

Handbook for Church Engagement

For any number of reasons, many of our churches have become disengaged in the cultural/political realm. This handbook is provided to help concerned Christians lead or at least encourage their local church to move toward a more effective Christian influence in their communities and be the salt of the earth and light of the world in the public square.

1. Vision and Function

Many local churches in America have established impressive track records of effective mercy-related social ministries by which members may serve and be engaged in the community. But they often lack any means by which the church as whole or interested members can be educated about or involved in cultural and policy-related issues in their community, state, and nation. This is unfortunate and often reflects an either-or type of Christian ministry approach rather than a both-and type of approach.

Perhaps a picture that illustrates the importance of both mercy ministries and policy-related ministries is that of people falling off of a cliff. Mercy ministries represent the hospitals we build at the foot of the cliff to care for those who are injured from the fall. But, too often, the church gives comparatively little thought, effort, or money to building a fence at the top of the cliff to restrain those who might fall. Law is that cultural restraint; it restrains evil by commending that which is good and punishing that which is evil, as God defines those terms (1 Peter 2:14).

The best way for a church to allow for engagement or education about social and cultural issues is to have a committee or ministry team devoted to this purpose as an official part of their ministry structure. The ministry may be called by different names—Salt & Light Committees, Moral Concerns Ministries, Current Issues Councils, Church and State or Christian Citizenship Committees, etc.--but it functions in the same: to provide in-house leadership for a congregational response to issues within the community, state and nation. For the purposes of this handbook we've chosen to call this a Community Impact Committee ("CIC").

a. Why a committee?

There are many reasons for this approach, among them: biblical obedience, accountability, effectiveness, and in face of the growing threat to religious liberty, protecting the church's ability to share the gospel.

Where we've seen CIC's succeed, it is usually a lay-run committee whose responsibility it is to keep the church leadership and congregation informed about social issues, provide counsel for involvement in social issues, and orchestrate various forms of action on social issues. As with any organization, even one within an organization, it can be wise to develop a mission statement by which its work will be guided. We have provided some sample mission statements at the end of this handbook.

There are numerous roles and responsibilities that a CIC could fulfill in your church, but the most fundamental are: educating, activating, and directing.

b. Educating

The initial role of the CIC is educator. Clarifying Christian duties toward the community should be first on your agenda. Providing to church members answers to questions like "Why should Christians be concerned about social issues?" "What exactly should we be concerned about?" should be your top priority because those are questions most people can't answer. And if you can't answer those questions, you probably don't need to worry about the other two possible roles and functions; you're probably not going to get very far off the ground

Helping members (and clergy) see engagement in the political and governmental process as a matter of stewardship and love of neighbor has proven to be effective in taking the focus off of politics, per se, and especially partisan politics. Understanding that our vote ultimately belongs to God, not a political party or trade or professional association, puts the focus where it needs to be - on our relationship to God with respect to that which He's given us. And stewardship is a basic tenant of the Christian church that people understand. FACT's [Stand for Truth](#) seminar is designed to help you be able to address these questions, but there are plenty of educational materials, such as DVD's, that can be used to answer these initial questions.

Once those questions are answered, the second aspect of education relates to the issues that we are facing in our culture. This is where the Committee can be a big help. Most people have a hard time trying to stay informed even if they want to and members of the clergy are often too overworked to keep up on every social issue.

Because of this, the CIC can be a great friend to the clergy, and you should try to help them see the committee's existence that way. You will get nowhere more often than not if you tell the pastor you have a great idea for him or if, whether you say it or not, he believes it is going to be just another thing they have to take on and be responsible for.

Once constituted, the information you provide must be consistently balanced, thorough, reliable, and as gracious as possible without watering down the truth. If you can do that, then you can win both gratitude and confidence of the clergy.

This is so important. Your clergy's confidence in you and your CIC is perhaps the single most necessary ingredient for success. You would do well to consider the church leadership your primary constituency. You will serve the church best by serving the leadership well.

Then, under the guidance or oversight of the clergy, your second priority should be to educate the congregation both on current moral and cultural concerns. What issues your CIC should focus on and how to keep members informed about them will need to be decided under the guidance of your clergy.

Hopefully the resources listed in the Appendix of this handbook will assist you to accomplish your two primary responsibilities as educator.

c. Activating

Education is the first step in the process. But once informed about the need to engage and about the issues, the question then becomes "What should we do?" "How do we respond?" The second role of the CIC is to provide a means for action. Telling people, even convincing them, that there is a problem and that they need to do something about it is not enough; you need to show them how. If you don't, people may go from being apathetic to frustrated.

"Whom should I call?" "Where should we go?" "Are there any experts who can help us?" "Are there any organizations that specialize in this arena?" "Has anyone dealt with this before?" The CIC will confront these kinds of questions. The good news your CIC doesn't have to re-invent the wheel; most social issues that your church will face have already been dealt with effectively by others! And often times other organizations, like FACT, can provide a means by which people can take action. You and the CIC don't have to be experts on everything. Being a resource center for the church can be enough. The information in the Appendix of this handbook, and the Family Action Council of Tennessee's web site (www.FACTn.org) will be very helpful in knowing where to turn to equip your congregation for effective action.

Again, working with the clergy is your first responsibility. The call to action is the point in the process where church leaders are mostly likely to grow skittish. When it comes to taking action as a congregation, the clergy will be the ones to make the final decision unless that decision has been delegated to your committee within certain parameters. The credibility you

developed in your role as an educator could determine whether action is taken or the church shrinks back.

At this stage, the CIC's role should be to educate and equip the clergy on the issue at hand and recommend a course of action. You are essentially an advisor. But to be a good advisor, you should pray regularly and specifically for wisdom and power as a committee. Schedule time to pray with the pastor if possible.

You need to know and understand where the clergy member with whom you are working is and take baby steps if necessary. As a legislative colleague used to say about complex legislation "sometimes the fastest way to get there is going slower." It's like the highway sign, "Arrive alive!" Better to start small and have some initial success than call for Armageddon against the cultural forces of evil and find that the only Armageddon was that of your ministry! Beside, having some early success will not only encourage you but will further encourage your clergy's confidence in you.

In this regard, as you consider what action is appropriate keep in mind that not every issue calls for the pastor to preach a sermon on the subject or issue a call to action for the pulpit. When something comes from the pulpit the people need to know it is really important. Sounding too many alarms is perhaps even worse than being asleep at the wheel. Like the boy who cried wolf, if everything is a crisis, then when a really big crisis comes along, people are numb to the call for action. Think about in the same way you might think of dealing with your teenager; you can't make every issue a major battle. And you can't do it here either.

In this regard, be mindful of the fact that the kind of people a CIC can attract are generally passionate about what is going on in our culture and the CIC (or some of its members) can easily develop a sense of urgency about everything, a feeling that is not likely to be shared by others less familiar with the subject. Passion can inspire, but it can also intimidate those who aren't as immersed in this kind of stuff, including the clergy. Again wisdom in knowing when, how often and in what manner a call to action should be made is critical. But done well, the potential for positive cultural influence is tremendous.

VOTER REGISTRATION: A special word about voter registration fits well under this heading of being equipped. If the members of your church are not registered to vote, which is quite often the case in churches across America, then they are not equipped to do fulfill the most basic aspect of their stewardship responsibility. FACT's web site has [instructions, forms, guidelines, Do's and Don't's](#), etc. about holding a voter registration drive in your church, so please consult that resource and download the materials. Some of that material has been included in the Appendix.

To avoid the accusation that the voter registration drive is just about election year politics or an effort to help some particular politician, common accusations that scare off support by clergy, we recommend that a CIC hold voter registration on a regular basis, perhaps once a month or quarterly on the fifth Sundays. Use the "Voting is Stewardship" church bulletin insert on that Sunday, announce from the pulpit that today is "Voter Registration Sunday" and volunteers will be available with blank forms after the service, collect the forms that are filled out and mail them to your county election commission office or drop them off. And if that is still too aggressive for your church's leadership, ask if you can at least put a reminder announcement in the bulletin or church newsletter about the importance of voter registration.

It may seem like a simple thing, but getting believers registered to vote is one of the most important things your committee can do.

d. Directing

Once the church leadership has agreed to a course of action, the clergy may return the ball to your court, depending on what the action is. If the action is a project like voter registration, most likely the CIC, if functioning well, will be asked to direct and coordinate the project. Again, coming to a member of the clergy with a great project for him to do will most likely result in no project! With projects, your responsibilities could entail such things as publicizing the action or event, coordinating volunteers, arranging for materials, coordinating needed technology, etc.

Knowing that this may be your hat to wear could help to moderate the frequency and ambition of your "calls to action," but this is also a very rewarding function of the CIC. Seeing the church in action and watching the joy people experience as a result of actually getting involved and making a difference is very satisfying indeed. And, of course, the more timely and appropriate* the involvement (i.e. the better you fulfill your role), the more likely your church will be to participate the next time!

*This is not to be confused with merely asking how successful an activity was. There will be times when you will do exactly the right thing and have precious little material evidence to show for it; keep your spiritual focus regardless of wins or losses.

e. The Role of the CIC in the Community

Educate, Activate, and Direct: these are the basic ways in which the CIC can serve the body of Christ. They might seem intimidating, but do not despair; there are friends both inside and outside the church ready and willing to help. Another significant role of the CIC is to enlist

those friends in fulfilling your "in-house" duties. This is the role of liaison; acting as the link to other churches and organizations.

To assist you in this task, FACT provides resources for churches on its website and voter registration information specific to Tennessee. And FACT provides "Alerts" about pending legislation in Tennessee affecting families. You may find it helpful to encourage members of your congregation to subscribe directly to these communications because quite often time is of the essence.

Since FACT focuses primarily on what is going on inside Tennessee, it is important that you or members of the CIC sign up for free updates on national matters from Citizen Link (www.citizenlink.org) formerly Focus on the Family Action, or The Family Research Council (www.frc.org). For information about legal issues impacting culture and religious liberty, the Alliance Defense Fund (www.alliancedefensefund.org) provides free email informational services.

As you develop your CIC, different members of the committee could be responsible for monitoring certain sources of information and relaying it to the proper person on the committee whose function is dissemination of the information.

The goal is to encourage synergy, where the total effect of cooperative action is greater than the sum of individual efforts. A fitting analogy is that of burning charcoal briquettes. When separated on the hearth, they quickly die out; but when stacked together, the intensity and duration of their heat increases.

By acting in liaison with the FACT and other organizations in the state, the CIC can tap into a nationwide network. As we mentioned before, there is no need to re-invent the wheel; most social issues that your church will face have already been dealt with effectively. A liaison needn't be an expert on everything, but a resource center for the church, the committee with the connections.

2. Getting Started

So far, we have summarized the vision and function of the CIC in the church and in the greater network of pro-family groups. Now we turn to the nuts and bolts of creating such a committee in your church.

a. Committee Leadership

The most basic prerequisite for any sort of Community Impact Committee is church consent by the leadership. This is not to say that a member of the clergy must run the committee, or even attend every meeting, but to be under the authority of leadership in your church is a biblical necessity (Heb. 13:17, Rom. 13). Of course, it also stands to reason that the church which most exemplifies a respect for moral authority has the best chance of promoting it in the community. Therefore, the church leadership must give assent to the establishment of the committee and establish the lines of authority and communication.

b. Clergy Generated

There are a variety of ways to start a Community Impact Committee in your church; it may begin as a concern laid upon a member of the clergy. However, given the great demands placed upon most members of the clergy, we recommend that a qualified lay-leader be identified to chair the committee. As mentioned above, however, a system of accountability must guide the committee in fulfilling its responsibilities.

Committee leadership requirements may be different from what characterizes the stereotypical "activist." While the Lord has blessed some people with a tremendous amount of energy and tenacity, the most important qualifications of a CIC leader should include depth of spiritual maturity and a gift for consensus building, a servant heart, and no stigma of rebellion or fruitless confrontation (1 Tim. 3:2-12, Titus 1:6-9). Political "flame-throwers" will be more destructive than helpful.

c. Lay Generated

If you are a lay-person who is feeling the call to deepen the social witness of your church, you might first want to identify other church members who share your concern. Support may be as close as your church's home-school network, Sunday School class or Bible study. The next step is to approach your clergy; perhaps you would want to broach the topic of social involvement by going through this handbook together. You may also wish to present the material about a biblical basis for engagement that you have been provided or consider inviting some of the church leadership to view Lesson 9 of The Truth Project (see www.TheTruthProject.org) on "The State."

Regardless of whether you are clergy or laity, leader or follower, novice or veteran, prayer is the order of the day, both in identifying folks who share the vision and in approaching those who may have less affinity for the social engagement dimensions of Christianity. Unless all these undertakings begin and continue through the power of the Holy Spirit, they will be of little eternal value and may actually do more harm than good.

d. Structure

Structure is first determined by size. In a small church the committee may not be much larger than you; but if there are many interested people, the group may decide to organize either functionally or topically. If folks have general concerns and specific skills, you may divide labor functionally with roles such as chairperson, secretary, researcher, editor, and event coordinator. If you have more people with specific concerns and general skills, you may divide labor topically under categories, such as abortion, homelessness, sex education, religious freedom, etc. Most groups incorporate both function and topic into their organization. Because three of your four fundamental responsibilities entail gathering and disseminating information, it makes sense that you have people with gifts in those areas.

Someone must have the duty of keeping up to date on the issues. There also ought to be someone with writing skills in the group, as you will often need to present your information in written form (bulletin announcements, newsletters, etc.).

Regarding the formal relationship of the committee to the church, a lot depends on your type of church government. In general, these committees tend to fall under the umbrella of Christian Education/Adult Ministries (since education and discipleship are essential) or Missions/Outreach (since social action is so closely related to evangelism). Discussion with the church's leadership should provide direction on how the committee is to fit into the organization of your particular church.

e. Meetings

Again, size and structure play a large role in how your meetings will be handled. In general, you may wish to start with a meeting every other week. Some CICs might meet as often as once a week, but few meet less than once a month. The internet has made group communication without physical meetings more possible than in the past. The Lord's blessing should be invoked at the beginning of every gathering, and the essence of what takes place should be recorded by someone acting as secretary. These minutes should be kept on file for future reference, and the clergy or church governing body should be asked if they want a copy.

Prepare an agenda beforehand as a matter of respect for your own time and that of your fellow committee members. It should always allow time for prayer, review of the minutes from the previous meeting, updates on current issues and projects, discussion of pending issues, and prayerful planning of action items for the church. In discussing information brought to the meetings, small groups may wish to proceed informally. However, larger

groups may find it helpful to consult a meeting guideline, such as the popular *Robert's Rules of Order*.

f. Keeping Informed

If you have been following social issues for a while, you probably have a pretty good idea what issues your CIC will address. If this is your first serious consideration of social involvement, you will want to start by becoming apprised of the shared concerns and relevant issues in your community. Either way, getting and staying informed is a high priority for the CIC. [Resources](#) on FACT's webpage can connect you with organizations that offer both a general overview of the issues and deeper research on particular topics.

You need neither a large budget nor a staff of researchers to stay informed, since there are many organizations with full-time staff to help you with that. Most of their newsletters are relatively inexpensive or free. Local libraries may also carry books and periodicals helpful to your work. An effective CIC will have a regular flow of information from a variety of sources.

While you may want to entrust the state and national scene to trusted organizations that work at those levels, the local scene is yours to monitor! As you grow, look for someone to follow meetings or at least consistently review the agendas of the school board, zoning board, county commission, and CICY council. Agendas are usually posted on the internet or you can sign up to get them by email. The meetings of some local governing bodies are often broadcast live over local cable channels.

By way of caution, there are probably more issues to be concerned about in the public square today than anyone church could possibly handle. As you begin to organize and operate your CIC, you must prioritize the issues that will command your attention. Start small! Educating the congregation about one issue and alerting them to a bill in order to contact their legislators might be enough for one month.

On the other hand, some issues will prioritize themselves. For example, just because state law allows local communities to regulate sexually oriented businesses, not every community may need to make that issue a top priority. And, of course, local crises will also emerge and demand your attention (such as an irresponsible sex education curriculum); but the tyranny of the urgent is a hard master, and every effort should be made to strike a balance between addressing problems and preventing them. The need for prayer and the role of the Holy Spirit in setting the priorities for your CIC cannot be overstated.

3. Moving Forward

a. Communicating With the Congregation

Once you have received the support of your church leaders and joined hands with a few other concerned members, you should begin to establish regular dialogue with the congregation.

It is useful to consider the various ways to communicate with the congregation. Remember that the object is certainly not for the committee to end up doing everything on its own or even on behalf of the congregation, but to get the whole church involved. This may be accomplished in a variety of ways, all of which involve regular communication with the congregation. The most obvious is an announcement from the pulpit by the pastor. This vehicle carries perhaps the greatest weight, but as stated earlier pulpit announcements should be used sparingly so that it has greater effect at those times when you really do need the "big guns." There are better ways of setting up your regular dialogue with the congregation:

*Bulletins - Bulletin inserts arguably provide the broadest coverage of the congregation since almost everyone who comes to church will read one. A frequent drawback is the small amount of space available, but there may also be topical and stylistic limitations (e.g., modesty may prevent mention of certain concerns). Still, this can be an effective line of communication. Bulletin inserts are available from the Family Research Council and even from some denominational organizations. If this is too aggressive for your church's leadership, the bulletin inserts could be made available to be picked up by those interested or posted in Sunday School rooms.

*Newsletters – Newsletters (and church web sites and blogs) are becoming an option for groups of modest means in this age of electronic publishing. If your church already has an established newsletter, blog or e-mail blast, you might consider seeking a regular column in it or including an insert; or you could start your own. Many of the pro-family publications listed in the bibliography permit churches to reproduce their articles under special arrangements. In this way, a very impressive newsletter can be assembled by a rather small committee.

*Class Contacts - Leaders of adult classes are a natural network within the church. Sometimes a bulletin insert or flyer may not be appropriate for the whole church to see (given that children will read it), so it could be more effective to distribute them through the adult Bible study groups instead. Building a relationship between the CIC and the various Bible study groups within your congregation is another way of getting the message out.

As you consider your options, this is where knowing your clergy and church leadership is important. Your church may not want everyone being contacted with the “issue information” you’ll be providing for fear it could offend visitors and others. A consideration in that instance is to have the formation and the existence of the CIC announced in the bulletin or newsletter and let people know how to sign up for more information or who to contact. Then information can be sent to those who are interested and requested it, reducing the risk of offense and allowing the leadership to tell those who object to the very existence of the CIC that they need not sign up.

b. Projects

An easy second step would be to lend your help to some of the groups who represent your values in the state capitol and in Washington, D.C. Sometimes these organization need help with everything from answering the phone to doing research that they don’t have the staffing to do. Sometimes these organizations will have a “Day on the Hill” and some members of the church might want to go and the CIC could organize the trip.

Another relatively easy projects on which the group might teethe itself would be informing the congregation about who their elected officials are and reminding them of the biblical exhortation to pray faithfully for these public servants (1 Tim. 2:1-4). One of the first items of business could be the creation of a list naming all of your elected officials, from local school board all the way up to the White House (include address, phone numbers, and web pages if possible). This information may be obtained from your local library or registrar of voters (listed in the phone book) or through simple internet searches. You may then provide the list for the congregation and update it appropriately.

Keeping in mind the education function, the CIC could work with the Christian Education/ Discipleship department to plan an adult education series on Christian social responsibilities. It could be something pre-packaged such as the Children At Risk video by Dr. James Dobson and Gary Bauer; Against The Night by Chuck Colson (see bibliography) or The Truth Project DVD series. For a more tailored message, someone from FACT might be appropriate to speak to your congregation or representatives of local prison ministries, drug and alcohol rehabilitation ministries, pregnancy resource centers, adoption ministries, sexual addition ministries, and the list goes on.

As we mentioned under Activating, another very useful first step would be a voter registration drive. Alert the congregation about upcoming elections and register them to vote. If permitted, as election time draws near, you may encourage responsible voting by distributing [non-partisan voters guides](#) that provide the candidates' stance on pertinent

issues (Again, if this is too aggressive, consideration could be given simply to providing the congregation with references to websites where they can do for that information.

One final suggestion is to host a candidate forum. Your church may not be large enough to make a forum attractive to a candidate, but consideration could be given to joining with other churches to hold a forum. And, again, if a forum prior to an election is too aggressive for your church, consideration could be given to inviting an elected official to come speak and answer questions during a non-election year.

4. Political Guidelines for Pastors and Churches

Is all of this permissible? Yes. Will we endanger our church's non-profit status? No, because clear guidelines have been established by the federal government. Taking a stand on social issues, educating your congregation, calling them to action, and exerting grass-roots pressure on officials are all well within the law for churches as tax-exempt organizations. Pastors may even use the pulpit to take a stand on specific legislation, issues, or acts of government. The only place where limits have been set is with specific regard to campaigns and elections. And even here a great deal can be done, more than most churches realize! Below is a brief outline of "dos and don'ts" for churches and pastors at election time, based on requirements by the Federal Election Campaign Act and Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. All this information is available on FACT's website.

4. The Long Run

Christians are people with eternal goals, yet they are unfortunately quite susceptible to becoming temporally "near sighted." They can become so "heavenly minded" that they can become of no earthly good. On the other hand, some become "ensnared" by the pleasures of the world and are afraid to do anything that might "cost" them in this world. Both kinds of Christians will be resistant to your efforts. So, try to set a course that maintains uncompromising values and reasonable expectations; any seeming progress or setback you experience should be evaluated on these two criteria. Remember that your call is to be a faithful steward of the passions and abilities that God has placed in you; the response of others is for Him to produce. Don't become discouraged.

And remember, even if you do everything correctly (and you probably won't), there looms the specter of burnout. You were never meant to do everything! Work toward not making yourself indispensable. As soon as possible, bring others onto the team and begin training others both to work with you and after you. Our work for the Lord should not push out our time with the Lord. Make sure there is still time in your day for worship, prayer, and study.

Make sure you have time for your family. And find some people with whom you can be real about your life for the sake of balance and accountability. Keep your priorities!

Lastly, be careful not to neglect the spiritual dimension of the issues you face, for they are the key to every real step of cultural progress that will be made. The spiritual forces that work against God's Truth, both in culture and even in the church, are real. Even Jesus said that some spirits will "come out only with prayer and fasting." (Matthew 17:21) And never lose sight of the fact that the "enemy" is not the person on the other side of the issue.

The problems America and your community are facing have been long in the making; solutions will take time too. What your hand finds to do, do with all of your might. But remember that every day is the Lord's; rejoice and be glad in it.

Sample Mission Statements

Example 1

As followers of Christ, we believe that it is our responsibility to impact those around us for Christ. And this impact should not just be with respect to individuals, but also our community, our culture, our government and our world. Amos 5: 21-24. To do this, we must be salt and light as Jesus admonished us in [Matthew 5:13-16](#).

The mission of the CIC is to promote righteousness in local, state and federal levels of government while at the same time exposing initiatives, policies and legislation that would oppose righteousness as measured by God's Word. While there are many verses that we could point to, the following two passages are helpful in highlighting our views in this regard:

Proverbs 11:10 – “When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, And when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy.”

Proverbs 14:34 – “Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a disgrace to any people.”

Subject to the Lord's direction and blessing, the CIC will accomplish its mission by educating, encouraging and energizing fellow believers to become engaged in the governmental process in order to promote righteousness. This may take many forms but could include interaction with elected officials, prayer for them and our nation, voting for candidates, informing family and friends of critical and time sensitive issues, and even running for elective office, if God so leads.

Example 2

The Community Impact Committee shall serve as an official committee of this church. Its charter is to serve both the church leadership and congregation by providing information about social issues of concern to the body of Christ and education on Christian responsibilities to love and service in the public square. The committee shall also endeavor to equip the church for action when so directed and to coordinate congregational involvement. The committee shall seek at all times to fulfill its responsibilities in a manner consistent with the character of Christ.

The committee shall endeavor to assist the leadership of this church by also acting as liaison to other pro-family organizations and churches. By identifying needs and concerns, together with the resources for addressing them, the committee shall help church leadership to direct the congregation in biblical response to the moral issues of our times. In this regard, the committee functions to disciple church members toward a fuller expression of their Christian faith in the public square.

Conducting a Voter Registration Drive

About half of U.S. churchgoers aren't registered to vote. That means millions of Christians are forfeiting their voice in elections that ultimately determine whether this nation honors biblical marriage, protects those in the womb and allows prayer in public schools. Help change that by hosting a church voter-registration drive. Here are some simple steps to follow:

Step 1: Ask

Get permission from your church's leaders to host a voter-registration drive so that you're under biblical authority. When asking, emphasize that voter registration is:

Biblical. "Part of pastoral responsibility is equipping the people of God to do their work in the world," says Father Frank Pavone of Priests for Life. He suggests having "Citizenship Sundays" that feature civic-responsibility sermons and voter-registration tables. (For sample sermons and bulletin inserts visit Focus on the Family's citizenlink.org or Family Research Council at FRC.org.)

Easy. You can download and print off all the Tennessee voter registration forms you need at FACT's website or that of the Tennessee Secretary of State or pick them up at your county election commission office.

Legal. The IRS says church voter-registration drives are legal, and even encouraged, as long as they're nonpartisan and don't endorse or oppose candidates. (At FACT's website under "church resources" is an easy-to-read and understand guide to what churches and pastors can do in the political arena.)

Step 2: Prepare

Contact your [county election commission](#) to obtain registration forms and learn about the collection procedures or simply [download and print off as many forms as you need](#). Voters can mail their own cards. But it's more effective to collect them from your fellow church members and then volunteer to mail or return them to the local election commission in bulk.

Familiarize yourself with the list of [frequently asked questions](#) on the "How do I" on the far right tab on the Tennessee Election Commission's Web site.

Schedule registration drives at least one Sunday prior to the week before voter registration ends .

Consider asking your church leadership to designate every fifth Sunday as Voter Registration Sunday. Voters are constantly moving from one address to another or moving into a new district. With regular voter-registration drives (having a table available in a regular, known place) you can:

- Make sure people do not forget to register or keep their registration current.
- Avoid any perception that voter registration is motivated by partisan interest since it is regular and not tied directly to an upcoming election.

Advertise your drive in church bulletins, newsletters, Sunday school announcements and posters—though “nothing beats announcements from the pulpit,” says Rick Scarborough, a former pastor and founder of Vision America, a voter-education group. “As the pastor goes, so goes the church.”

Step 3: Register

Pews. Let ushers distribute registration cards in the pews, allowing those present a few minutes to fill out the cards before they’re collected. That way “you don’t miss anyone,” Scarborough says, “which is the same reason people pass offering plates.” Offerings are important to a church; making sure that Christians are good stewards of the power they hold as citizens, which power is ultimately a delegation from God, should be just as important.

Tables. If your pastor and church leadership prefers a more passive approach, set up tables in the church’s foyer. If you only hold registration drives once or twice a year, consider having light refreshments and plenty of pens. FACT’s president, David Fowler, suggests these tips:

Take the Initiative. “Stand up, don’t sit, and don’t just let people walk by. Speak to them, saying, ‘Good morning, can I help you fill out this form’ and politely suggest that they fill it out at the booth.

Provide Assistance. “Lead people step-by-step through the process so they don’t feel like any question is stupid.”

Have Sign-up Sheets for people who want more information. This is a good starting point for forming a Community Impact Committee in your church to whom you can communicate other important information affecting our families, culture and religious liberties.

Keep Records. Whether you do pew distributions or tables, keep a list of the names of the people you have registered so that you can later check to make sure the forms you have turned in have been properly handled by the Election Commission.

Personal Contacts. If you or members of your Community Impact Committee have the time, consider making telephone calls or even personal visits to members of your church who aren't registered—you can obtain that information by comparing church-mailing lists with voter-registration records, which are public information. "Don't put them on the defensive by saying, 'You're not registered,'" Scarborough says. Instead, "offer to help them become a voter."

Step 4: Follow Up

Contact those on the sign-up list you kept during registration a few days before the election and remind them to vote.

Send Thank-You Notes to church leaders and volunteers who approved or otherwise helped with the registration drive.