

how to do mission 3:

hosting church voter registration

Statistics show that millions of Christians still forfeit their voice in elections by neglecting to vote. Help change that by hosting a church voter-registration drive.

STEP 1: Ask.

As mentioned previously, even though you've already established a church committee, it's important to get church leaders' permission for every new activity you do so that you earn their trust. When asking permission to do voter registration, emphasize that it's:

- ★ **Biblical.** Dr. Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, told Focus' *Citizen* magazine that by allowing voter registration, pastors enable their parishioners to follow the Romans 13 mandate to fulfill civic duties — which, in America, is voting — as well as Matthew 5's command to be the light:

"You can sit around and curse the darkness, or you can light a candle. And every time you register, or encourage someone else to, you're lighting candles."

*Dr. Richard Land, President
SBC Ethics & Liberty Commission*

- ★ **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. (See "Legal Guidelines," Section 7.)

Tips for staying nonpartisan

- ★ Emphasize registration, not politics.
- ★ Allow people from every political party to register.
- ★ Don't make issue statements — like, "Do your part for pro-life candidates" — that can be construed as endorsements.
- ★ Don't tell people who you are voting for during registration.



STEP 2: Prepare.

Your goal should be to register every church member who isn't already prepared to vote. Here are some easy ways to obtain registration cards:

- ★ **National form:** There's a national registration form available at www.eac.gov/register_vote_forms.asp that's accepted by most states.
- ★ **CitizenLink:** Focus on the Family's online Action Center allows you to click on your state and download the appropriate registration forms, as well as read about your state's requirements for registering people. Just go to www.citizenlink.org and click on the "Make Your Voice Heard" button at the top of the page.
- ★ **Local registrar's office:** You also can go directly to your county clerk's or secretary of state's office to obtain registration cards. Voters can mail their own cards. But it's more effective to collect them from parishioners and then volunteer to mail or return them in bulk.

"We highlight in yellow all the questions on the registration cards that need to be answered by people. After they fill those out, we keep them and return them to the registrar ourselves — church members don't have to do anything but fill out the information," says Dean Welty, director of Valley Family Forum, an affiliate of the Virginia FPC.

Note: Some states, like Texas, require you to be deputized before collecting other people's registration cards. Be sure to check Focus on the Family's voter registration site (listed above) to learn what your state's requirements are.

STEP 3: Plan.

- ★ **Schedule** registration drives on two consecutive Sundays more than a month before the election, advises Focus on the Family's John Paulton. Most states require voters to be registered 30 days before an election.
- ★ **Advertise** your drive through church bulletins, newsletters and posters — but the best-case scenario is an announcement from the pulpit. "Around election time, Focus will have a sample sermon listed on its Web site," adds Paulton. During primary and general elections, the www.citizenlink.org Web site also has several ready-made, voter registration advertising tools like posters and bulletin ads that church volunteers can use.

STEP 4: Register.

- ★ **Pews.** The most time efficient and effective method is to let ushers distribute registration cards in the pews, allowing parishioners a few minutes to fill out the cards before they're collected.

"You can put a voter registration card in every bulletin that people receive as they go in the door" and then collect the filled-out cards in the offering plates, suggests Gary Cass of the Center for Reclaiming America.

"It literally takes just a couple of moments to fill out the form and put it in the offering . . . then church members can take the responsibility of delivering the cards" to the registrar's office. "I saw one church in San Diego register over 900 people through that method."

- ★ **Tables.** If your pastor prefers a more passive approach, set up booths in the foyer. "Make sure your registration table is in a prominent, high traffic area in your church and that it has a patriotic style," suggests the www.citizenlink.org site. "Have volunteers scheduled to man the registration table and answer questions."

When doing a table registration, remember to:

- ★ **Take initiative.** “I would even suggest getting clipboards and approaching people . . . because if you just wait for them to come to you, you’ll get a very low response,” Cass says.
- ★ **Ask questions.** When people say they are already registered, it helps to ask things like: Have you turned 18? Have you gotten married? Have you had an address change? If the answer is yes to any of those, that person probably needs to register again.

“A lot of people think they’re registered, but they’re not,” says Cass. “That’s why it’s important to ask those questions.”
- ★ **Provide voter guides.** Many state FPCs make available legally approved, nonpartisan voter guides during elections that you can distribute at your registration booth. Most pastors he works with like the voter guides, says Gene Mills of the Louisiana FPC, because “it’s a great tool they can use that’s pulpit-safe and pulpit-friendly.”
- ★ **Keep records.** Have sign-up sheets for people who want more information about your group or who want to sign up for action alerts.

STEP 5: Follow up.

- ★ **Remind parishioners to vote** a few days before the election. (To encourage them, you can share tidbits from the following page about elections won by a single vote.)
- ★ **Send thank-you notes** to church leaders and volunteers.

Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty . . . of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.

John Jay, the First Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court