



# Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

## **Policy on Political Activity In the United States of America**

**Effective Date: September 8, 2020**

### **Background**

The First Presidency's "Statement on Political Activity" (Reference A) shapes Community of Christ principles for appropriate political engagement by priesthood and leaders in the worldwide church. In addition, the "Community of Christ Social Media Ethics Statement" (Reference B) provides guidelines of appropriate behavior for the growing participation in online communication, debate, and dialogue that cross geographic boundaries. Although a few policies dealing with political activity, such as "Use of Facilities for Political Activities" (Reference C) already are in place, leadership for each country is tasked with developing more specific policy guidelines based on its national and local laws, and culture of political engagement.

### **Role of Disciples in Political Dialogue**

Doctrine and Covenants 163 challenges disciples:

- 3a. You are called to create pathways in the world for peace in Christ to be relationally and culturally incarnate. The hope of Zion is realized when the vision of Christ is embodied in communities of generosity, justice, and peacefulness.
- b. Above all else, strive to be faithful to Christ's vision of the peaceable Kingdom of God on earth. Courageously challenge cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling and restoring purposes of God. Pursue peace.

Politics is defined as the set of activities associated with making decisions in groups, or other forms of power relations between individuals, such as the development of policy, distribution of resources, or establishment of priorities.

Politics in the realm of governmental affairs and actions affect the common good and therefore is of concern to disciples who follow the way of Jesus. Engagement in the political process is not only appropriate but an essential dimension of our response to Christ's vision of the peaceable Kingdom of God on Earth. However, as we engage, we need to fully acknowledge and be aware of specific regulatory requirements and limitations for the church in the United States of America as a religious tax-exempt organization.

### **Limitations under USA Tax Law**

Church political activity in the USA is subject to Internal Revenue Service requirements and limitations. Community of Christ is tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code as a

religious organization that operates “exclusively for religious, charitable, or educational purposes.” Because of this designation the church does not pay corporate income taxes and donations to it are eligible for tax deductions. The church may expend funds for “religious, charitable, and educational purposes,” but any funds used to lobby or influence legislative outcomes must be an “insubstantial amount.”

The church, under IRS code as a tax-exempt organization, may participate in political activities such as:

- Educating members about current issues
- Discussing public policy
- Encouraging voter registration and voting
- Hosting candidate forums
- Distributing voting records of public officials
- Allowing an individual, on their own initiative, to circulate a petition at the church, but the petition cannot advocate for a particular candidate for office and cannot indicate the church is taking an official position on the petition.
- Note: Consulting with the Office of General Counsel on any questions and concerns regarding the appropriateness and legality of church-related political activity is strongly advised.

### **Policy on Appropriate Activity**

- a. Individuals and church jurisdictions may fully participate in any of the political activities allowed by the IRS tax code.
- b. Church leaders, priesthood members, and church employees have the same rights as any citizen or church member to participate in political activity as individuals. These activities include campaigning for legislation and candidates, posting on social media, non-church-related fundraising, and engaging in conversations and dialogues; however, the individual must clearly state their comments and actions are personal and not intended to represent the views of Community of Christ. All statements and actions, however, should be in alignment with the Social Media Ethics Statement (Reference B).
- c. Lively conversation will occur on issues where multiple perspectives are held. Open and respectful dialogue that models active listening and upholds the worth of each person is expected. Supervising administrative officers may initiate guidance or administrative action when priesthood members engage in conduct that is harmful to individuals or the community.
- d. Public ministry, such as preaching and teaching, may strongly advocate for active and tangible response to Community of Christ Enduring Principles and Mission Initiatives, but statements must not reference any specific legislation, political candidate, or political party affiliation.
- e. Public ministry seeking and supporting governmental actions which support World Conference Resolutions or Official Church Statements are appropriate. This includes church leaders, priesthood, and church employees. Confirmation of alignment of WCRs or Official Statements with governmental action is provided through the First Presidency’s office.
- f. Acts of civil disobedience done through nonviolence (as defined in Reference A) may be undertaken by members as long as the church is not administratively identified as the

instigator of these actions and is not liable for any incurred expenses. Acts of physical or emotional violence are never supported by the church.

Supervising administrative officers are responsible for upholding this policy with individuals engaged in political activity, as well as observers who incorrectly assume individuals are speaking on behalf of the church when expressing personal convictions.

## Reference A



Community of Christ

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### First Presidency Statement On Political Activity

Effective Date: September 8, 2020

#### Definitions

Please become familiar with these definitions.

**Civil disobedience:** Willful violation of a law in a nonviolent manner because an individual perceives the law to be unjust or seeks to draw attention to a matter of perceived injustice.

**Nonviolence:** The use of peaceful means to bring political or social change. (The word *peaceful* refers to methods that are not intended to cause harm. The church's ongoing study and discussion of *nonviolence* will provide more clarity about the meaning of the term.)

**Partisan politics:** Political preference or activity based on favor or allegiance to a political candidate, party, or movement.

**Politics:** Relating to the way humans achieve and use power through social structures, institutions, law, and government in a society, institution, or government.

**Political:** See "Politics."

**Political activity:** Action and speech intended to produce a desired outcome through a political process. Political activity may or may not be partisan politics.

**Prophetic:** Aligning one's actions and speech with the vision of God for creation through responsible scriptural interpretation, theological and ethical reflection, and spiritual discernment.

#### Introduction

The rights, freedoms, laws, and traditions related to political activity vary greatly among nations. No statement from the First Presidency can address all the issues that must be considered in international, national, cultural, and local settings. The Presidency offers this statement to

## Reference A

emphasize certain principles that apply throughout the whole church. More detailed policies are needed in some church jurisdictions to ensure compliance with applicable laws.

### Principles Related to Political Activity

- Prophetic ministry often includes political activity intended to bring needed change.
- Our Judeo-Christian tradition offers many accounts of people involved in prophetic-political words and actions in response to God's call. The ministry of Jesus Christ is a primary example.
- Political activity should reflect responsible scriptural interpretation ([www.CofChrist.org/scripture-in-community-of-christ](http://www.CofChrist.org/scripture-in-community-of-christ)), the Enduring Principles of the church ([www.CofChrist.org/enduring-principles](http://www.CofChrist.org/enduring-principles)), and be nonviolent.
- Involvement in political activity is an expression of personal conscience and agency.
- Church jurisdictions granted specific status by local or national government such as tax-exempt status as religious or charitable organizations must adhere to any legal requirements pertaining to political activity or risk losing that status. Additional policies may be needed in some jurisdictions to ensure compliance.
- Involvement in civil disobedience is a particular political activity that includes accepting the inherent risks involved. Civil disobedience should be undertaken only after:
  - Carefully studying issue(s) from scriptural, theological, and ethical perspectives.
  - Prayerfully testing one's motivation.
  - Consulting with others to gain additional perspective.
  - Understanding possible legal consequences for violating the law.
  - Understanding the risk of physical or emotional harm.
  - Being trained in nonviolent civil disobedience methods.

Note: Church staff members should contact Human Resource Ministries for the most current policies related to civil disobedience pertaining to them.

### Priesthood Members

Relating the gospel to current political issues should occur from a well-considered gospel and scriptural perspective; not a politically partisan one. Particular attention should be given to World Conference Resolutions ([www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/WCR-Texts-July2019.pdf](http://www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/WCR-Texts-July2019.pdf)) and official statements that pertain to topics of concern and represent positions formed through prayer, study, discussion, and common consent. There is no place for speaking for or against a specific candidate or political party in public ministry. There is a place for thoughtful critique of cultural, religious, and political trends that are contrary to the reconciling and restoring purposes of God (Doctrine and Covenants 163:3b). Care should be taken to responsibly interpret and apply scripture, Enduring Principles, and World Conference Resolutions to current issues without attacking people or partisan affiliations. Priesthood members must take reasonable steps to inform the public that their political and partisan activities may or may not represent official positions of the church as an institution.

## **Political Activity and Social Media**

Political activity often uses social media and related technology. The church provides a “Social Media Ethics Statement” ([www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Social-Media-Ethics-Statement-EN-2019.pdf](http://www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Social-Media-Ethics-Statement-EN-2019.pdf)). This statement offers guidance for peaceful, responsible, and constructive social-media communications and relationships. Political activity involving social media should reflect the principles in this statement. It should be in harmony with the church’s Enduring Principles and be nonviolent. False, misleading, or malicious statements or images should not be used.

## Reference B



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# Community of Christ Social Media Ethics Statement

## What is an ethics statement?

An ethics statement provides general guidance. It may offer guidance in three ways:

- provide rules or limits for behavior
- name goals, values, or principles that define desirable or responsible action
- describe quality of individuals or interactions expected for a community

An ethics statement may use any or all of these approaches to guide responsible action.

## 'Social Media Ethics Statement'

The mission of Community of Christ is to proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace. Social media provides opportunities for self-expression, community building, witness and education, faithful disagreement, and fulfillment of Christ's mission. Social media, which provides ways to make relationships and engage in dialogue, has tools to promote or diminish Christ's mission.

The purpose of this ethics statement is to affirm for Community of Christ disciples and priesthood that Christ's calling is lived out in all aspects of our lives including interactions on social media. Priesthood members and disciples of Jesus should consider the following guidance when using social media. The five elements of this guidance work together and should not be applied separately when applied to interactions and relationships on social media.

### 1. Promote Community

Do my responses and the media I share promote healthy lives and relationships in community?

Social media provide ways to express ourselves. We share through words, images, music, and video. Disciples of Jesus are encouraged to use social media to promote

## Reference B

shared life in Christ. This includes celebrating life, praising God, praying with and for others, and bearing positive and prophetic witness.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God...

—Romans 12:2 NRSV

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

—Matthew 7:12 NRSV

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

—John 13:34-35 NRSV

## 2. Empower Others

Does my response and the media I share promote and build the worth of persons?

What we do on social media, like what we do in all relationships, can build up or tear down. Often, Paul instructs disciples of Jesus to focus on what builds up Christ and others.

Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

—Romans 14:19 NRSV

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.

—Ephesians 4:29 NRSV

Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

—1 Thessalonians 5:15 NRSV



## Reference B

### 3. Affirm Diverse Perspectives

Do I—or anyone—have a complete perspective? Do I trust that the Spirit moves in and through diversity, guiding us toward God’s purposes? Have I listened to understand others who disagree?

Social media offer ways to discuss matters that affect our lives, families, community, and world. Discussions can lead to common consent and faithful disagreements. Whether building common consent or having faithful disagreement, disciples of Jesus are called to love one another, be quick to listen, use nonviolent language, and not think of themselves more highly than others.

...do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become servants to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

—Galatians 5:13b-14 NRSV

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness.

—James 1:19-20 NRSV

...now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal, there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

—Colossians 3:8-11 NRSV

### 4. Courageously Challenge

When I challenge ideas or differ with others, what are my motivations? Whom does it benefit? Can I say clearly what shapes my feelings and point of view? Am I vulnerable to others? Can I offer a constructive alternative?

Disciples of Jesus are called to be a prophetic people and follow his example on social media. Through the Gospels, we see Jesus’ disruptive and healing interactions with others. Before his prophetic ministry, Jesus was drawn into the wilderness to be tested and to discern. After, filled with the Spirit, his ministry drew controversy welcoming outcasts, forgiving sinners, confronting hypocrisy, and challenging worldly assumptions about power in word and action. Also, he was vulnerable to others’ judgment. We are called to use words and actions that disrupt as well as

## Reference B

heal to point to God's will and be vulnerable to judgment. We seek constructive alternatives for this world by discerning God's will together.

Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness (justice), and all these things will be given to you as well.

—Matthew 6:33 NRSV

You are called to create pathways in the world for peace in Christ to be relationally and culturally incarnate. The hope of Zion is realized when the vision of Christ is embodied in communities of generosity, justice, and peacefulness. Above all else, strive to be faithful to Christ's vision of the peaceable Kingdom of God on earth. Courageously challenge cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling and restoring purposes of God. Pursue peace. There are subtle, yet powerful, influences in the world, some even claiming to represent Christ, that seek to divide people and nations to accomplish their destructive aims. That which seeks to harden one human heart against another by constructing walls of fear and prejudice is not of God. Be especially alert to these influences, lest they divide you or divert you from the mission to which you are called.

—Doctrine and Covenants, 163:3a-c

“For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye?”

—Matthew 7:2-4 NRSV

## 5. Engage Others in Christ's Mission

Do the things I share engage others in Christ's mission of compassion, invitation, justice, and peacemaking? Am I proclaiming Christ and promoting communities of joy, hope, love, and peace?

Social media open new ways to create community and pursue peace. They hold new opportunities to invite others to Christ and fulfill Christ's mission. Disciples of Jesus are encouraged to find new ways to create pathways of peace and build community.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”  
And I said, “Here am I; send me!”

—Isaiah 6:8 NRSV

## Reference B

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free...”

—Luke 4:18 NRSV

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

—1 Corinthians 9:19-33 NRSV



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## Reference C OFFICIAL POLICY USE OF FACILITIES FOR POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

**Reference: First Presidency Conference,  
Office of General Counsel Memo 29 September 2016**

**Policy Number: 80.37  
Effective Date: 07/26/2018  
Revision Date:**

**Distribution: General**

### **Background**

From time to time questions are raised about whether a congregation may hold a town hall for a political candidate or other politically related activity in their facility. Past practices in some fields of the church have allowed this type of activity provided that the congregation was supportive and equal access was provided to all parties involved in the particular election.

IRS guidelines state that federal law prohibits churches from becoming directly or indirectly involved in campaigns of political candidates for public office at the federal, state, and local levels. However, churches can engage in advocating for or against issues and, to a limited extent, ballot initiatives or other legislative activities.

### **The Policy**

Community of Christ congregations are allowed to engage in advocating for or against issues, and to a limited extent ballot initiatives, that are in harmony with the church's Enduring Principles and current World Conference Resolutions.

Community of Christ congregations are allowed to host a forum of elected officials for the purpose of discussing a specific issue.

Community of Christ congregations are allowed to host a town hall meeting in their facility where the political candidates involved in a particular election are invited and participate during the same meeting. The town hall meeting cannot favor or oppose any candidate for public office. The candidates must have equal opportunity to speak during the town hall meeting.