to have them remove any campaign-related items if going on the platform for any reason. This could include being a worship leader, praise leader, prayer giver, requester of offering, or any other role that might appear on camera during a streaming event.*
- *Churches may talk about issues that affect the church and her members, as long as it is not in conjunction with the mention of any candidates.*
- *Churches are allowed to be polling places on election day.*

**If you have any questions on topics**

**in this issue, please reach out to**

**Religious Liberty at the Southern**

**Union: 770-408-1800 (M-Th),**

**religiousliberty@southernunion.com.**

**We are here to help guide you through**

**these highly charged political times.**

**Southern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists**  
**Public Affairs and Religious Liberty**  
P.O. Box 923868  
Peachtree Corners, GA 30010

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
NORCROSS, GA 30304  
PERMIT NO. 6849

## Who Are Your Enemies? Look to Jesus for Guidance

From Joshua 5:13-14 NIV:

"Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand.

"Joshua went up to him and asked, 'Are you for us or for our enemies?'

"'Neither,' he replied, 'but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.' Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, 'What message does my Lord have for his servant?'"

The story found in Joshua 5 is one of the undisputed times in the Old Testament that Jesus appears incarnate. The Israelites, having just crossed over the dry riverbed of the Jordan, won an easy victory over the Amorites and the Canaanites, who withdrew in fear. No wonder Joshua seems on high alert. Not recognizing Jesus, but most certainly concerned at the warrior standing armed in front of him, Joshua asks, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" Jesus' answer is more telling of His relation-

ship with humankind, than merely an answer to set Joshua at ease.

After 40 years of protecting and directing them through the desert, after holding back the waters of the River Jordan and the bloodless victory that was given the Israelites when they made it to Canaan, you would think Jesus would say, "I'm on your side." Instead, he says, "Neither." He says "neither" even though He is about to give them another victory in Jericho. I imagine that if Jesus were to appear before

**"Are you for  
us or for our  
enemies?"**

**"'Neither,'  
he replied..."**

us today and we asked Him, "Are you for the Democrats or the Republicans?" his response would be much the same: "Neither. I am the Savior of all mankind."

Our daily prayer should always remain, "Make me more like Jesus. Amen."