

# What churches can and cannot do

Whether the elections are federal, provincial, municipal or for a school board, Canadian churches can participate in the democratic process. And yet, for churches that are registered with the Canada Revenue Agency as charities with the ability to issue income tax receipts, there are specific guidelines that outline the allowable activities of charities.

## Let's start with the positive ways churches can engage

Here are five steps churches can take to encourage their members to be responsible Christian citizens during an election:

- 1** Church members can get to know the candidates, pray for them and ask about issues of interest or concern. For ideas, see the Questions for Candidates section above.
- 2** Church staff, volunteers and members of a church are free to engage in political activity outside the church, on their own time and/or with their own money, as long as they are not using church resources or presenting themselves as representatives of the church.
- 3** Churches may invite all candidates to speak at the same event or service. Churches can also organize an all-candidates' meeting. See our resource on organizing an all-candidates meeting for ideas.
- 4** Churches are free to provide information on issues of interest or concern that flow from biblical teaching, as long as the church does not link its views to any party or candidate. A church is also allowed to publish how all Members of Parliament, provincial representatives or municipal councillors or school board trustees voted on a given issue.
- 5** In all its actions, a church with charitable status must be non-partisan. That means a church may not endorse or support a particular candidate or political party (even if the candidate attends your church).

Voting is one way Christians seek the good of those around us and our country. It's an important way to contribute to Canadian society. It is good for our society when churches and faith communities become involved with election issues. We can pray for the candidates (see our Call to Prayer section above) and consider how we can respond to God's call to justice through the election process.

Remember that all our votes matter.

Here are the activities that are off-limits for charities.

### What churches cannot do

- 1** Invite candidates to speak at different times, or at separate events or services.
- 2** Promote or oppose any one (or more) candidate or political party.
- 3** Use church resources to support a candidate or party, including posting signs for a candidate or political party on church property.
- 4** Endorse a candidate or party from the pulpit.
- 5** Highlight or publish how one particular party or candidate voted on a given issue.
- 6** Distribute literature for any one candidate or party.
- 7** Link its views on issues with those of a particular party or candidate.
- 8** Collect a church offering for a political candidate or a political party.
- 9** Allow political party memberships to be sold on church premises.
- 10** Allow comments that support or oppose a candidate or political party to stay on the

church's website or blog or other public platform. Churches must monitor these platforms and remove partisan comments.

Churches that engage in prohibited activities such as partisan politics can face deregistration and lose their charitable status. For more information, see the Canada Revenue Agency's recent guidance on charities.

To sum up, as long as the church itself remains non-partisan, individual members in their personal capacity are free to support a particular candidate or political party with their personal resources, on their own time.

Churches can encourage family, friends and other church members to value and make good use of their democratic right to vote, and to speak up about issues facing our country and local communities.

*This information does not constitute legal advice. If you are unsure about a certain event or activity, check with the Canadian Centre for Christian Charities, seek legal counsel and/or contact the Canada Revenue Agency directly.*