Most Christians agree that a nation, and its people, benefit from upright leaders and an adherence to biblical principles. Those principles include matters like defending the dignity of every human being, promoting justice, pursuing peace, upholding family and marriage, protecting the weak and vulnerable and furthering racial reconciliation.

Most would also recognize that a nation’s leaders and policies are derived from a process we call politics. Therefore, if people of faith hope to have influence in who leads and what policy decisions are made, they must by necessity engage in the political process. This report is designed to help Christians and Christian leaders think through how to participate as citizens more effectively.

Over the past 40 years, some Christians desiring to participate and influence the political process in a positive way have used the most rudimentary of political tools, raw political power. In other words, they have strived to out-work, out-organize, out-spend and at times, out-compromise those with differing political agendas.

All too often in this process, Christian participation has been defined by political muscle, rather than contributing to the social good. And as a result, many of the values we cherish, like healthier marriages and families, respect for all life and cultural decency, have actually eroded, rather than been strengthened.

We stand united in the belief that God’s approach to life and living is best for all people, believers and non-believers alike. The challenge for Christian citizens is to demonstrate and articulate God’s approach to society’s challenges in such a way that reasonable people can give them serious consideration. The challenge for Christian leaders is to help unfold biblical truth in ways these concepts can be practically applied to society’s needs and policy-making.

Done right, instead of being a wedge that separates people from Christ, Christian involvement in civic affairs can be a bridge to help us all draw closer.
SECTION 1

The Purpose of Civil Government
As defined by the US Constitution

Perhaps the most well-known portion of the US Constitution are the words, “We the people.” This phrase is actually found in the Constitution’s preamble, which is a brief introductory statement summarizing the document’s fundamental purposes and guiding principles.

This 53-word introduction bears remarkable parallels to the function and purposes of civil government described in the Bible.

We the people of the United States, in order to:

• Form a more perfect union,
• Establish justice,
• Insure domestic tranquility,
• Provide for the common defense,
• Promote the general welfare, and
• Secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity,

Do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

A Biblical Perspective

The Christian Bible does not specifically espouse one particular form of civil government above another; however, it speaks quite definitively that the concept of civil government originated with God. Furthermore, the Bible makes clear that government is ultimately subordinate to God and describes the principles and values by which every government should function and every ruler should lead.

While the following summary does not presume to be a comprehensive statement of the purpose of government in the Bible, it does list several of the most commonly agreed upon duties and functions mentioned throughout the Bible.

1. Governments derive their power from God

For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted. Rom 13:1-3 NLT
Anarchy: A state of disorder due to absence or non-recognition of authority.

Tyrant: A ruler who uses power oppressively or unjustly

“The foundations of our society and our government rest so much on the teachings of the Bible that it would be difficult to support them if faith in these teachings would cease to be practically universal in our country.” Calvin Coolidge 30th US President

2. Governments should provide social order

The authorities are God’s servants, sent for your good. Romans 13:1 NLT

A cursory observation of human history reveals that where there is no government, or where the government is so weak that it cannot enforce its laws, there is anarchy.

In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes. Judges 17:6 NLT

3. Governments should preserve human dignity

If anyone takes a human life, that person’s life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings in his own image. Now be fruitful and multiply, and repopulate the earth. Genesis 9:6-7 NLT

Victimless crimes do not exist. While it is easy to discern the diminishment of human dignity done to a victim, the victimizer also diminishes his or her dignity because as an “image bearer” he was created for good works, not evil. Derrick G. Jeter, What’s the Purpose of Government? A Biblical Perspective. (Oct 19, 2010)

4. Governments should punish evil and praise goodness

For the Lord’s sake, submit to all human authority—whether the king as head of state or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right. 1 Peter 2:13-14 NLT

5. Governments should promote justice

Rulers should not crave alcohol. For if they drink, they may forget the law and not give justice to the oppressed … [instead, they should] speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice. Proverbs 31:4-9 NLT

6. Governments should protect peace

Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by goodness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior. 1 Timothy 2:2-4 NLT

“Posterity, you will never know how much it has cost my generation to preserve your freedom. I hope you will make good use of it.”

John Quincy Adams 6th US President
**CULTIVATE AN UNDERSTANDING OF CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY**

We call churches to cultivate an understanding of civic responsibility and public justice among their members. We call all Christians to a renewed political engagement that aims to protect the vulnerable and poor, to guard the sanctity of human life, to further racial reconciliation and justice, to renew the family, to care for creation, and to promote justice, freedom, and peace for all. Above all, we commit ourselves to regular prayer for those who govern, that God may prosper their efforts to nurture life, justice, freedom, and peace.

*National Association of Evangelicals*  
*An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility (2004)*

**GOD SEES OUR POLITICAL COURSE**

The time has come that Christians must vote for honest men and take consistent ground in politics ... Christians seem to act as though God did not see what they do in politics. But I tell you, He does see ... and He will bless or curse this nation according to the course they take.

*Charles G. Finney*  
*Lectures on Revivals of Religion (1868)*

**PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE IS A MORAL OBLIGATION ...**

In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation ... one shaped by the moral convictions of well-formed consciences and focused on the dignity of every human being, the pursuit of the common good, and the protection of the weak and the vulnerable ... We are called to bring together our principles and our political choices, our values and our votes, to help build a better world.

The Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice ... The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.

*US Conference of Catholic Bishops*  
*Excerpts from “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship” (October, 2011)*

**THE GOSPEL IS INTENDED TO TRANSFORM BOTH PEOPLE’S LIVES AND SOCIETIES**

There is the original New Testament message called the gospel of the kingdom, which was intended to transform both people’s lives and their societies; and there is a more modern message that concentrates mostly on individuals ... By focusing so much on what happens after we die, we have neglected the agenda of Jesus for how we live now. I think we show that Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom of God was for the sake of the world and not just for the sake of religious believers.

*Jim Wallis*  
*On God’s Side: What Religion Forgets and Politics Hasn’t Learned about Serving the Common Good (2013)*

**CITIZENSHIP VIRTUES SHOULD BE LEARNED IN THE CHURCH**

It is communities of faith in which people learn to trust and to be themselves trustworthy; in which people learn to take a long view, and to value honesty and dependability; in which people learn to share one another’s costs and burdens. And the Christian citizen who has learned these citizen’s virtues in the church through the language of the Christ is then called on to go out and contribute to the policy-making and decision-making of a wider world, where those values are not taken for granted.

*Dr. Rowan Williams*  
*Archbishop of Canterbury (March, 2011)*

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**SECTION 2**

The Church and Government  
The Role of the Church in Public Policy

Many church traditions, whether liberal-leaning or conservative-leaning, recognize a Christian duty to influence society to benefit the common good. In a participatory government like we enjoy here in the United States, the influence includes a challenge to citizenship involvement for the Christian individual.

Equally common is the challenge to churches and church leaders to help their flocks better understand how the principals of biblical faith can be expressed in cultural and policy-making contexts. Below are insights along these lines from a cross-section of faith traditions:
THE FEDERAL TAX-EXEMPT STATUS OF CHURCHES

Almost all churches are exempt from federal income taxes. As a tax-exempt organization, a church:
1. Is exempt from paying corporate income taxes, and donations to the church are tax deductible on individuals’ federal tax returns.
2. May expend funds for religious, charitable, and educational purposes, as well as an insubstantial amount on lobbying to promote or oppose legislation.

SAFE HARBOR FOR “LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY”

The Internal Revenue Service allows nonprofit corporations 501(c)(3), including incorporated churches, to engage in “legislative activity” as long as such activity is deemed an “insubstantial” part of its overall activity in terms of time and money. Legislative Activity: any activity intended to influence legislation. Overall Activity: encompasses the entire scope of church ministry including worship services, messages, adult classes, youth and children’s ministries and outreach and associated budgets. Insubstantial: Generally considered overall activity up to 5%. Applying this standard to finances, a church with a $1,000,000 budget could safely expend up to $50,000 on legislative activity.

GUIDELINES FOR NONPARTISAN VOTER GUIDES:

Nonpartisan: Not favoring any political candidate, group or party over another.
1. Do not endorse or recommend votes for or against a particular candidate.
2. Include all viable candidates for a race.
3. Cover a variety of issues.
4. Provide candidate responses in a neutral manner.
5. Support or opposition to legislation is allowable.

Churches Cannot Do This

• CHURCHES CANNOT SUPPORT OR OPPOSE POLITICAL CANDIDATES
A church, or spokesman on behalf of the church, should not support or oppose a candidate’s election campaign or any political party.

• CHURCHES CANNOT CONTRIBUTE TO CANDIDATES OR PARTISAN ELECTION ACTIVITIES
Church funds, including special offerings used to support political candidates or partisan political activity is forbidden. This includes “in-kind” support, like allowing free or discounted use of church facilities, church mailing lists or other church assets.

• CHURCHES SHOULD NOT ALLOW CANDIDATE CAMPAIGN APPEARANCES
Church leaders should not allow candidates to deliver campaign speeches, garner support or raise funds during church-sponsored gatherings.

Churches Can Do This

• CHURCHES MAY ENGAGE IN LIMITED LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY
Churches may safely engage in a limited amount of the following legislative activities:
  • Contacting legislators
  • Urging church members and others to communicate with legislators
  • Circulating petitions
  • Recommending how citizens should vote

Churches Can Do This Within Limits

• CHURCHES MAY ADDRESS CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND MORAL ISSUES
Churches are free to address social, cultural and moral issues from a biblical perspective. When those topics become clearly “legislative,” the 5% safe harbor rule should be applied.

• CHURCHES MAY PROVIDE NONPARTISAN VOTER EDUCATION
Churches can provide education on a variety of government and citizenship related issues, including the impact of policy decisions.

• CHURCHES MAY SPONSOR NONPARTISAN VOTER REGISTRATION
Churches may also remind people of upcoming elections and encourage them to vote.

• CHURCHES MAY PROVIDE NONPARTISAN VOTER’S GUIDES
Churches may safely distribute nonpartisan voter’s guides that conform to the nonpartisan guidelines.

The above guidelines were compiled from content published by the IRS (Internal Revenue Service), FECA (Federal Election Campaign Act), ADF (Alliance Defending Liberty) and other sources. While this content summarizes the generally accepted guidelines for churches and political activity, it should not be construed as legal advice.

Church and Politics

What churches can and cannot do.

Sermon Topics to Help Your Congregation be More Effective Citizens

- Death Penalty
- Marriage and Divorce
- Physician-Assisted Suicide
- Peace, Violence and Helping People in Need
- Religious Persecution at Home and Around the World
- Stewardship and the Role of Government
- Human Cloning
- Gambling
- Legalized Marijuana
- Gender Identity Issues and Sexuality
- Stewardship and Environmental Resources
- Debt: Personal and Governmental

The above guidelines were compiled from content published by the IRS (Internal Revenue Service), FECA (Federal Election Campaign Act), ADF (Alliance Defending Liberty) and other sources. While this content summarizes the generally accepted guidelines for churches and political activity, it should not be construed as legal advice.
1. Make an opportunity during a weekend service. Set aside a few minutes during a weekend service to admonish your adult congregation about their citizenship responsibility to vote. To do that you must first be registered. Here are the simple requirements:
   - You must be a United States Citizen.
   - You must be a resident of Oregon.
   - You must be 18 years of age or older.
   - If your name or address has changed you must register again.
2. Provide Voter Registration forms to each adult. Oregon Family Council has approved voter registration cards for use in churches. Simply contact us for a no-cost bulk supply.
3. Collect the completed voter registration forms. While individuals can drop their completed registration forms in the mail themselves, we’ve found it most effective to allow congregation members a few minutes to complete their forms and then collect them. You can then return all of the forms in a prepaid envelope which we provide.

Q. What is the Christian Voter’s Guide?
A. The Voter Guide is a nonpartisan resource that shows where candidates stand on issues like religious freedom, life, education, taxes, and family values. The information on candidates is gathered through surveys, interviews, voting records, and other research. Also, a ballot measure guide is included during Oregon general elections.

Q. Is it legal to distribute Voter’s Guides in churches?
A. Yes. Within your own local church or ministry, providing opportunities for nonpartisan voter registration and distributing nonpartisan election resources like the Christian Voter’s Guide is an easy first step. There are also a variety of other ideas outlined in this report, like helping those under your care better understand how to apply Christian principles to complex public policy issues.

Q. Is it legal to distribute Voter Guides in churches?
A. Each election cycle the Voter’s Guide is carefully reviewed by the Oregon Family Council for nonpartisan voter registration and distributing nonpartisan election resources like the Christian Voter’s Guide is an easy first step. There are also a variety of other ideas outlined in this report, like helping those under your care better understand how to apply Christian principles to complex public policy issues.

Q. As a church leader, how can I get more involved?
A. The Oregon Family Council has approved voter registration cards for use in churches. Simply contact us for a no-cost bulk supply.
SECTION 5. The Christian Citizen
Fulfilling the duties and responsibilities of our citizenship

“I am rather tired of hearing about our rights and privileges as American citizens. The time is come, it now is, when we ought to hear about the duties and responsibilities of our citizenship.”
Peter Marshall
Chaplain of the US Senate, 1947

“My God! How little do my countrymen know what precious blessings they are in possession of, and which no other people on earth enjoy!”
Thomas Jefferson
3rd US President

“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan.”
Proverbs 29:2

“Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God.”
Romans 13:1

Throughout the New Testament, Christians are admonished to be respectful of government authorities and to fulfill their basic civic responsibilities and obligations. For Christians in the United States, those instructions will have different implications than for those in first-century Rome.

That’s because ours is a government of, by and for the people. That means our duty is to elect representatives who will uphold our laws and Constitution with justice and integrity. Here are some ways Christian citizens can fulfill this duty:

- **Pray for our government officials.** This instruction applies to all Christians in government contexts. And it implies a promise that can lead to a more peace-filled community life.

- **Submit to our governing authorities.** Christians are instructed to honor and respect our governing authorities except when those authorities ask us to do things contrary to God’s commands.

- **Register and Vote.** A representative form of government demands that its citizens participate. The most basic form of participation is registering to vote and voting regularly.

- **Be Informed.** The Bible and history speak clearly to the fact that the quality and value of a nation’s leaders matter. Therefore, as Christian citizens it is our duty to research those seeking public office to better elect people of character and justice.

- **Communicate with Elected Officials.** Political leaders are constantly approached and enticed by special interest lobbyists. That’s why it’s critical they hear from the most important special interest, the citizens they’re elected to represent.

- **Engage in the Political Process.** Many campaigns are won or lost by a handful of votes. Your support of time, talents or finances may be the tipping in a race toward more just leadership.

- **Encourage Others to Get Involved.** One way to multiply your influence is by informing and challenging your family, friends, co-workers and church community to fulfill their civic duty to pray, vote and support upright candidates. Distributing the Christian Voter’s Guide is one simple way to do just that.

“I am rather tired of hearing about our rights and privileges as American citizens. The time is come, it now is, when we ought to hear about the duties and responsibilities of our citizenship.”
Peter Marshall
Chaplain of the US Senate, 1947
SECTION 6

Influencing Policy in Salem

“The concerned citizen makes a difference.”

It is estimated there are 60 million committed Christians in America, but only about 30 million vote. If every pastor will encourage his members to register and if every Christian will vote their values, we can change the future of our nation and see America truly be “One nation under God.”

Robert Morris, Founding Senior Pastor
Gateway Church, TX

Over the past number of years concerned Christian citizens working alongside faith-based policy organizations like Oregon Family Council have been able to make important policy contributions. The examples below relate specifically to bills that would impact churches or individual religious liberties, but the same kind of Christian influence can be found across a wide scope of legislation.

Protecting Hiring Practices for Churches and Religious Organizations
Amended Senate Bill 2 (2007)
Oregon Family Council fought for and succeeded in adding a religious exemption to this bill written to protect the LGBTQ community from discrimination in hiring practices. Without the religious exemption, churches and other religious organizations in Oregon could be forced to hire those with lifestyles that contradict a church or faith-based organization’s values and employee standards or face penalties and lawsuits.

Protecting Religious Expression for Public School Teachers
Passed HB 3686 (2010)
Oregon Family Council worked with a bipartisan coalition to pass HB 3686. This legislation repealed ORS 342.650 to provide Oregon’s public school teachers with the same rights to religious freedom as all other Oregon workers. ORS 342.650 specifically singled out public school teachers and unfairly excluded them from the rights granted to all other Oregonians.

Protecting Pro-Life Pregnancy Centers from Unfair Regulations
Stopped SB 490 (2013)
SB 490, which was introduced at the request of abortion industry advocates, imposed a cadre of onerous and burdensome regulations on all pro-life pregnancy resource centers in Oregon, the weight of which may have caused several of these crucial ministries to shut their doors. Several legislators were invited to visit centers in their own districts and after seeing the vital work they performed helped kill the bill.

Protecting Churches and Religious Organizations from Being Required to Offer Abortion Coverage
Stopped SB 894 (2015)
SB 894 is a bill that would require all insurers and employers in Oregon to provide abortion coverage in every health insurance policy. This bill ignores religious protections and would force a church that provides insurance coverage to their employees to include coverage for abortions. A combined effort of pro-family policy groups, the faith community and believing legislators appears to have stopped the bill.

*“Without God there is no virtue because there is no prompting of the conscience… without God democracy will not and cannot long endure.”* – Ronald Reagan, 40th US President

*“The history of liberty is a history of limitations of governmental power, not the increase of it.”* – Woodrow Wilson, 28th US President
Our Duty to Guard the Flock

Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! For He has strengthened the bars of your gates; He has blessed your children within you. Psalm 147:12–13

The above passage is a wonderful illustration of God’s protective hand over His people and the blessing and praise that results from it. As good shepherds, we are instructed to guard the flock entrusted to us by the Great Shepherd (Acts 20:28). That means pastors are to be active in tending to dangers to the Church and her members. And today, some dangers come in part from government.

Applying this principle in Psalms 147 to guarding our flock (which is often illustrated as a city), the term “bars” can refer to all the things that protect the city, including good laws, good lawmakers, good judges, good municipal rules, and good order in the city. The means God normally uses to accomplish protection and order in society is our involvement in civic matters. As a result, our children are blessed, fueling our praise of Him. The clear implication is that pastors have a particular responsibility in civic matters which includes interacting with civil rulers, and helping equip the congregation for meaningful political action so we can elect good governors, and enact laws that are just.

May God bless His pastors as they seek His blessings on our children and churches through their active involvement in seeking godly government!

Dennis Tirri, Senior Pastor
Reformation Covenant Church

When Faith-Led Conscience and Societal Norms Collide

In our rapidly changing society, it is going to become increasingly common for deeply held religious beliefs to conflict with cultural norms. These conflicts will have consequences for members of our church families. In many instances, Christians will be able to carefully navigate this changing cultural landscape, but in other instances, the option may be limited to violating their conscience or facing fines or prison. Below are two such instances.

Sweet Cakes by Melissa, Gresham, Oregon

Sweet Cakes by Melissa was a small privately owned bakery in Gresham, OR. The Christian owners of the bakery, for reasons of conscience based upon their Christian faith, declined to provide a cake for a same-sex wedding ceremony. What ensued was months of legal battles, public outrage on both sides of the issue and ultimately the bakery closing its storefront. The owners now face a $150,000 judgment levied against them by state officials.

Arlene’s Flowers, Richmond, Washington

Arlene’s Flowers, Richmond, is an example of a similar challenge when a long-term customer requested floral services for his same-sex wedding. Stutman respectfully declined. An investigation led by the state’s Attorney General in Washington leaves Barronelle with the prospects of losing her home, family business and her life savings for the crime of following her Christian faith.

Will We Be Found Faithful?

Psalm 11:3 asks a question that is particularly applicable to church leaders today… “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” “Foundations” is a metaphor for the essential elements for the order of our society. This includes the three institutions of family, government, and the church. We live in a day that the family and the church are not only under attack, but in many circumstances have been made the enemy of government by misguided politicians, special interest groups and ungodly legislation.

King David faced a similar dilemma as he witnessed the self-destruction of King Saul and uncertainty of his own appointment by God to soon become the king of Israel. Because of the adversity David was facing, some of his fainthearted counselors advised him “to flee like a bird to the mountains!” David refused!

There are some Christian leaders today that believe efforts to influence culture through civic involvement are futile. But until Christ does return, the question of whether or not the Church should be involved with politics and public policy is driven by the command of our Lord to “preach the Gospel to every creature” and to be “salt and light” until He comes again. Therefore, the real question is not, “What is the role of the Church in the area of politics and public policy?” The question is “Will we be found faithful?” I believe we will.

Dr. Rick Adams, Senior Pastor
Greater Portland Baptist Church

What Practical Steps Should I Take As a Church Leader?

Every pastor, with input and wisdom from those who help him or her lead their flock, must decide in what ways and at what level they will participate in civic activities of the society where God has placed them. Here is a list of some ways Christian leaders can respond. We hope these will be helpful as you prayerfully consider the response that is right for your church.

Church Action Check List

- Pray for our nation, government leaders and elections
- Develop meaningful relationships with government leaders
- Encourage good citizenship
- Provide voter registration opportunities
- Provide biblical perspective on matters affecting culture and society
- Provide nonpartisan voters guides and information at election time
- Host an issues forum or candidate forum open to all viable candidates in a race
- Consider limited legislative activity on matters related to injustice or religious liberties
- Contribute to an outreach dedicated to benefiting our community

An unabridged version of these letters is available on our website, www.oregonfamilycouncil.org/blog.
“We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!”

Abraham Lincoln