

KENTUCKY COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
COMMISSION ON JUSTICE MINISTRIES
Statement on Campaign Ethics
Adopted by the 48th Annual Assembly, October 27, 1995

Exodus 20:16 ... “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

Exodus 23:1-2 ... “You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness. You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; when you bear witness in a lawsuit, you shall not side with the majority so as to pervert justice...”

As citizens and as persons of religious conviction, we believe that we are an important voice to identify, reflect on, and to share ethical concerns about the common good in our civic and political life. In recent years we have become increasingly concerned about the tenor and content of political campaigns, whether for elected office or oriented around a ballot issue. It is apparent to us that a fresh and continuing commitment to ethical principles in political life and to truth in campaign advertising is an urgent necessity in America’s civic life. Our goal, therefore, is to suggest some basic guidelines for all participants in the political processes and elections as a standard for fairness and decency.

WE CALL FOR CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE AT EVERY LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT TO:

- demonstrate personal conviction and integrity;
- be straightforward, simple, and clear about their own position;
- be willing to admit indecision on a matter, or to a change of opinion based on new information, experience, and reflection;
- identify the issues which the candidate believes need attention;
- address the issues clearly;
- avoid the use of racial, regional, and class conflicts or antagonisms;
- meet in public forums with their opponents;
- quote their opponent’s views fairly and accurately;
- disapprove of personal attacks in campaign advertising;
- speak directly and honestly to questions asked by citizens;
- make known the persons and organizations contributing financially to their campaigns.

WE CALL THE MEDIA TO:

- assist the electorate in identifying the substantive and critical issues;
- promote forums and debates through the media;
- report polls and other measures of public opinion in an objective manner;
- recognize that endorsement of particular candidates is an editorial privilege and should be done with great care;
- be vigilant about differentiating between “paid political advertisements” and editorial content, perhaps by running a constant “crawl” throughout political commercial advertising, or, in other media, by making it clear that the material being presented is advertising, not news, nor the editorial policy of the media being utilized;
- report responsibly all campaign contributions;
- avoid undue polarization in reporting information about candidates and issues.

WE CALL THE CITIZENS TO:

- help each other to understand the unique value of each vote;
- try to be as informed as possible prior to voting in any election;
- avoid making political decisions based on single-issues, seeing that many complex matters may be at stake; avoid making a judgment about a candidate based solely on the candidate’s public image;

- seek out a variety of sources of information about the issues and the candidates to heighten objectivity and balanced decision making regarding for whom and for what they will vote;
- seek a larger view of what actions will benefit the common good, not allowing self-interest alone to obliterate a responsibility for the well-being of all;
- broaden their understanding of “self-interest” to include the welfare of our neighbors;
- be aware of the affiliations of contributors to political campaigns, and their particular aims in providing such financial backing.

WE CALL UPON ALL **CHURCH LEADERS AND RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS** TO:

- help their members understand the relationship between faith and participation in civic life;
- encourage members to see that voting is an act of discipleship similar to regular attendance at worship and stewardship of one’s finances, by assisting in voter registration and election participation;
- facilitate voter education through provision of materials such as candidate statements, voting records, questionnaire responses, instructions for voting machines and voter registration and making space available in religious facilities for public meetings;
- encourage fair and balanced presentations of all candidates and issues;
- encourage their members to be intentional in using the resources of faith in building a society which is respectful of creation and human dignity.

WE CALL **LEGISLATIVE BODIES AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS** TO:

- enforce existing legislative ethics and ethical campaign laws;
- continue efforts to develop legislation which will bring fairness and honesty to campaign financing;
- require that candidates publish a list of their contributors;
- consider placing time limits on campaign periods prior to elections.

WE CALL ON **ALL SECTORS OF OUR CIVIC LIFE TO WORK TOGETHER TO**

- refuse to tolerate the use of innuendo and lies of omission in campaign activity and rhetoric;
- keep the focus on the public policy issues and the candidates’ positions on these issues. The candidates’ promises, opinions, and past record are more important than their personal lives.