

Pastors Battle IRS on Pulpit Freedom Sunday

Shouldn't our pulpits be free? More than 1,200 pastors in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico think so.

Pastors around the country have registered to participate in the fifth annual Pulpit Freedom Sunday.

Registered pastors have committed to preach sermons that present **biblical perspectives** on the positions of electoral candidates. In so doing, they will exercise their constitutionally protected freedom to engage in religious expression from the pulpit despite an Internal Revenue Service rule known as the Johnson Amendment that activist groups often use to silence churches by threatening their tax-exempt status.

"Pastors should decide what they preach from the pulpit, not the IRS. It's outrageous for pastors and churches to be threatened or punished by the government for applying biblical teachings to all areas of life, including candidates and elections. The question is, 'Who should decide the content of sermons: pastors or the IRS?'" says Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) Senior Legal Counsel Erik Stanley.

"No government-recognized status can be conditioned upon the surrender of a constitutionally protected right. No one would suggest a **pastor** give up his church's tax-exempt status if he wants to keep his constitutional protection against illegal search and seizure or cruel and unusual punishment. Likewise, no one should be asking him to give up his church's tax-exempt status to be able to keep his constitutionally protected right to **free speech.**"

Pulpit Freedom Sunday, on Oct. 7 this year, is an event

associated with the Pulpit Initiative, a legal effort designed to secure the free speech rights of pastors in the pulpit. ADF hopes to eventually go to court to have the Johnson Amendment struck down as unconstitutional for its regulation of sermons, which are protected by the **First Amendment**.

Pulpit Freedom Sunday began in 2008 with 33 participating pastors. Participation increased each year, with last year's participation blossoming to 539.