

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 › MADISON, WI 53701 › (608) 256-8900 › WWW.FFRF.ORG

December 14, 2022

SENT VIA EMAIL:

eoclass@irs.gov

Internal Revenue Service
1111 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20224

Re: First Baptist Grapevine Electioneering

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to report concerns of potential illegal political campaigning by First Baptist Grapevine, located at 301 E Texas St, Grapevine, TX 76051. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 39,000 members across the country. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

According to a November 2022 report published by ProPublica and the Texas Tribune, First Baptist Grapevine Senior Pastor Doug Page joined a group of Dallas area pastors to highlight and explicitly endorse candidates across multiple elected offices. During a service on April 18, 2021, Pastor Page displayed the names of nine candidates running for local office that were members of not only First Baptist Grapevine, but also other area churches that showed similar lists of candidates in an effort to mobilize their congregations to vote for them.

“This is not an endorsement by us. We are not endorsing anyone. However, if you’re part of a family, you’d like to know if Uncle Bill is running for office, right? And so that’s all we’re going to do is simply inform you.”¹

The Internal Revenue Code states that to retain their 501(c)(3) status an organization cannot “participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.”² Though Pastor Page tries to claim that the church is not endorsing any of these candidates, by showing his congregation these lists during services, he is clearly expressing the church’s preference.

Here, Pastor Page in his role as the Senior Pastor of 501(c)(3) organization First Baptist Grapevine is breaching the responsibilities that come with his church’s tax exempt status. Pastor

¹ Jessica Priest & Jeremy Schwartz, *These 20 Churches Supported Political Candidates. Experts Say they Violated Federal Law.*, ProPublica and the Texas Tribune (November 7, 2022), available at: <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/11/07/churches-list-violations-johnson-amendment/>.

² I.R.C. Sec. 501(c)(3)

Page endorsing political candidates and directing his congregation to vote for them is a violation of these regulations.

First Baptist Grapevine appears to have improperly used its status as a religious organization and 501(c)(3) entity to intervene in political campaigning. Pastor Page violated IRS regulations by directly identifying candidates for specific offices, clearly displaying the church's preference for certain candidates over others.

We write to respectfully request that the IRS immediately investigate First Baptist Grapevine, and ensure that it is not receiving the benefits of 501(c)(3) status and that donations made to the church are not being treated as tax deductible. The IRS should take appropriate action to remedy any violations of 501(c)(3) regulations that occurred or which continue to occur.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kat D. Grant". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Kat D. Grant

*Equal Justice Works Fellow (sponsored by the Wm. Collins Kohler Foundation)
Freedom From Religion Foundation*