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## West Side Church Position on Political Involvement of The Christian & The Church

This paper will provide guidelines for church leaders and members as we consider how Christ-followers at West Side should respond to the social, national and global issues of our day through the political process.

### 1. GOD HAS SOMETHING TO SAY TO OUR WORLD AND CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO ACTION.

- The prophets repeatedly call God's people to interact with the social and political issues of a nation. For example, Micah is sent by God with a supernatural word at a time when Israel is entering one of its darkest hours. The totally decadent nation of Israel is facing annihilation by the Assyrian Empire. The nation of Judah is headed into the dark 16-year reign of a wicked king. Micah's message has application to the darkness of our world. Micah declares:

- **Hope is in the Lord's coming.** The Lord sees and hears. The Lord knows about the sins and sorrows from palace to pit, from bedroom to boardroom, from one end of the nation to the other, and He is coming to set things straight someday.
- **The Lord's coming is first for judgment.** The Lord is coming because of sin. His coming will be terrifying.
- **The Lord's judgment is closing in on the wicked.**
- **The wicked world needs the Lord's hope.** Micah prays and laments for those who are doomed; lost; in danger of God's wrath.

We have a responsibility to lament for the doomed and to announce hope in the Lord for those in need. People who need Jesus are slaves to sin just like we used to be. They need hope and we do too.

- This is how we are to behave:

*"He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)*

- This is what we announce:

*"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago." (Micah 7:18-20)*

**"God has something to say about the issues faced by our nation and our world and calls His people to participate!"**

- The question is how to engage the issues as citizens of heaven and citizens of the United States.

## 2. THE “GREAT SEPARATION MYTH” IN AMERICA CONFUSES OUR INVOLVEMENT.

- Amendment #1 of the Bill of Rights states:

*“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”*

- This is commonly, inaccurately referred to as the “separation of church and state”: a phrase not in the Constitution.

- This amendment protects religion from interference by the state.
- It was not written to eliminate all expression of religion in the state.
- It is the freedom “of” religion, not a requirement of freedom “from” all religion.
- It is to keep the state out of the church’s hair not keep church out of the public square.

- The confusion and conflict surrounding this clause is stated by people in various ways:

- “There is a requirement of the separation of church and state.”
- “You can’t mix religion and politics.”
- “There is a sacred realm and a distinctly secular realm.”
- “There are matters of faith and belief in contrast to science and fact.”
- “Morals are different from laws and our laws should not legislate morality.”
- “We must advocate for soul gospel; the salvation of the person’s soul in the next life, versus a social gospel; the rescue of people from the ills of evil in this life.”

- Many have fallen into this conflict, confusion and error.

- But there is no “Great Separation” biblically. It is all God’s, even government. He cares about it all, even politics, and so should we. He doesn’t forbid paying taxes or curse Caesar. They have their place. Paul says:

*“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” (Romans 13:1-2)*

- Counter to each one of the above confusions, the Gospel always has personal and social ramifications.

- Just as the church is ordained by God, the state is ordained by God!
- Religion has everything to say about politics, every politician has a religion / belief.
- Everything is sacred. There is no separate category of “secular” about which God does not care. “It is all mine,” says the Lord. Everything will be put under Jesus’ feet. He is King and Lord of all.
- Faith is not blind belief contrary to fact. Faith is built on fact and truth; on science and evidence.

- Morals are always linked to our laws. That's what a law is: imposition of a moral code; a right and wrong.
  - The soul needs salvation and so does the body. Good deeds open up the way for Good News.
- The Gospel of Jesus always has political implications.
- Moses challenged the systemic slavery of Egypt right to Pharaoh's face.
  - David called out Saul's mental, moral, and military insanity.
  - Micah challenged the immorality and idolatry of King Ahaz.
  - John the Baptist accused Herod of changing the God-given definition of marriage and lost his head for it.
  - Jesus stood up to Pilate in his imperial arrogance.
  - Paul died because of the restriction of religious freedoms by Emperor Nero.
  - Throughout history Christians have fought for the dignity of women, child labor laws, the humane treatment of prisoners, libraries, schools, feeding the hungry, etc., as good Samaritans should.
  - William Wilberforce worked tirelessly to bring Great Britain's slave trade to a halt.
  - Dietrich Bonhoeffer defied Hitler's Nazis.
  - Martin Luther King Jr. marched for civil rights.
  - Mother Teresa, a tiny nun from Calcutta, pointed her finger at the President of the United States, the most powerful man in the world, and said, "Stop killing your babies!"

***"The Gospel has private and public expressions and ramifications which are not forbidden by the free expression of religion in our Constitution."***

- In spite of the call to act and the freedoms to act, the political situation in America today is dangerous.

### **3. WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE DANGERS OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE.**

- Terribly Polarized. Simplified political philosophies, misrepresentation of the facts, the influence of money and power have all worked against healthy debate, compromise, solutions and the truth.
- Bitterly Contentious. "Hatred" is not too strong a word and may not be strong enough to describe the political discourse in the country at this time.
- Devoid of truth - Media bias. It used to be said, "you can't believe everything you hear." We are living in an age when it's hard to believe anything you hear. We must rigorously check the facts.
- Dangerously blurred lines. Designating so-called "Christian" or "Evangelical" voting blocs can improperly distort, simplify and misrepresent people, the Bible, and the Church. Historically, the marriage of the church and the state or the use of political means for spiritual ends has been disastrous.

### **4. WE MUST HEED THE CAUTIONS FOR EVANGELICAL RESPONSE.**

- We must work to always maintain the priority of the Gospel.

- Christ is the answer to all the issues of this world.
- That will often mean that solutions will be neither politically “right” or “left” but biblically “radical.”
- We are to be “salt & light” in the political arena as well.

- We must act as citizens of heaven first.

- Jesus said, “They are not of the world.” In it, but not of it. (John 17:16)
- Paul teaches, “But our citizenship is in heaven.” (Philippians 3:20)
- “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?... Therefore come out from them and be separate.” (2 Corinthians 6:14,17)
- We are Christian first, above being American, or having a party affiliation. To ignore this leads to confusion and mixture of political, moral, and spiritual issues. America is NOT a Christian nation. It was founded on some Judeo-Christian principles worth upholding. But, the old adage that ‘politics makes strange bedfellows’ is true. This could hinder our ministry to those with whom we disagree.

- We must not treat complex issues with naïve simplicity. There is a natural tendency to make issues black and white when they are highly complex and nuanced. Care must be taken not to misrepresent the problem or the solution.

- We must avoid the Blame Game: Often the issue is described this way: the one problem: “silent churches: pastors & pulpits,” with one solution: “activist churches and pastors & pulpits.” But this does not address the issues constructively.

***“Believers must be better prepared for participation by understanding the dangers and heeding the cautions.”***

## **5. WE MUST EMBRACE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE KINGDOM.**

- The Scriptures are calling us to a life of careful, purposeful participation in our world.

- “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you...Pray for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” (Jeremiah 29:7)
- “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.” Jesus warns of neglecting the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. (Matthew 23:23)
- “He redeems and purifies a people eager to do what is good.” (Titus 2:14)
- “What good is it if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?” (James 2:14)

- We are called to be agents of the coming “year of the Lord’s favor,” as in Luke 4:14-21 and Isaiah 61. We are to be those “oaks of righteousness...”

- rebuilding the ruins, shepherding, farming, ministering,

- using God's blessings to be a blessing,
- in our land, around the nation, among the nations, for the display of His splendor, to make righteousness and praise spring up

## **6. WE NEED TO FIND BALANCE.**

Error #1: Privatize faith

Error #2: Politicize faith

Instead: Participate with faith

Error #1: Sacred in the public square – one faith

Error #2: Naked in the public square – no faith

Instead: Counted in the public square

Error #1: Coercion

Error #2: Complacency

Instead: Contend constructively with civility

Error #1: Compromise (accommodation)

Error #2: Conflict (reaction)

Instead: Speak the truth in love

***“Seeking scriptural principles and balance we should embrace opportunities for the kingdom.”***

## **7. WE WILL FOLLOW THESE GUIDELINES FOR WEST SIDE CHURCH AS AN ORGANIZATION.**

- Assert that Christ is the hope of our nation not the political process. (Hebrews 1:1-4)
- Address social issues from a biblical perspective not a political agenda. (Proverbs 14:34)
- Encourage believers to be involved in the political process without the promotion of any particular political party or candidate.

## **8. WE WILL FOLLOW THESE GUIDELINES FOR THE BELIEVER AS AN INDIVIDUAL.**

- Honor the government that God has ordained to rule. (Romans 13:1-2)
- Recognize the governing authorities as God's servants. (Romans 13:3-4)
- Pray for the government. (1 Timothy 2:1-4)
- Model Christ-likeness in the political process. (2 Peter 1:3-8)

## **9. WHAT WEST SIDE AS A CHURCH WILL DO.**

- Pray for our nation and government.

- Encourage our people to vote and engage in the political process as individuals.
- Encourage speaking the truth in love: with respect and civility.
- Address moral issues from a biblical perspective.
- Provide opportunities for individuals to register to vote.
- Investigate the biblical foundations of political issues.
- Provide opportunities for healthy dialogue.

#### **10. WHAT WEST SIDE AS A CHURCH WILL NOT DO.**

- Endorse or oppose any particular candidate or political party.
- Invite any political candidate or political party representative to speak.
- Distribute voter guides.
- Approach individuals unsolicited to sign documents or encourage involvement in the political process.
- Sponsor political rallies, boycotts or protests.

#### **SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS:**

As a church we affirm the following:

**“God has something to say about the issues faced by our nation and our world!”**

**“The Gospel has private and public expressions and ramifications which are not forbidden by the free expression of religion or the Constitution.”**

**“Believers can be better prepared for participation by understanding the dangers and heeding the cautions.”**

**“Seeking Scriptural principles and balance we should embrace opportunities for the kingdom.”**

We will encourage believers everywhere to pray, learn the Word, check the facts, register and vote, love and partner in the work of the Kingdom.

Approved by the Elder Council 04-24-12