



THE  
PASTOR'S  
ADVOCATE  
SERIES



*Ministering to the  
Needs of Your Minister*

*Working Together To*  
Impact  
Your  
Community

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Impact  
Your  
Community

Edited by Ron Reno and Dan Davidson



## Preface

The following booklet was compiled from numerous resources and authors at Focus on the Family. It provides guidelines for establishing and implementing a community action committee in your church that could coordinate congregational involvement with social issues and provide accurate and valuable information to your pastor.

Every congregation has a nucleus of people who care deeply about the signs of the times. They are motivated, bothered and concerned when society begins to move in a direction that could be detrimental to the institution of the family, the freedom of the church and the well-being of their children. Call them together around a cause, and you have the simple beginnings of a committee that can become invaluable to pastor and congregation member alike.

## Introduction

We live in an age of unprecedented prosperity. Yet, we also live in a time of immense pain, chaos and confusion:

- Children kill children in our schools.
- More than one million babies are aborted every year.
- AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases run rampant.
- Half of all marriages end in divorce.
- Homosexual marriage, euthanasia and other attacks upon traditional morality gain favor in our media, courts and government.

Pornography, drug and alcohol abuse, gambling addiction, out-of-wedlock births . . . the list goes on and on. What are we, as Christians, to do? What *can* we do?

We are all familiar with Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves. We know how that affects our interactions with spouses, co-workers and next-door neighbors. But what does it mean to love the "neighbors" who attend the school down the block, who work at the local supermarket or who live in a different neighborhood? What does it mean to love all the people in the community in which we live?

This booklet is designed to help you, your church and your pastor demonstrate the love of Christ through involvement in the key social issues that affect the individuals and families in your community. It provides ideas, practical advice and a framework from which to proceed. Before getting to the "nuts and bolts," however, let's first examine what the Scriptures have to say about a proper biblical approach to engaging social issues.



## A Biblical Case for Social Involvement

Perhaps you're wondering whether Christians should even be involved in social issues. You've heard the criticisms that "Christians don't belong in politics," that social activism detracts from our ability to spread the gospel. It is essential that we have a firm grasp as to why we as Christians have an obligation to involve ourselves in the critical issues of our day.

### 1. A Christian view of love and compassion compels us.

We have a tendency to forget that the stories we read in our newspapers and the reports we hear on the nightly news represent the lives of real people. They are not faceless statistics—they involve the teenager down the street who has just discovered she is pregnant, the young man in the church youth group struggling with his sexual identity and our co-worker whose marriage is teetering on the brink of divorce. Because we are talking about real people, human beings made in the image of God, the question of the second greatest commandment is immediately raised. How do we love our neighbors as ourselves when it comes to social issues? We know that Christ calls us to compassion for those in distress, but what exactly is meant by compassion? Is it merely feeling bad for the person?

B.B. Warfield in his book, *The Person and Work of Christ*, points us to the story of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:33-36) to broaden our understanding of compassion.<sup>1</sup> Jesus has two reactions: one is sorrow (He wept). The other is described by the phrase "deeply moved," used twice in this account. Warfield points out that the English translation doesn't fully convey the sense of the Greek word *embrimaomai*. The root of this word

means to "snort in spirit." It was used by Greek playwrights to describe stallions before battle, rearing up on their hind legs, pawing at the air and snorting before they charged.

Jesus enters His Father's world, a place that should have been full of beauty, order and, above all, life. Instead He finds ugliness, disarray and death. Christ is not only moved with sorrow here, He is outraged. He figuratively snorts in spirit. This gives us a fuller understanding of the biblical meaning of compassion. This is an appropriate reaction to issues like abortion, pornography and euthanasia—a reaction that should be encouraged in our churches.

Outrage may be an appropriate place to start, but we know that outrage is not enough. A biblical sense of compassion demands action on our part. We are all familiar with the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Both the priest and the Levite could see that an injustice had been done to the man in the ditch, but the Samaritan did something about it. He got involved. He made a difference. Biblical compassion is not sentimental wish-wash. A sense of outrage in the face of an injustice must result in action on our neighbor's behalf.



### 2. A Christian view of being human assumes it.

The late Francis Schaeffer used to say that "man is not just a soul to be saved." Throughout his writings, Schaeffer placed a great emphasis on the biblical model of humanity, and for good reason. We understand from Scripture that people have physical needs with which God is concerned, but we have emotional needs and social needs that are important to God as well.



British theologian John Stott says, “Therefore, if we truly love our neighbors and, because of their worth, desire to save them, we shall be concerned for their total welfare, the well-being of their soul, their body and their community. And our concern shall lead to practical programs.”<sup>2</sup>

The evangelical church, in particular, has lost this balance. Its focus on evangelism frequently excludes social action. People are not just souls to be saved. Take a careful look at the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46. This sobering passage reveals that Christ is very concerned about how we respond to the physical and emotional needs of our fellow man.

Compassion demands action; and the biblical model of man requires that we take action not only to save souls, but to address temporal welfare of those souls as well. Frankly, when our Christianity fails to address all aspects of life, it appears to the world too trivial to be true.

### 3. The effectiveness of evangelism depends on it.

The relationship between social action and evangelism has been described as being “like the two blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird”:

- *Social activity is a consequence of evangelism.* Our salvation should result in social responsibility. Paul wrote in Galatians 5:6 (NAS) about the importance of “faith working through love.” James 2:18 says, “I will show you my faith by my works.”

- *Social activity can be a bridge to evangelism.* By first demonstrating Christ’s love in tangible ways, we can often break down walls, dispel prejudices and gain a hearing for the gospel.
- *Social activity is a partner with evangelism.* Jesus not only went about teaching and preaching, He also did good works and healed. Both were expressions of Jesus’ compassion; we should demonstrate both as well.<sup>3</sup>

Christians often distinguish between social *service* and social *action*, but the two should go hand-in-hand. John Stott uses slavery as an example. The harsh treatment of slaves might be ameliorated through social service, but you will continue to have the problem unless you abolish slavery through social action. Or, if accidents keep occurring at an unregulated intersection, what is needed is not more ambulances, but a traffic light. “So if we truly love our neighbors and want to serve them, our service may oblige us to take . . . political action on their behalf,” notes Stott (p. 12).




### 4. A Christian view of government requires it.

Webster defines politics as “the art or science of government.” Given the respect the Bible accords to government, why has the church shied away from politics? There are many reasons, but foremost among them is the confusion surrounding the New

Testament teaching on civil government. British theologian C.E.B. Cranfield makes these observations from the following passages:<sup>4</sup>

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### **Mark 12:13-17**

The Herodians, trying to trap Jesus, ask Him if it is proper to pay taxes to the Roman government. At Christ's request, one of them produces a Roman coin and Christ says, "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." The word "render" carries a sense of duty or obligation. Christ commands His hearers to do their duty to civil government. In the United States, that means participation in the political process.

### **Romans 13:1-4**

God has established government and service to the state as part of our debt of gratitude. Romans 13 does not appear in a vacuum. It is merely a continuation of an exhortation that starts with chapter 12, an exuberant call for us to love, to give, to bless and to serve others. Why? This attitude of service wells up out of a deep sense of gratitude for all that God has done and is doing for us, His people (chapters 1-11). Further, God's purpose in establishing government is very limited and very specific: to reward good behavior and punish evil. When government strays beyond those parameters, Christians should be concerned.

### **1 Timothy 2:1-4**

When government restrains chaos, conditions are best for preaching the gospel, and God desires that all people be given the opportunity to repent and be saved. This is why government is essential. What stronger motivation could there possibly be for the Christian to ensure that government works well?

### **Acts 5:29**

The principle set forth in this passage is quite clear: when government violates the will of God, it is our duty to oppose it. Part of our submission to government is to hold our government accountable to a higher law—the law of God. Remember Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 3)? Or Rahab (Joshua 2)? Or the Hebrew midwives (Exodus 1)? They are all examples of limited submission.

In addition to the above observations, Jesus spoke directly to our need to influence and even preserve society. His call to be "salt and light" (Matthew 5:13-14) means that we are to thoroughly interpenetrate the culture in which we live with a distinctively Christian approach. By bringing justice and mercy to bear in the public square, we have a beneficial, redemptive influence on all of society.

### **5. The character of God and the Lordship of Christ require it.**

Many Christians view the God they serve as Lord of their own lives and of His church, but not much else. A biblical view of His dominion is much broader. In his work on social involvement, *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today*, John Stott points to three elements of God's nature that have been neglected by the church:

- *God is the God of the secular as well as the sacred* (Isaiah 58). Christians tend to view God as concerned only with religious things, but God is the God of all creation and His concern extends even to the smallest sparrow.



- *God is the God of the nations as well as of His covenant people* (Daniel 4:32). In the Old Testament, the Israelites were often guilty of reducing God to a petty tribal deity. The self-interest of many Christians today reflects the same error the Israelites made (Daniel 4:32). We are to be a “blessing to all nations.”
- *God is the God of justice as well as of justification* (Psalm 146:7-9). We serve a compassionate God who abounds in mercy, but not to the exclusion of justice. In the first two chapters of Amos, God indicts a number of nations for their brutal practices. Sodom and Gomorrah are well aware that God is concerned with injustice wherever He finds it.

This cursory overview provides a framework for why Christians have a responsibility to be involved in their communities and their government. For a more in-depth examination of the topic, you may wish to obtain one or more of the following resources:

- How Now Shall We Live?* by Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey (Tyndale, 1999)  
*A Christian Manifesto* by Francis A. Schaeffer (Crossway, 1981)  
*Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today* by John Stott (Revell, 1990)



## What Can You Do?

Your opportunities for community involvement are limited only by your imagination. As you become informed about the issues and aware of the human needs in your community, you will soon discover no shortage of things to do. Rather, your challenge will be to focus on just one or a few key tasks. In determining what to do, you should seek the Lord’s direction. This will involve:

- Understanding His will
- Assessing your own talents and abilities
- Evaluating the desires of your heart

With so many important moral issues and human needs confronting us, there are no simple formulas for deciding what to do and what not to do.

In order to address the social and civil tasks that we are called to as the people of God, Focus on the Family encourages Christians to organize within their churches. We have found that the most influential churches in their communities have an organized activity devoted to social and civil concerns. These organizations are called by different names—social concerns committees, current issues councils or Christian citizenship commissions—but their function is the same: to provide spiritual and organizational leadership



on social and political issues facing the congregation and community. They have responsibility for educating and equipping the membership toward responsible and effective social awareness and action. We call these organized activities “community impact committees.”

A community impact committee can serve a wide variety of purposes within your congregation. First, it can become a research and information source for the whole church body. Its members can attend meetings of your local city council, school board, library board, etc. They can gather pertinent information related to relevant social issues and make it available to anyone in the church with a passion to make a difference in the community.

Second, the committee itself can take action on behalf of the congregation. The members can make telephone calls and visits to significant players in the community who help shape policy matters. They can formulate lists of names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of those whose opinions should be influenced by public opinion and need to be contacted with your church’s position. They can write letters and organize others to do so. They can stimulate the congregation’s interest and involvement in issues that affect the church, its families, its community and its nation.

Third, and quite significantly, the committee can serve the pastor. The members can provide him or her with accurate and comprehensive material that can be used in sermons, writings and other forms of communication. They can gather information he could never collect on his own. They can question the sources and verify the integrity of the facts. They can also question him and challenge him to be forthright, fair and true in his interpretation and use

of information. They can encourage him when he gets discouraged, support him when he gets weary and defend him when he is attacked or criticized. And, of course, they can pray for him.

“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people”  
(Proverbs 14:34).

“With the 300 men that lapped, I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands” (Judges 7:7).

## *Starting a Community Impact Committee*

There are five steps necessary to starting a community impact ministry in your church: (1) pray, (2) seek the affirmation and approval of church leadership, (3) recruit others for involvement, (4) develop a mission statement and organize for action and (5) begin the flow of information. Let’s briefly look at each of these steps.

**1. Pray.** Personal prayer is the first step in the development of your social vision and the establishment of a community impact committee in your church. Because of the importance of prayer, it seems almost trite to devote only a few sentences to it here. E.M. Bounds, a 19th-century authority on prayer, wrote: “There can be no substitute, no rival for prayer; it stands alone as the great spiritual force, and this force must be imminent and acting. . . . Many persons believe in the efficacy of prayer, but not many pray. Prayer is the easiest and hardest of all things; the simplest and the sublimest; the weakest and the most powerful; its results lie outside of human possibilities—they are limited only by the omnipotence of God.”<sup>5</sup>





Therefore, personal prayer must be the first priority as you work toward establishing a community impact committee in your church. Put first things first by taking this spiritual discipline seriously. There can be no substitute for prayer.

## 2. Seek the affirmation and approval of church leadership.

This is the second step in starting a community impact committee in your church. Personal vision and commitment are not enough. The church is not an aggregate of individuals, but a community of faith under the authority of Christ, administered through ordained and appointed leaders. As the writer of Hebrews reminds us, “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Hebrews 13:17). The church must affirm and approve your vision and plans to establish a community impact committee, and you must submit to their examination. Without these two elements, most community impact committees fail.

If you are to serve them, you must seek the counsel of your pastor or priest, elders, deacons, vestry or other persons who are responsible for your spiritual oversight as you determine your calling to social and political service. With the affirmation of your gifts and calling, and the official approval to organize a community impact committee in your church, you are now ready to begin recruiting others.


**3. Recruit others who share your vision and calling.** In one sense, everyone has a calling to the basic responsibilities of citizenship (e.g., being law-abiding, paying taxes, voting intelligently and so on). In another sense, however, social and political service is not for everyone. In fact, it probably will not be of interest to the majority of people in your church. In forming a community impact committee, you should find those people in your congregation who share a similar calling and desire to be part of a group that will help other church members be better citizens.

To get started, you need to identify those persons in your church who have a social vision and invite them to pray and study together as a fellowship group. You may already know who these people are, or you may have to go about finding them, perhaps by placing an announcement in the church bulletin inviting any interested parties to meet for prayer and study concerning social issues. You might also network within your Sunday school classes to identify others of like mind.

Next, set a time and place to meet and get started. The net effects of meeting together will be mutual encouragement, shared vision and increased guidance and direction. In meeting together with those who share your calling and vision, the synergy will “spur” all of you “on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24).



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At your first meeting, let those in attendance share their burdens and interests relating to moral and social issues. In this way, you will get to know something of the personal and common concerns of the group. Pray together about these matters, for each other and for specific discernment, guidance and direction about what to do. Then begin a study on biblical principles for social involvement. (For an example of this kind of study, see John Stott's book, *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today*.)

These times together will provide opportunity for a leader (or leaders) to surface. As the organization of your community impact committee evolves, the leadership requirements may be different from what characterizes the stereotypical "activist" in your church. Be sensitive to the need for servant-leaders who demonstrate a depth of spiritual maturity and respect within the church body. As you seek to determine who your leader shall be, the qualifications for leadership found in 1 Timothy 3:2-12 and Titus 1:6-9 provide an ideal as well as a valuable rubric for candidate screening and selection. Persons of this character and maturity will have the wisdom, respect and credibility to help make your committee a success.

#### **4. Develop a mission statement and organize for action.**

The organization of your community impact committee will be determined by three factors: mission, tasks to be accomplished and available human resources. Its mission is like a charter because it sets the committee's future direction and establishes a basis for organizational decision-making. All planning, goals and objectives should be tested in relation to the mission statement because it is your committee's reason for existence. Organizational

tasks and structure should be examined to determine how they serve the committee's mission.

The formation of your mission statement involves a clear understanding of your purpose within the church and surrounding community. In formulating this statement, four primary questions should be answered:

- Why will the committee exist . . . for what purpose or end?
- What function or functions will the committee perform? They may include any or all of the following:
  - Information gathering, interpretation and implementation on behalf of the pastoral staff and the congregation at large.
  - Citizenship education and the dissemination of information relevant to moral and social issues.
  - Effective political activism and social advocacy on behalf of neighbors in the interests of love, mercy, truth and justice.
  - Prayer concerts for government leaders and officials, policies, international peace initiatives, etc.
- For whom will the committee function? The church membership, its leadership or someone else?
- What actions or activities will the committee conduct to fulfill its functions?



The process of working through these questions can be difficult and time consuming, but the process will be as valuable to your group as the final product itself. By wrestling with the “what,” “who,” “how” and “why” questions, the committee will be able to assess personal, group and church values relative to social and political involvement. This exercise will provide even more insight on the tasks that you initially will need to undertake. Additionally, each member of your group will develop a sense of ownership in the committee’s vision.

Here is a draft of a sample community impact committee mission statement for your consideration:

*The community impact committee exists to serve this church and its pastor(s) by helping disciple its membership toward a fuller expression of Christian faith in the public square. In this effort, the committee endeavors to foster the biblical virtues of love, mercy, truth and justice on behalf of its neighbors through prayer, citizenship education and organized social action within local, state, national and international communities. It further serves as a resource to the church’s pastor(s) by providing any relevant research or information on social and community issues.*

Once you have formulated the mission statement, you will need to determine the tasks necessary to accomplish your stated mission. You will want to spell out in some detail the paths by which you intend to accomplish your mission. What is the future impact that you would like to make in your community, and what are the sequential steps necessary to achieve your goals? Who will be responsible for these steps?

Your committee’s organization will finally be determined by both the number of people available to serve and the talents and abilities that they bring to the group. In a small church, the committee may only be a handful of people; in a larger church, a committee could number in the dozens. If your committee is small, it is probably unrealistic for you to effectively engage 15 pressing social issues in your community. It is possible that even one or two issues will strain your committee’s human resources. In this situation, you will need to prioritize between what is important and what is crucial for your church and community. What can you do effectively with the resources God has given you? Once you have determined these things, organize accordingly. On the other hand, if you are part of a 50-member community impact committee in a church of 3,000 members, then several opportunities can be addressed simultaneously, such as:

- Parents and teachers could work on education issues.
- Attorneys could address religious liberty and church-state issues.
- Medical professionals could focus on human life and health care issues.
- Those with desktop publishing skills could help develop a newsletter, bulletin inserts, information sheets and more.
- Gifted communicators with the talent for persuasive writing or debating could open an avenue for influencing public opinion in the editorial section of local newspapers or on local talk radio shows.
- People who like to bake or make crafts could be involved in coordinating a bake sale or bazaar as a fundraiser for the local crisis pregnancy center, soup kitchen or prison ministry.

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The possibilities are endless, depending upon the composition of your committee. A more extensive list of activities that your committee may wish to undertake is provided in the next section.

**5. Begin the flow of information.** Solid education should undergird the actions of every community impact committee and must be an important function of your mission. Effective education is crucial toward building a consensus in your church regarding social and political involvement. Furthermore, the dissemination of timely, accurate and pertinent information on moral and social issues is a prerequisite to informed and responsible activism.

One primary reason for dispensing this information is that church members may not be socially and politically involved simply because they don't have the time to learn about the issues. Save them time by providing accurate information and analysis. For example, a handy-sized voter's guide on the local school-board candidates would be a valuable digest of information that the average voter may not otherwise be able to get without great effort.

Your committee's mission will augment and support the comprehensive ministry of your church and pastor by helping to teach the congregation about the Christian's role in society. In this manner, you will contribute to the overall effort of making disciples.

Your committee will need to read and study the issues. Continue your own education by subscribing to some informative periodicals. Maintain a reading schedule of good books pertinent to social and political involvement, and

encourage "issue expertise" within your group. Each of you will have special interests. Cultivate these interests by reading and studying books, articles and background papers in the areas of concern. You don't need a large budget or a staff of researchers to stay informed, since there are many organizations that can help. Contact these organizations (several of which are listed in Appendix A, "Resources") and build on their publications and networks.



## Practical Ideas for Community Impact Committees

Here are several examples of activities your community impact committee may wish to undertake:

- Organize a group from your church to serve in a local homeless shelter or soup kitchen.
- Conduct a voter registration drive for members of your church.
- Support a crisis pregnancy center with resources and volunteers.
- Instigate an effort toward greater racial harmony among the churches in your community.
- Keep your church and pastor apprised of legislative developments at the state capitol, especially those with implications for families. (This can often be done via the Internet.)
- Provide your pastor with background information and materials for challenging sermons on those social issues that require a Christian “voice.” (For example, Focus on the Family’s Web site offers a series of sermon outlines on a number of social issues to help in this effort.) Locate appropriate speakers to help him do so.
- Arrange activities to observe “Sanctity of Human Life Week” each January.
- On Mother’s Day and/or Father’s Day, sponsor an advertisement in your local newspaper highlighting the importance of motherhood/fatherhood.
- Start a Sunday school class on social issues and community involvement.
- Work with your local district attorney to see if additional restrictions can be placed on sexually oriented businesses in your community, or if such businesses can be shut down.
- Organize a letter-writing campaign to the sponsors of offensive television programming. Likewise, send letters of encouragement to advertisers who support wholesome programming.
- Survey local school board candidates regarding their stances on relevant issues, then report the results to members of your church.
- Provide a bulletin insert listing key local, state and national officials for whom your congregation can pray.
- Organize volunteers for a prison ministry. (Contact Prison Fellowship at 703-478-0100 for more information.)
- Develop an e-mail network to provide regular updates regarding important issues in your area to other community impact committees and interested individuals.
- “Adopt” an individual or family on welfare, providing them with assistance, training and opportunities to transition into a self-sustaining lifestyle.
- Provide materials and suggested speakers to your local school district that emphasize abstinence in sex education and the importance of traditional marriage between a man and a woman.
- Help coordinate your community’s observance of the National Day of Prayer each May.
- Organize volunteers to serve with a local hospice organization.
- Work with clergy members in your area to create a Community Marriage Policy, setting standards for marriage (e.g., comprehensive premarital counseling) among local churches.
- Host a free parenting course for single or “at risk” parents in your community.
- Place a billboard advertisement for abortion alternatives, such as crisis pregnancy centers or adoption services.

As your community impact committee considers activities that involve the legislative and/or political realm, keep in mind that restrictions do exist on what constitutes legally permissible activity for such a group. Appendix B, “Political and Legislative Guidelines for Churches and Pastors,” provides helpful parameters for what community impact committees may and may not do.

## Conclusion

The Lord is opening incredible doors for His church to be salt and light in the world as we move further into this new millennium. We trust that the suggestions and guidelines set forth in this booklet will help your church respond even more effectively to opportunities to influence your community.

You may encounter obstacles as you begin the process of forming a community impact committee. Perhaps you will have a hard time locating others of like mind. If so, pray that God will send others to join you. If one activity does not seem to work, try something else.

Don't become discouraged by these or other minor setbacks. Instead, take heart! History is filled with examples of Christian men and women called by God to social action, but who faced incredible obstacles—from William Wilberforce's decades-long efforts to abolish slavery in England to Martin Luther King Jr.'s tireless crusade for racial equality in our nation. They persevered, and their efforts changed the course of history.

Your community impact committee can make a significant—in some cases, even life-changing or life-saving—difference in the lives of people in your community. May the Lord bless your efforts!





## Appendix A Resources

There are numerous organizations within the Christian community that can serve as valuable resources to your community impact committee. In this section, we have listed, by social issue, several organizations that can provide additional information and assistance in helping your group understand and get involved. These sites will help familiarize you with the subject and may answer whatever questions you have.

First, you may want to check our Focus on the Family Web site which provides information on a wide range of social issues. For information on gambling, abstinence education, pornography, life issues, marriage, education and many other topics, go to **family.org** and click on “social issues.” In addition, you might check our **citizenlink.com** Web site for current news and commentary on the social issues of the day.

### Abortion

Care Net

109 Carpenter Dr., Ste. 100

Sterling, VA 20164

703-478-5661

info@care-net.org

care-net.org

National Right to Life Committee

512 10th St. NW

Washington, DC 20004

202-626-8800

NRLC@nrlc.org

nrlc.org

WELS (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod)

2929 N. Mayfair Rd.

Milwaukee, WI 53222

414-256-3888

wels.net

### Education

*Home Schools:*

Home School Legal Defense Association

P.O. Box 3000

Purcellville, VA 20134

540-338-5600

mailroom@hsllda.org

hsllda.org

*Private Schools:*

Association of Christian Schools International

731 Chapel Hills Dr.

Colorado Springs, CO 80920

719-528-6906

admin@acsi.org

acsi.org



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Focus on the Family  
Colorado Springs, CO 80995  
719-531-3400  
citizenlink.com

Family Research Council  
801 G St., NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
202-393-2100  
corrdept@frc.org  
frc.org

*Public Schools:*

Center for Education Reform  
1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 204  
Washington, DC 20036  
202-822-9000  
cer@edreform  
edreform.com

### **Euthanasia/Physician-Assisted Suicide**

International Task Force on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide  
P.O. Box 760  
Steubenville, OH 43952  
740-282-3810  
info@iaetf.org  
iaetf.org

National Right to Life Committee  
512 10th St. NW  
Washington, DC 20004  
202-626-8800  
NRLC@nrlc.org  
nrlc.org

### **Gambling**

Focus on the Family  
Colorado Springs, CO 80995  
719-531-3400  
citizenlink.org  
(click on gambling link)

The National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling  
100 Maryland Ave. NE, Rm. 311  
Washington, DC 20002  
703-443-9362 or 800-664-2680  
ncalg@ncalg.org  
ncalg.org

### **Homosexuality**

Exodus International  
P.O. Box 540119  
Orlando, FL 32854  
407-599-6872 or 888-264-0877  
exodus.to



National Association for Research and  
Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH)  
16633 Ventura Blvd., Ste. 1340  
Encino, CA 91436-1801  
818-789-4440  
narth.com

## Marriage and Divorce

Marriage Savers, Inc.  
9311 Harrington Dr.  
Potomac, MD 20854  
301-469-5873  
mj\_mcmanus@compuserve.com  
marriagesavers.org

National Fatherhood Initiative  
101 Lake Forest Blvd., Ste. 360  
Gaithersburg, MD 20877  
301-948-0599  
nfi1995@aol.com  
fatherhood.org

National Marriage Project  
Rutgers University  
54 Joyce Kilmer Ave.  
Lucy Stone Hall B217  
Piscataway, NJ 08854  
732-445-7922  
marriage@rci.rutgers.edu  
marriage.rutgers.edu

## Pornography

National Coalition for the  
Protection of Children and Families  
800 Compton Rd., Ste. 9224  
Cincinnati, OH 45231  
513-521-6227  
ncpcf@nationalcoalition.org  
nationalcoalition.org

Morality in Media Inc.  
475 Riverside Drive, Suite 239  
New York, NY 10115  
212-870-3222  
mim@moralityinmedia.org  
moralityinmedia.org

Concerned Women for America  
1015 15th St. N.W., Ste. 1100  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-488-7000  
cwfa.org

National Law Center for Children and Families  
225 North Fairfax St.  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
703-548-5522  
nationallawcenter.org

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## Pro-Family Legislation

Concerned Women for America  
1015 15th St., NW, Ste. 1100  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-488-7000  
cwfa.org

Family Research Council  
801 G St., NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
202-393-2100  
corrdept@frc.org  
frc.org

Heritage Foundation  
214 Massachusetts Ave. NE  
Washington, DC 20002  
202-546-4400  
info@heritage.org  
heritage.org  
familyfacts.org

## Religious Liberty

The Alliance Defense Fund  
15333 North Pima Rd., Ste. 165  
Scottsdale, AZ 85260  
800-TELL-ADF  
alliancedefensefund.org

American Center for Law and Justice  
P.O. Box 90555  
Washington, DC 20090-0555  
Legal Helpline Phone: 757-226-2489  
aclj.org

Christian Legal Society  
8001 Braddock Rd., Ste. 300  
Springfield, VA 22151  
703-642-1070  
clshq@clsnet.org  
clsnet.org

## Sexual Abstinence for Teens

Abstinence Clearinghouse  
801 E. 41st St.  
Sioux Falls, SD 57105-6027  
605-335-3643  
info@abstinence.net  
abstinence.net

True Love Waits  
Lifeway Christian Resources  
MSN 152  
127 Ninth Ave., N.  
Nashville, TN 37234  
615-251-2273  
truelovewaits@lifeway.com  
truelovewaits.com



## Stem Cell Research and Human Cloning

Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity

2065 Half Day Rd.

Bannockburn, IL 60015

847-317-8180

cbhd.org

info@cbhd.org

Do No Harm: The Coalition of Americans for Research Ethics

1100 H St. NW, Ste. 700

Washington, DC 20005

202-347-6840

stemcellresearch.org



## Appendix B

# Political and Legislative Guidelines for Churches and Pastors

The following “do’s and “don’ts” are based on requirements by the Federal Election Campaign Act and Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. As they are general guidelines, it is always a good idea to seek legal advice as you make specific plans for your church.

### Influencing Legislation

According to the Internal Revenue Code, pastors and churches may engage in activities designed to influence legislation, as long as the total sum of these activities does not reflect a “substantial part” of their church’s overall activity in a given year.

While the IRS has not defined “substantial,” court cases have applied percentage tests. Past rulings have held that expenditures of less than five percent of a 501(c)(3) organization’s time and finances devoted toward activities intended to influence legislation were not “substantial” and, therefore, were permissible.<sup>6</sup> Most churches are 501(c)(3) organizations.

The IRS considers “legislation” to be any official act that makes public policy, including town councils, county commissions and the legislative branches of both state and federal governments. School boards are not included in this definition.

The IRS defines “direct lobbying” as direct contact by an organization with members of a legislative body if the contact refers to specific legislation and reflects a view on such legislation. Though limited by the “substantial” test, such activity is also allowed.

“Grass roots lobbying” is far more common in churches and other nonprofit organizations. Such activity is designed to influence legislation through the members of a constituency.

However, simply informing your congregation about the content or status of a legislative measure under consideration is not an attempt to influence legislation. In order for such communication to be considered a grass roots lobbying attempt, the IRS has determined that it must refer to a specific piece of legislation, reflect an opinion on that legislation *and* call the reader or listener to action.

Grass roots lobbying is permitted to the extent allowed by the “substantial” limitation. Activities that do not involve all three components are merely considered “education” by the IRS and, therefore, have no restrictions at all.<sup>7</sup>

### Initiatives, Referendums, Ballot Questions and Propositions

Critical moral issues are increasingly being put to voters directly in the form of initiatives and referendums (also called ballot questions and propositions). This is not political activity, but the making of law by popular vote. Thus, churches and pastors may speak freely about initiatives, referendums, ballot questions and propositions, including outright endorsement or opposition. Bulletin inserts, fact sheets and statements from the pulpit are also allowed. This activity is considered direct lobbying, since the people you are attempting to influence—the voters—are the “lawmakers” in this case. However, the “substantial” restraint still applies.



### Example 1

A church tells its congregation about specific abortion legislation moving through the state legislature, announces its opposition and urges the congregation to contact their state representatives and request that the bill be defeated. This is a permissible “grass roots lobbying” activity.

### Example 2

The same church tells its congregation about specific abortion legislation moving through the state legislature and announces its opposition without urging them to contact their state representatives. This is merely educational activity; it may be done without limit.

### Example 3

A pastor speaks about a specific state initiative from the pulpit, announces his opposition and urges members to vote against it in the general election. This is permissible “direct lobbying” activity. (As with grass roots lobbying, it may be done until all such activities for the year exceed the “substantial” limit.)

## **Political Activity and Elections**

According to the Internal Revenue Code, a 501(c)(3) organization may “not participate or intervene in (directly or indirectly, including the publishing and distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office.” However, there are many ways for churches and pastors to affect positive change in elections by ensuring that church members have all of the information necessary to fulfill their civic responsibilities.

## **What a Church May Do**

- Conduct non-partisan voter registration/education drives.
- Contact your local city clerk’s office for information on registering voters in your church.
- Host candidate forums where all are invited and treated impartially.
- Rent a church mailing list (at market value) to a candidate.
- Publish an ad in the church bulletin for all candidates who request one, as long as the ad is purchased at the regular rate for all such ads.
- Publish neutral news stories on political candidates, including information regarding public endorsements candidates have received from a variety of organizations.
- Invite a political candidate to attend a church service or meeting. Remember that other candidates, regardless of party affiliation, must also be given the same opportunity should they request it and no church representative may endorse or solicit funds for any candidate.

## **What a Church May Not Do**

- Endorse a political candidate.
- Contribute to political candidates or political action committees.
- Make an outright donation of a mailing list to a political candidate.
- Participate in fundraising projects for political action committees.
- Sell a political ad at a discount rate if no other advertisers are offered discounts.
- Distribute candidate political statements.  
*(Note: this is not the same as a voter’s guide—see below.)*
- Pay to attend a caucus for a state or national political convention.
- Make in-kind or independent expenditures in favor of or against candidates.

## Voter's Guides

During election years, many churches make voter's guides available to their members. This is a permissible educational activity as long as the guides do not reflect a partiality which could be misunderstood as an endorsement of a particular party or candidate. The following guidelines will help ensure that your guide is indeed "neutral."

- Do not use a "comments" section in your voter's guide to clarify an incumbent's voting record. Doing so would indicate a bias. Let the candidate's voting record speak for itself.
- Do not use percentage or plus/minus ratings of candidates to indicate whether a candidate voted "pro-family" or "anti-family." Do not skew the voting record of a candidate by having YES votes mean they voted for a pro-family position or NO votes meaning they voted against the family.
- Do not use the ratings of other organizations that "score" office holders according to the percentage of times they vote in line with the organization's wishes.
- Keep the language neutral. Do not use such terms as "pro-family," "anti-family" or "baby killer" to describe candidates seeking office.
- Do not encourage your readers to vote for pro-family candidates, but encourage them to be involved. Everyone should be able to use your voter's guide to find candidates they like.
- If candidates refuse to respond to your questionnaire, you may mention it in your guide and include their phone numbers so voters can ask them why they refused.
- Do not mention any political action committee in the guide.

- You are not required by law to publicize the voting records or ideologies of third party candidates unless there is a good chance the third party candidate is viable or in a position to win the election.
- Questions asked of candidates must deal with a wide range of issues, not just abortion, pornography and homosexuality. Be sure to include taxation, health care, foreign policy, national defense and other topics of interest to provide a well-rounded view of the candidates.



### A Special Note for Pastors

As private citizens, pastors have the same rights as all Americans. A pastor may even endorse candidates from the pulpit as long as it is absolutely clear that these opinions are those of a private citizen and not made on behalf of the church or its members.

#### Endnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> B.B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ*, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian, 1970), pp. 110-115.
- <sup>2</sup> John Stott, *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1990), p. 19.
- <sup>3</sup> Material condensed from a conference report sponsored by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism and World Evangelical Fellowship in Grand Rapids, Mich., in 1982. *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment*, The Grand Rapids Report, Paternoster, 1982, p. 23.
- <sup>4</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, "The Christian's Political Responsibility According to the New Testament," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 15, 1962, pp. 176-192.
- <sup>5</sup> E.M. Bounds, *The Complete Works of E.M. Bounds on Prayer*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 317.
- <sup>6</sup> The IRS makes such rulings on a case-by-case basis. Both qualitative and quantitative factors are examined in such cases. Therefore, such percentage tests tend to be subjective and variable. It is recommended that you always seek legal counsel in planning activities designed to influence legislation. It is also advised that you keep records of the expenses incurred.
- <sup>7</sup> There is an exception to this rule when it comes to mass media. Churches planning to use radio, television or newspaper campaigns within two weeks of a vote on specific, "highly publicized" legislation should seek legal counsel before proceeding.





## Acknowledgments

The following sources were used in the compilation of this booklet. The editors wish to thank each of these authors for their contributions.

John Eldredge, *Why You Should Be Involved: A Biblical Case for Social and Political Involvement*, Focus on the Family, 1993.

H.B. London Jr, "A Social Concern Committee: Worth a Try?" *Pastor to Pastor*<sup>™</sup> newsletter, August 1997.

Alan R. Crippen II, "A Call to Action," *Reclaiming the Culture: How You Can Protect Your Family's Future*, Focus on the Family, 1996.

*Political and Legislative Guidelines for Churches and Pastors*, Focus on the Family, 1996.





*The Pastor's Advocate Series is intended to assist congregations in better understanding the needs of their pastors and pastoral families, in better caring for the personal welfare and professional wellbeing of these leaders, and in better teaming with them to maximize their united ministries for Christ.*



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