

IRS rejects Christian nonprofit's tax-exempt request because 'Bible teachings are typically affiliated with the Republican Party'

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The Internal Revenue Service last month denied a Christian nonprofit organization tax-exempt status by arguing its mission of educating and empowering Christians to engage in America's civic process necessarily benefits the Republican Party.

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What are the details?

In a May rejection [letter](#) sent to Christians Engaged, the IRS wrote that the group is disqualified from the status because the "Bible's teachings are typically affiliated with the Republican Party and candidates."

"Specifically, you educate Christians on what the Bible says in areas where they can be instrumental including the areas of sanctity of life, the definition of marriage, biblical justice, freedom of speech, defense, and borders and immigration, U.S. and Israel relations," IRS exempt organizations director Stephen Martin wrote in the letter. "The Bible teachings are typically affiliated with the Republican Party and candidates. This disqualifies you from exemption under IRC Section 501(c)(3)."

Christians Engaged says on its [website](#) that it "exists to awaken, motivate, educate, and empower ordinary believers in Jesus Christ to: pray for our nation and elected officials regularly, vote in every election to impact our culture, [and] engage our hearts in some form of political education or activism for the furtherance of our nation."

In its letter, the IRS does not appear to dispute the group's claims or argue that it does not carry out its mission honestly. However, according to the Treasury agency, the very fact that the group promotes biblical teachings makes it de facto engage in "prohibited political campaign intervention."

"You operate for a substantial non-exempt private purpose and for the private interests of the Republican Party," Martin concluded.

Under [federal law](#), to receive tax-exempt status as a religious organization, an organization must operate exclusively for charitable or educational purposes and must "not attempt to influence legislation" or "participate in any campaign activity for or against political candidates."

What else?

In response to the decision, the group's legal counsel, First Liberty Institute, filed [an appeal](#) last week.

In a press release about the appeal, Counsel Lea Patterson said the claims "that Biblical values are exclusively Republican ... might be news to President Biden, who is often described as basing his political ideology on his religious beliefs."

Patterson added: "Only a politicized IRS could see Americans who pray for their nation, vote in every election, and work to engage others in the political process as a threat. The IRS violated its own regulations in denying tax exempt status because Christians Engaged teaches biblical values."

In its appeal letter, First Liberty argued, "By finding that Christians Engaged does not meet the operational test, Director Martin errs in three ways: 1) he invents a nonexistent requirement that exempt organizations be neutral on public policy issues; 2) he incorrectly concludes that Christians Engaged primarily serves private, nonexempt purposes rather than public, exempt purposes because he thinks its beliefs overlap with the Republican Party's policy positions; and 3) he violates the First Amendment's Free Speech, and Free Exercise, and Establishment clauses by engaging in both viewpoint discrimination and religious discrimination."

Anything else?

According to the press release, Christians Engaged president Bunni Pounds lamented, "We just want to encourage more people to vote and participate in the political process. How can anyone be against that?"

The group was formed in July 2019 as a Texas nonprofit organization and describes itself on its website as educational, Christian, and nonpartisan.

As a major part of its efforts, Christians Engaged helps organize statewide and local prayer gatherings in which participants make supplications and petitions to God on behalf of elected leaders.