

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

Media Release

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Electioneering by houses of worship undermines prophetic voice and independence

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) strongly supports religious freedom, free speech and the separation of church and state. However, we oppose President Trump’s Executive Order entitled, “Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty.”

This latest executive order neither promotes free speech nor religious liberty. By instructing the Internal Revenue Service to exercise “maximum enforcement discretion” of a law banning electioneering by houses of worship and other tax-exempt organizations, the order threatens to undermine the prophetic voice, moral and financial independence, and much-needed civil discourse in our nation’s faith communities.

Last month, EMO joined 98 other religious and denominational organizations from across the country opposing the weakening of protections that prohibit houses of worship and other tax-exempt organizations from opposing or supporting political candidates. We stated forcefully, “The charitable sector, particularly houses of worship, should not become another cog in a political machine or another loophole in campaign finance laws.”

Places of worship should have the power to critique government actions regarding moral issues. They should be able to engage in advocacy and encourage the democratic right to vote. But, they must not intervene in political campaigns or endorse political candidates. Such activities endanger the integrity of our voices of faith, possibly making some places of worship a tool for the political system.

Current law prohibiting electioneering reinforces the separation of church and state, protecting houses of worship from being used as mouthpieces for political candidates in exchange for partisan-driven donations or promises of future social service contracts. To protect the credibility and mission-driven focus of our houses of worship, there should be no doubt in the minds of congregants or members of the community in

MEMBER DENOMINATIONS

African Methodist Episcopal Church ■ American Baptist Churches of Oregon ■ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) ■ Christian Methodist Episcopal Church ■ Church of the Brethren ■ Community of Christ
Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon ■ Episcopal Diocese of Oregon ■ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ■ Greek Orthodox Church ■ Presbyterian Church (USA)—Presbytery of the Cascades
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) ■ Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Portland ■ United Church of Christ ■ United Methodist Church ■ Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches

which they reside that faith communities are forbidden from acting as conduits of campaign donations or are beholden to a given candidate.

President Trump's decision to not uphold the prohibition of electioneering by nonprofits makes possible abuses to both the process by which we elect our government leaders and the independence of our houses of worship. We urge our religious leaders and their institutions that, while raising moral issues for public debate, they resist using the pulpit to endorse political candidates. Our prophetic voice must transcend the partisan divide.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is a statewide association of Christian denominations, congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians through community ministry programs, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, environmental ministry and public policy advocacy.