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IRS Announces Churches May Endorse Political Candidates

The Internal Revenue Service has announced that it will allow churches and other houses of worship to endorse political candidates without losing their tax-exempt status.

This has not been the case since the addition of the Johnson Amendment to the tax code in 1954. That amendment specifies that churches and nonprofits — 501(c)(3) organizations — “are absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office.” It was an assurance that the taxpaying public would not subsidize politics in the religious nonprofit sector. Further, those tax-exempt organizations could not make contributions to political candidates.

Still, the Johnson Amendment has rarely been enforced by the IRS. A few churches have been investigated, but only one has lost tax-exempt status. However, the National Religious Broadcasters

and two churches in Texas sued the IRS, saying the rule infringes on their First Amendment rights to freedom of speech and free exercise of religion. This response by the IRS is part of the settlement.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State urged the judge in the case to reject the settlement, saying, “Weakening this law would undermine houses of worship and nonprofits by transforming them into political action committees, flooding our elections with even more dark money.”

Despite support by the churches more in favor of Christian Nationalism, most religious Americans would prefer no political endorsements from the pulpit. A 2023 poll by the Public Religion Research Institute showed that nearly three-quarters of American Protestants, Catholics, and Jews preferred not to mix politics with church services.

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NEWS OF THE WORLD

Arresting Person for Praying with Others Violates Human Rights

In a case heard in July 2025, The European Court of Human Rights determined that arresting a person for prayer together with others is a violation of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. *Rafiyev v. Azerbaijan* addressed the arrest and conviction of a follower of a branch of Islam who was found to be having an unauthorized religious meeting in a private area.

Eight years earlier, the applicant attended a funeral service. Afterwards,

they met with friends at a private house, which was subsequently raided by police officers who arrested 22 individuals. The charge was breaking the rules about holding religious meetings.

The court determined that the law applied to someone trying to establish or operate a religious organization, which was not the case. Also, even though Rafiyev was not a member of a registered religious organization, they could not be excluded from praying.

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Churches and Politics... (Cont. from cover)

The first proposal to repeal the Johnson Amendment came in 2017, during Donald Trump's first presidency. He did not do away with the amendment, but did issue an executive order to the IRS to quit enforcing it. The Seventh-day Adventist Church issued a response in the April 6 issue of the *Adventist Review*.

"The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, because of its biblical beliefs and practices, does not desire to intervene in elections. Additionally ... the church reaffirms its opposition to leg-

islative efforts to eliminate or weaken rules that prohibit nonprofits, including houses of worship, from endorsing or opposing candidates.

"... the church will not modify its practice of remaining neutral in elections. While church members are free to support candidates or even run for office themselves, it is not the role of the church to become involved in the electoral sphere."

The Adventist Church in 2025 continues to maintain its stance on neutrality. "For Adventists, the concern that American churches could

become more heavily involved in politics has its roots in the prophetic implications of this troubling action," notes Amireh Al-Haddad, director of public affairs and religious liberty for the Southern Union Conference. "By allowing churches more unbridled freedom in politics, you risk making the politician beholden to the organization/church which got them elected. Conventional wisdom dictates that we are better able to fulfill our prophetic purpose as a church when we stay focused on Christ, rather than politics."

"This is what the Jews did in the days of Christ and what the church has done ever since whenever she has lost the grace of Christ. Finding herself destitute of the power of love, she has reached out for the strong arm of the state to enforce her dogmas and execute her decrees. Here is the secret of all religious laws that have ever been enacted, and the secret of all persecution from the days of Abel to our own time," Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings, page 126.2.

- In the latest action taken in this case, via the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, California has agreed to allow sectarian schools to participate in the IDEA program, which provides special services for children with disabilities.
- The Supreme Court has agreed to hear the case of a Rastafarian whose dreadlocks were shaved — against his religion — by Louisiana prison guards when he was a five-month inmate in 2020. The decision will determine whether the man can sue for damages.
- In an update, the Department of Justice has joined a suit by Catholic bishops against a new Washington state law removing clergy privacy privilege in confessional. The DOJ says it interferes with Catholic priests' fundamental rights to fairly exercise their religion.
- An injunction has been upheld against Louisiana's law requiring the 10 Commandments in public school classrooms. A court of appeals found that plaintiffs had merit to challenge, and showed good chance of success via their Establishment Clause claim. And, a consulting religious historian found no evidence that the Ten Commandments were permanently displayed in early American public schools.

Federal Workers Receive Presidential Permission to Evangelize Coworkers

The current White House administration released a memo to federal workers in July: though originally with the aim to protect religious expression, the memo states that employees are now allowed to evangelize their coworkers if it does not impose "undue hardship on business operations."

The memo also indicates that displaying Bibles, religious artwork, jewelry, and posters with religious messages is allowed, as well as other religious items "such as crosses, crucifixes and mezuzah."

One or more employees — including supervisors — are allowed to have conversations on religious topics, "including attempting to persuade others of the correctness of their own religious views, provided that such efforts are not harassing in nature." Details were included about how federal workers can engage with

others about why they think their personal faith is "correct" and why others should "re-think" their own beliefs. "During a break, an employee may engage another in polite discussion of why his faith is correct and why the non-adherent should re-think his religious beliefs. However, if the non-adherent requests such attempts to stop, the employee should honor the request," the memo added.

Further, federal workers can also "encourage their coworkers to participate in religious expressions of faith, such as prayer, to the same extent that they would be permitted to encourage coworkers to participate in other personal activities," according to the memo.

Specific examples of permissible religious expression include forming a prayer group with employees while not on duty, or a Veterans Affairs doc-

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tor praying with a patient. It should be noted that freedom of off-duty activities and patient-solicited prayer were already allowed.

The new directive is a product of collaboration between the Office of Personnel Management and the White House Faith Office. The memo follows Trump's executive order on anti-Christian bias, which aims to protect Christians from religious discrimination and mentions religious articles from the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths. But, it also removes historical religious neutrality in federal workplaces.

The memo does not, however, address the possibility of employees being Wiccan or Pagan or involved in Satanism, etc., nor whether they would also have this freedom of religious expression in the federal workplace.

Religion in Classrooms... (Cont. from page 4)

Opponents testified concerns of exclusion of students of other faiths or no faith, pointed out the irrelevance to subjects such as math, and expressed concern over possible non-age-appropriate questions such as "what is adultery" arising.

At least two suits have already been filed in a Texas

federal district court challenging the constitutionality of Senate Bill 10.

In addition to passing the Ten Commandments bill, Texas approved three more measures aimed at encouraging religion in the classroom.

Senate Bill 11 allows school districts to provide a daily period of prayer and

reading the Bible or other religious texts at school. The daily ceremony would be open to students and employees, but out of hearing range from non-participants.

Senate Bill 965 says that it is the right of any school district employee to engage in religious speech or prayer while on duty, and that right

cannot be curtailed except in specific instances.

Senate Bill 1049 requires all public schools to adopt policies which allow students (with parental permission) to attend off-campus religious instruction by private entities for 1-5 hours a week during the school day.

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Texas Passes 10 Commandments, Three More Bills Encouraging Religion in Classrooms

Despite a similar Louisiana law being deemed unconstitutional, Texas has passed Senate Bill 10, which requires every public school classroom to display the Ten Commandments.

The bill passed the Senate 28-3. Ironically, it passed the House 88-49 — on a Sabbath, contrary to the guidance of the fourth commandment.

"It is incumbent on all of us to follow God's law and I think we would all be bet-

ter off if we did," Rep. Candy Noble, a Republican from Lucas, said during the floor debate in the House that Sabbath in May.

As with the 15 other states which have passed similar laws, promotion of this bill is part of a national movement that considers the idea of church-state separation a myth. Past efforts in Texas include a push to require schools to display "In God We Trust" signs, eventually signed into law in 2021; as

well as the approval in 2024 of teaching materials that have a biblical emphasis.

"The constant presence of a sacred text in the room with them is effectively telling [students], 'Hey, these are things you should read and obey,'" says Robert Tuttle, professor of religion and law at George Washington University. "That's not the state's job — to do religious instruction."

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