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Step-by-Step Suggestions for a Church Voter Registration Drive

Prepared for Wisconsin Family Council's Voter Registration Resource Kit

Your vote is important—and so are the votes of the people within your church and community! Here's how you can help others prepare to cast their ballot and make a difference.

This section is intended to help you organize an effective Voter Registration Drive, which is an organized effort to register other voters within your congregation and community. Please be assured that in helping people register to vote, you **will not** be and in fact **must not** be campaigning for a candidate, issue, platform or party. By registering others to vote, you are helping to motivate them to be active in the governing process and take advantage of their right of suffrage.

Following are some suggestions to help you organize a successful drive within your church:

Getting Ready

1. PRAY for wisdom in hosting a registration drive and for the event itself.

2. UNDERSTAND what churches can and cannot do during elections. **Conducting a voter registration drive in a church is completely legal.** Churches and pastors can do certain things regarding elections and are prevented from doing others. Knowing what those are will not only help you follow the rules, but also help you answer those who might question the legality of what you are doing.

- Read the *Legal DOs & DON'Ts* Guidelines.
- Read the *Letter from Alliance Defense Fund President, Alan E. Sears*. (these resources can be found in the *Vote Your Values* packet)
- See the American Center for Law & Justice article on *Voter Registration Activities* at <http://www.aclj.org/news/Read.aspx?ID=6>.

3. Ask church leaders for PERMISSION to hold the drive within the church.

- As helpful, share the above-mentioned legal requirement guidelines with your church leaders and the *Why Christians Should Vote* pamphlet and bulletin insert in the *Vote Your Values* packet.
- Volunteer to lead the drive.

4. Find several PEOPLE to help you with the drive.

5. Determine the DATE(S) for the drive. Ideally, in order to enhance the effectiveness of the drive, we suggest you conduct the drive on two (2) separate days (e.g., two

consecutive Sundays). All drives must be completed in order to ensure that you can mail or hand-deliver the forms **20 days prior to an election.**

Registration Drive Date Suggestions for 2008 Elections

- Spring General Election – Tuesday, April 1, 2008
 - Forms must be mailed or hand-delivered to local clerks (preferred) or State Elections Division no later than **March 12.**
 - Registration Drive held February 26, March 2 or 9.
- Fall Primary Election – Tuesday, September 9, 2008
 - Forms must be mailed or hand-delivered to local clerks or State Elections Division no later than **August 20.**
 - Registration Drive held August 3, 10, or 17
- Fall General Election – Tuesday, November 4, 2008
 - Forms must be mailed or hand-delivered to local clerks or State Elections Division no later than **October 15.**
 - Registration Drive held September 28, October 5, or 12.

You do not have to organize a drive for all these dates; **pick one or two elections and then, ideally, choose two (2) consecutive weeks for the drive.**

6. DETERMINE which municipalities are represented in your church.

- Use your church directory to determine which municipalities are represented by the members of your congregation.
- Contact the municipal clerk's office for each of the municipalities for the correct address to mail completed registration forms. (See question #1 of FAQ's)

7. Check on getting yourself and one or two others DEPUTIZED by your municipal clerk. This allows you to verify identification of those registering without making a photo copy of their identification. You will still have to send the completed forms to the municipal clerk—just without the extra identification attachment.

- ***Important Note:*** You can only be deputized by a town, village, or city clerk; some clerks may not allow it. If you are deputized, you can ***only verify*** those registering to vote ***in your municipality.*** *If you have a geographically diverse congregation, we do not recommend being deputized. It's easier to make photocopies of the identification.*

8. Provide your church leadership with materials to PROMOTE the drive. Without input and encouragement from your church leadership, the drive may not be as successful as it could be.

- Provide your church leader with the *2006 Citizen Message Brief* enclosed in the *Vote Your Values* packet. This can be used for adult Sunday School classes, small group studies and church services.
- Ask your church leadership to mention the drive from the pulpit.
 - Consider creating “pledge” cards to commit people to vote on election days. Have the pastor walk them through the pledge card. Keep it short—two or three statements that reflect our duty to vote, concluding with making a commitment to vote.

- Give your church leaders the *Why the Fuss?* piece in this resource kit. Consider using further supplemental materials from WFC's *Christian Involvement Resource Kit*.

9. Make sure the voter-registration drive is ADVERTISED in your church bulletins, newsletters, and other materials. This allows people to come prepared to register.

- Either stuff the inserts in the bulletins or have ushers pass out the bulletin inserts when you make the announcement for the voter-registration drive during a church service. The two-sided inserts are in the *Vote Your Values* packet. You'll need to make enough copies for the bulletins. Follow your church protocol on deadlines for bulletin announcements and inserts.
- Use the poster in the *Vote Your Values* packet to advertise your drive.

Registration Drive Set Up

1. COPY as many Wisconsin Voter Registration Applications as you think you will need for the drive. The instructions are on the back of the applications.

2. GATHER all materials (pens, forms, envelopes, staplers, paper clips, clipboards, paper, etc.). Arrange for a *photo-copy machine*, if at all possible.

3. SET UP a Voter Registration table(s) in high traffic areas.

- Be sure to stand beside or in front of the table(s) in order to help people and encourage them to register.
- **Check with church leadership to see if you can have several individuals with clipboards and applications circulating to enhance people's participation and reduce crowding around the registration table.**
- You will want to set up and tear down the same day in order to make people aware that the drive is temporary, and they need to act immediately if they want to register through the drive.
- Familiarize yourself with the applications so that you can answer questions and give directions on the day of the drive.
- Put *Why Christians Should Vote* pamphlets from the *Vote Your Values* packet on the main table for the drive (contact Wisconsin Family Council for additional copies of this pamphlet).

4. To fully register an individual, unless you are deputized, you will need a PHOTO-COPY MACHINE.

- Per the instructions on the back of the Wisconsin Voter Registration form, you will need to **copy and attach proper identification to each application.**
 - Have available for each worker a copy of the list of permissible identification (see "Wisconsin Election Guidelines" section in this resource kit).
 - Make sure you know how to operate the copy machine and that it is well-stocked with paper. (We recommend buying a ream of copy paper to use for the drive.)

- Train a couple of volunteers to run the copier. That will be their job during the drive.
- Have staplers available at the copy machine to attach the identification copies to the applications.
- Even if you do not have a photo copy machine, filling out the Voter Registration form will still speed up the process on Election Day for the individual voters. On Election Day, the municipal clerk and polling location will have the individual's name flagged to obtain identification prior to voting. All the individual will have to do that day is show his/her identification to a poll worker.

5. To conduct the REGISTRATION, have individuals fill out the one-page form and photocopy their identification.

- Encourage people to fill out the applications and finish the process right then. This reduces the possibility of their mailing it to a wrong location or missing a deadline.
- Once an application is filled out, direct the individual to the volunteer at the photo-copy machine (see step 4 above). This will allow for quick registration for everyone.
- Make sure everyone **signs** and **dates** the form and **attaches a copy of their identification**. You will want to have a volunteer at your table who can intake the completed applications, check for attached identification and separate the forms by municipality in order to speed up the mailing process (see step 1 below).
- See the *How To Host a Church Voter-Registration Drive* article from *Citizen Magazine* for techniques to encourage filling out the form.

6. Have a stack of *Application for Absentee Ballot(s)* at your table.

- These forms **must go to the municipal clerk** and ***not*** the Elections Division of the Government Accountability Board.
- You may want to promote absentee ballots along with your announcements for the Voter Registration Drive.
- Once the municipal clerk receives the absentee ballot request, he/she should be able to mail a ballot directly. The voter must return—by mail or in person—a completed ballot to the clerk's office, **making sure it arrives before 5 p.m. on Election Day**.
- Some municipalities expand absentee voting hours in an effort to encourage voting by making it more convenient, as well as to decrease waiting times on Election Day. Check with your municipal clerk's office to find out the schedule for any expanded hours for requesting and casting absentee ballots. Consider publishing these expanded hours on your Election Central bulletin board. People may also register in person at the municipal clerk's office prior to requesting an absentee ballot.

7. At your table, have a SIGN-UP sheet for email updates regarding election information.

- Assure people you will use their email address *only* to send election-related resources and Election Day reminders.

Post-Registration Drive

1. You will need to MAIL your completed applications (you can use one envelope, per municipality) and copies of identification (attached to each application) 20 days prior to an election. (See #5 under “Getting Ready” for exact dates.).

- We recommend that **one person** (probably the organizer of the voter registration drive) handle preparing all the applications and mailing them.
- Make sure that forms are separated by municipality. Forms from a particular municipality—registration forms and absentee ballot applications—can be mailed in the same envelope to the appropriate municipal clerk’s office.
- **The Elections Division prefers that you mail or hand-deliver your applications and copies of identification to the proper municipal clerk(s).**
 - Contact the appropriate local municipal office(s) (check your phonebook for local government contact information) for the mailing address of your municipal clerk. (Also, see #1 of FAQ’s)
- If you mail the applications to the **Elections Division** you will need to use the following address:

**Elections Division – WI Government Accountability Board
P.O. Box 2973
Madison, WI 53701-2973**

2. COMPLETE any follow-up you promised, including reminder emails on Election Day and **send thank you notes to church leaders and those who helped you.**

Other Suggestions

If you are unable to hold a drive in your church or would like to register others in the community, consider bringing applications to your place(s) of employment or get permission to hold a registration drive outside a business, at a sporting event or city-wide festival, in Bible studies, ESL classes, etc. You can even do door-to-door registration within your community, depending on the type, size and safety of the area where you live.

Remember: Registering to vote is a great first-step in getting people to cast a ballot on Election Day! *Anyone can assist anyone in registering to vote. All it takes is a little initiative!*