



**Minister's Column**

November is election month, but I am not giving an election sermon this year. Our elections are on November 7<sup>th</sup>, and I really wanted to talk about the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation this year, and our last Sunday in October is inter-generational, so I moved that subject to that first Sunday in November which would usually be my election sermon. That means that this is a perfect thing to write my newsletter column about! Specifically, I want to clarify what the church's and minister's limitations are when it comes to elections.

I often hear people say things like "talking about politics in church is a violation of church and state" or "it's illegal for a church or minister to endorse a candidate." Both of these statements are trying to capture the concept of how churches and ministers need to stay out of politics in certain ways, but neither is exactly accurate. What is the separation of church and state? "Separation of church and state" is our short-hand way of talking about the clause in the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution which states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establish-ment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Notice this clause does *not* place any limitations on the church. It is designed to keep the government out of religion, not vice versa.

Where does the limitation on the church's actions come from, then? Well, the answer is it is a function of our non-profit status, and that this restriction is relatively new (from a 1954 congress act). If churches were not tax-exempt, churches would have free reign to get involved in politics the same way corporations now do. But as tax-exempt entities, we have the restriction to not get involved in politics, to a certain degree. Now, I said, "to a certain degree" – what does that mean? Well, there are limits within which churches can operate in a political sphere. For example, we're allowed to do lobbying on issues, as long as lobbying is not a

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**Calendar**

- 1 Wed. Board Meeting ~ 6:30 pm
- 2 Thurs. AUUW Meeting ~ 12:00 pm
- 5 Sunday Daylight Saving Time Ends
- 5 Sunday ~~~~ Service ~ Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Landrum ~ 11:00 am
- 9 Thurs JXN Community Forum ~ Human Trafficking ~ 6:30 pm
- 12 Sunday ~~~~ Service ~ Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Landrum ~ 11:00 am
- 12 Sunday Caring Committee Meeting ~ After the Service
- 14 Tue. R.E. Meeting ~ 5:30 pm
- 15 Wed Membership Meeting ~ @ Marge's Vista Grande Villa ~ 6:00 pm
- 16 Thurs. Personal Care Ministry ~ @ 1st Baptist Church, 201 S. Jackson ~ 4:30-6:30 pm
- 19 Sunday ~~~~ Service ~ Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Landrum ~ 11:00 am
- 19 Sunday Holiday Gift Baskets Auction ~Begins
- 19 Sunday The Bellnote Newsletter ~ Submissions Due
- 21 Tue Interfaith Comm. Thanksgiving Service @ 7pm St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Jackson
- 23 Thurs Thanksgiving Day
- 23 Thurs Smith Rental ~ Family Feast
- 26 Sunday ~~~~ Service ~ Guest Speaker ~ 11:00 am

**Upcoming Events**

- 10 Dec Holiday Gift Baskets Auction ~ Ends

**Sunday Services at 11:00 am**

**November's Theme is: Abundance**

**Nov 5 - "95 Theses" — Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Landrum**

The 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation was October 31<sup>st</sup>. Rev. Cindy will examine the historical impact and importance, and imagine how we might continue to improve our faith's practices.

**Nov 12 - "Foster Parenting and Adoption Awareness" — Rev. Daniel Kidder-McQuown**

UUCEL will be delighted to welcome back Rev. Daniel Kidder-McQuown, pastor of the Arbor Grove Church on November 12<sup>th</sup>. Rev. Cindy will be speaking at his church. Both will be speaking about Foster Parenting and Adoption, in an effort to raise awareness in our churches and community. November is adoption awareness month, and November 12<sup>th</sup> is "Orphan Sunday" when churches are encouraged to bring awareness to the issue of foster care and adoption.

**Nov 19 - "Abundance" — Rev. Dr. Cynthia L.**

**Landrum** - Abundance is our November theme, and just before Thanksgiving is a great time to talk about abundance in our lives. This service will also share the Guest at Your Table materials. This year's Guest at Your Table theme is "Small Change Is Big Change." Start saving your change!

**Nov 26 - "Water Justice" — Guest Speaker** for our social justice theme of Environmentalism: Water Justice.

# MEETINGS AND EVENTS: AT OR AFFILIATED WITH U.U. CHURCH OF EAST LIBERTY

## Rev. Cindy's Column Continued...

“substantial” part of our overall activity (over 25%). If this comes into IRS question, they weigh what percentage of time and expense is devoted to lobbying. This does not include conducting meetings, preparing and distributing educational materials, or other educational efforts. If the church has done excessive lobbying, then they are subject to a tax of five percent of the lobbying expenditures. So even if I were spending one full day per week lobbying (which I'm not), we would be well within our limits.

When it comes to political campaigns, there are more significant restrictions. Churches are “absolutely prohibited” from directly or indirectly “participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.” This means no financial contributions or public statements of position or endorsements by the church. Churches may do voter registration activities and hold public forums as long as there is no bias toward any candidate.

Ministers have similar restrictions to churches when acting on behalf of their church. But ministers still also have freedom of speech like any citizen. So the restrictions are very specific that a minister can't endorse a candidate *from a pulpit*, in any official publications of a church, or *on behalf of a church* in any public speech. Ministers are able to endorse a candidate on their own time, as long as they don't say that they are doing so on behalf of the church and their title and church name is used for identification purposes only. We're encouraged to go further and say directly that this is not on behalf of the church. In practice, I often say, “My yard, my bumper, and my Facebook page are free speech areas for me.”

Lastly, churches and ministers *are* allowed to take positions on issues, “including issues that divide candidates in an election for public office.” We have to be careful not to be directly involving ourselves in the campaigns, of course, but we're free to state our faith's opinions on issues that divide the candidates. The IRS states, “A communication is particularly at risk of political campaign intervention when it makes reference to candidates or voting in a specific upcoming election. Nevertheless, the communication must still be considered in context before arriving at any conclusions.” There's a balance that must be paid attention to. For example, advocating on issues that we've been involved in already is okay, even if we're doing so right before an election and the issue is one that divides candidates. So it might well be okay to point out that there is an issue in the community that we've been deeply involved in and that divides candidates, depending on the larger context of our history on campaign activity and our history on that issue. This is the trickiest of the lines that are drawn.

I read over this type of material very carefully just about every election season, and my own understanding of the nuances continues to evolve. For folks wanting to understand this even more, I recommend this IRS document, from which I have quoted here: <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1828.pdf>. Meanwhile, I encourage everyone to vote. That's something we can always say!

Peace,

**Rev. Cindy**

## **Holiday Gift Baskets Auction ~Begins Sunday Nov 19 ~Ends Sunday Dec 10**

Start planning now for a basket, box or bag of special items for our annual Holiday Gifts Basket Auction. Some ideas from the past are: art supplies, children's games, books, personal care items, Michigan products, movie with popcorn & candy, pet supplies, bird feeding supplies, holiday decorations, gift wrapping supplies or goodies. See Nena for more info.

<http://www.libertyuu.org/newsletter.html>

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