

that contract with the government must be prepared to comply with government regulations. Accountability demands that recipients of government money must be governed first by the dictates of government, rather than the dictates of conscience. Such rules may transform religious ministries into administrative centers of government. Keep the church out of legal trouble. If you do not want to answer to the government, you should not accept government money.

The institutions of government and religion have vital and distinct roles to play in recovery efforts. Religion makes its best contribution by doing the work of religion—providing care and comfort to those who hurt, speaking of hope to those who despair and offering community to those who are lost. Houses of worship threaten to lose their focus when forced to act like an agency of the government. Government should focus on restoring essential services—repairing infrastructure, ensuring safety and rebuilding utility systems. Government agencies are not competent, nor constitutionally permitted, to provide or pay for religious services.

3. Use Caution When Cooperating With Government.

There are many non-financial ways government agencies may assist houses of worship, such as by providing information and coordinating efforts between religious and other non-governmental entities. While houses of worship should not receive government money, they can partner with government agencies through separate nonprofit organizations that

Religious affiliates

Religiously affiliated enterprises offer tax-funded, secular services that do not involve proselytizing, discrimination or religious exercises. They may also offer religious activities, provided such activities are privately funded, purely voluntary and clearly separate from the tax-funded social services.

receive government money.

These nonprofit organizations, including “religious affiliates” that are set up and run separately from pervasively religious organizations, such as houses of worship, may receive government money and may assist with the efforts of houses of worship. In times of crisis, new cooperative arrangements among houses of worship and with other nonprofit organizations offer opportunities to expand each entity’s reach. Nonprofit organizations that provide government-funded services without incorporating religious content offer a way to use government money, without improper government advancement of religion. The experience of secular nonprofits and religious affiliates that have long received government money to provide social services is a model your congregation should use as it seeks to meet the challenges ahead.



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Government Funding of Houses of Worship in the Wake of Tragedy

Protecting Religious Liberty and Avoiding Pitfalls

Statement by the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty and The Interfaith Alliance Foundation

In the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, houses of worship face enormous challenges responding to the needs of the suffering. Despite the inadequacy of the government's initial response, some suggest that the government now has the answer: providing taxpayer money to houses of worship. Houses of worship should beware of the consequences of accepting government funds, particularly at this time of tremendous vulnerability.

The hurricanes revealed what many would expect in the face of tragedy—a generous voluntary outpouring from individuals, community organizations and houses of worship to care for those displaced by the storm. The enormity of the problem led some houses of worship (and other entities) to be transformed into emergency shelters at great expense, depleting financial resources and adding debt. In many cases, houses of worship provided the kinds of secular services government agencies are expected to provide, but in this case did not.

Whatever the government's plan to assist those in need and remedy prior failings, it should not use tragedy to transform church-state relationships that have served both houses of worship and government well, during good times and bad.

1. Private Contributions Should Fund Houses of Worship.

Private sources of money, such as individuals, churches and other religious entities, nonprofit organizations, and non-governmental relief funds, do not carry the risks of government entanglement.

Private sources can provide help for damaged and destroyed houses of worship and assist those who are responding to the urgent need, without threatening the long-term health and mission of houses of worship. For example, churches should seek funds from private relief efforts such as the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund, as President Bush noted in a speech from New Orleans.

Houses of worship responded to needs because they are built on God, not government. Those who work in and support your church do so voluntarily, not because they are forced to participate through tax-

"[T]he private fundraising effort led by former Presidents Bush and Clinton has already received pledges of more than \$100 million. ... A portion will ... be sent to local houses of worship, to help reimburse them for the expense of helping others."

—President George W. Bush
September 15, 2005

ation. Do not let government change your ministry in a way that will diminish its autonomy and prophetic witness.

Religion's role as a prophetic critic is compromised when government claims credit or seeks political gain from its involvement with churches. Houses of worship should call government to account for its actions and inaction, including its response to these storms. Only when religious entities are voluntarily funded and independent can they do so effectively. Do not compromise the holy and voluntary nature of your house of worship.

2. Government Should Not Fund Houses of Worship.

The constitutional separation of church and state protects religious liberty by keeping government out of religion. To respect the voluntary nature of religion, government may not fund pervasively religious organizations or promote religious activities. Government subsidies for religious services will alter the time-honored relationship between religious institutions and government. Houses of worship have opened their facilities to evacuees and given generously according to their particular abilities and religious commitments. Many who are involved in relief efforts share their religion explicitly, with prayer services, religious education and distribution of religious tracts. To

Faith-based Organization

Beware of those promoting government funding of faith-based organizations. The term "faith-based" has no precise meaning, referring to everything from houses of worship to organizations with only some attenuated link to religion. Because we believe there are meaningful distinctions among religious institutions, we do not use the term "faith-based."

ensure religious liberty for all, however, the government must not fund such efforts. Voluntary dollars should fund faithful efforts.

Whatever the government funds, the government controls. Religious ministries