

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: St. Luke “Community” United Methodist Church 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 St. Luke “Community” United Methodist Church, located at 5710 E R L Thornton Fwy, Dallas, TX 75223. 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, St. Luke “Community” United Methodist Church Senior Pastor Richie Butler explicitly endorsed Beto O’Rourke as a candidate for Texas’ governor. During a service on October 23, 2022, Pastor Butler introduced O’Rourke to his congregation as “the next governor of Texas.”

“We want to encourage him as he continues to run the race that is before him, and he needs us to get him across the finish line.”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 Here, Pastor Butler clearly expressed his preference for O’Rourke by introducing him as “the next governor,” and directed his congregation to support O’Rourke in his campaign for Governor. Pastor Butler in his role as the senior pastor of 501(c)(3) organization St. Luke “Community” United Methodist Church has breached the responsibilities that come with his church’s tax exempt status.

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)

St. Luke “Community” United Methodist Church appears to have improperly used its status as a religious organization and 501(c)(3) entity to intervene in political campaigning. Pastor Butler violated IRS regulations by endorsing Beto O’Rourke, displaying a clear preference for one candidate over others.

We write to respectfully request that the IRS immediately investigate St. Luke “Community” United Methodist Church, and ensure that it is no longer receiving the benefits of 501(c)(3) status and that donations made to the church are no longer 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*