



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Activism Begins at Home



It has been said that politics is “showbiz” for ugly people. And most people can appreciate the allure of holding a prestigious office or having a vast amount of governmental resources at your disposal. While some of you reading this book are champing at the bit to obtain one of these important jobs, others of you are intimidated by the aura that surrounds such people or positions. But it is crucial that any person who aspires to have a great influence in our culture understand that the best place to get involved is in your local community.

This principle is one reason I start training students at their own state capitol instead of the daunting city of Washington, D.C. Not only does this discourage them from overlooking the opportunities that are more “local,” but when students go to their

state capitol, and meet state legislators, government becomes more familiar and less intimidating. This effect is amplified when a student is involved with a city council or county commission.

The problem with starting your “civics” education in Washington is that Capitol Hill is so complex (I still get lost in the basements of those buildings myself). You rarely see your own member of Congress and you leave the city feeling like you have to be a millionaire to get elected to the U.S. House of Representatives or the U.S. Senate. On the other hand, going to one’s state capitol for four to five days leaves students feeling like they “own the place.” And the reality is, we do kind of own it, don’t we?

My goal at *TeenPact* is for students to leave a capitol class saying something like, “My dad (or mom) could be a state representative!” I want students to see that such positions are attainable. I want students to leave the capitol at the end of the week believing that Christians not only need to be in many of these positions, but can reasonably aspire, plan, and work to attain them in God’s time.

Another aspect of this principle is plain ol’ supply and demand. Students who get involved with local campaigns for

“lower” offices can be assigned significant roles. I have seen young people given the opportunity to run campaigns for state house and mayoral races. The experience gained gives these students a lifetime of ambition to influence government. Indeed, one of the first few interns in our program, Stacie Stone, actually ran for the State House in Georgia at only 21 years of age.

Many Christians are frustrated that our culture’s mores are moving away from biblical standards. We go to the polls to vote and have to choose between the “lesser of two evils.” This should not be so. To see more immediate impact, get involved on a local level. When we moved to Norcross, Georgia, just after leaving the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ, our little town of 5,000 people had a five-member city council, a mayor and a \$10 million budget. A council seat came open and I helped persuade a friend to run. This fine Christian man did not exactly fit your small-southern-town profile of a councilman. He was a recent immigrant with a non-native-sounding name; he was a hairdresser by trade and had been a drug dealer prior to becoming a Christian. I offered to be his campaign manager, and the fun began.

We bought a voting list from our county registrar, analyzed it, and then mailed personal, handwritten notes to everyone who had voted in the last three elections. Surprisingly, that turned out to be only around 700 people. Yes, 700! I discovered that most people were apathetic, uninvolved and uninformed. We won that election with just over 250 votes, defeating a candidate who had previously served six terms on the council. My friend wound up serving two terms, and God used the experience to teach us many things. My family and friends learned about tax rates, zoning laws, mosquito eradication and constituent services as we rallied around “our” councilman. And I concluded from the experience that God was leading me to launch *TeenPact*.

Your local church is perhaps the *most* local community you belong to. If you are like me, you attend church with people you would consider pretty conscientious. I think it would really surprise you how many people in your church do not vote. You would likely be even more surprised to see how many of them aren’t even *registered* to vote. Apathy has crept into the pews today and many Christians have succumbed to the lie that they are not

needed in the “culture war.” That is one reason we are losing the culture war.

Aside from your immediate family, your local church is the first community you should begin to influence toward *real* citizenship. Generally, all that is needed is a little initiative and a servant’s heart. My friend, Nancy Schaefer, began what she called a “Family Concerns Committee” in her church because she was concerned about what was happening in the culture war and the impact on the family. Through that vehicle, she kept church members and staff informed of important legislative goings-on in her state, the U.S. Capitol, and even the United Nations. Nancy’s committee idea grew, and other churches followed suit. Through her encouragement, many churches have mobilized their members toward *real* citizenship. Nancy has since been elected to the Georgia State Senate.

Maybe you could exercise leadership to begin something like a Family Concerns committee in your church. These committees usually meet once a month, have a short program and cost very little to operate. Another great idea is to conduct a voter registration drive in your church. Young people can help staff a

table and you will likely have 10% to 20% of your congregation register. Through this initiative you make it easy for them to be a better citizen.

Some have had success at asking their pastors to mention a particular public policy issue at significant times during the year. For example, many churches observe a “Sanctity of Life” Sunday in January around the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*.¹⁴ You could also feature something on “Christian Action” around the time of an election or near the Fourth of July.

Sometimes, a pastor will be hesitant to speak out on political issues—especially during the Sunday morning service. Although some pastors’ concerns are based on a misunderstanding of the law and although there are resources to give clarity to the issue, it is best not to pressure your church leadership.¹⁵ You can offer to play a role of keeping members informed of important issues affecting the Body of Christ at large. Maybe you can make

¹⁴ *Roe v. Wade* is the infamous 1973 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that effectively legalized abortion in all 50 states. The decision was announced by the Supreme Court on January 22, 1973.

¹⁵ *The Alliance Defense Fund* (alliancedefensefund.org) and *American Center for Law and Justice* (aclj.org) are examples of helpful resources on this point.

announcements in Sunday school classes, set up an information table, or even produce a church-wide newsletter. My church owns a radio station, so I volunteered to do daily reports on the station during the legislative session for their local newscast. It is only 45 seconds of air time, but it is a simple way I can keep believers informed about issues before the state and federal legislatures.

I am always on the lookout for potential political candidates in my church as well. Maybe you have someone who would make a good mayor, city councilman or state officeholder. Challenge them to run and offer to be on their team.

Getting involved in campaigns and politics on a local level is the first overt step to making an impact on your culture. I hope you will begin today!

Chapter Challenge

1. Go to your city council or county commission meeting. Afterwards, go up and introduce yourself to each of the elected officials.
2. Participate in a program like *TeenPact*, *City on a Hill*, *Student Statesmanship Institute* or a similar local Christian program on government.

3. Sign up to work in the campaign of a good candidate for a local, state, or federal office. Volunteer on a regular basis for best results. The *Student Project* program, which I conduct separately from *TeenPact*, is also a great experience. (See www.studentproject.net).
4. Call your county registrar and ask for details about conducting a voter registration drive at your church.
5. Start a Family Concerns Committee, Right-to-Life chapter or similar group at your church after conferring with your church staff.