

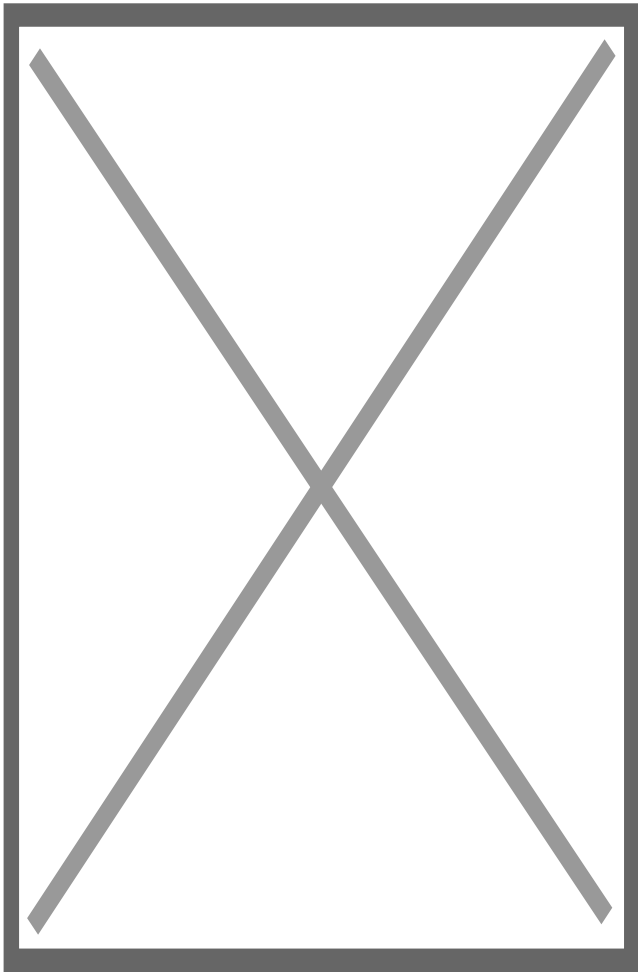
Reclaiming “church politics”

Ross Kane argues that politics is about congregational life and governance—not just statecraft.

by [Laura E. Alexander](#) in the [November 2025](#) issue

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In Review



The Good News of Church Politics

By Ross Kane
Eerdmans

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RW-REPLACE-TOKEN

I recently served as president of my church council. Any reader who has served on any church leadership committee will know what this means: long meetings that cut into evening family time; fielding questions,

concerns, and sometimes anger about what is happening within the church; puzzling over how to solicit feedback, communicate priorities, and distill big ideas into manageable pathways for action. Nonetheless, I found joy in the energy my fellow Christians bring to building community, doing justice, and worshiping God.

In *The Good News of Church Politics*, Ross Kane asserts that the work of my church council is politics and assures me that it is both necessary and a source of good news—for our congregation and the world. Kane, a theologian and Episcopal priest with years of congregational experience, argues that it is a mistake to confine politics to statecraft or regard it as detached from our lives. It's also a mistake to view politics as inevitably a source of division in our religious communities.

Politics is simply how communities, large or small, “shape a common, interdependent life” together. Church leaders and members practice politics everyday, and we have the ability and responsibility to do so in Christlike ways that reflect our call to love of God and neighbor. The less the politics of our local church communities reflect the often toxic debates over national or global policy, the better chance Christians have of shaping the world toward love and justice.

This readable book unfolds in a clear, purposeful progression. Kane begins by discussing how politics can be reframed as an ordinary means for churches to build and maintain communities that support their members and reach out to neighbors in love. Then he describes how spiritual and political practices in churches can enhance each other. For example, Jesus' admonition to love one's enemies might take concrete form in community debates about modifying a road configuration or in organizing the painting of the fellowship hall. Drawing from the example of Martin Luther King Jr. and the US civil rights movement, Kane argues that these everyday acts of decision-making and cooperation prepare Christians to better stand up for their principles when they advocate for policies or join social movements for change.

Next, Kane examines practices of leadership and governance. Even when limited time and resources mean we cannot effect all the change we want, he advocates using authority to “build up loving interdependence” among both members and neighbors.

The final section of the book turns to the colloquial understanding of the word *politics*, addressing the role of churches in their wider communities, whether local, regional, or national. Kane strongly recommends that churches become involved first, and primarily, in their neighborhood communities, as paying attention to the needs of those who seek help from the church can inform local advocacy in beneficial ways. He describes one church that provided emergency food assistance, whose members realized that many of the families they helped were hungry because they had to spend more than half their income on housing. This inspired the congregation to advocate for the city to adopt policies promoting affordable housing.

At the same time, Kane cautions against a singular focus on one's own immediate community, partly because neighborhoods, cities, and towns are often segregated through unjust policies and practices. Churches should reach out to their neighbors across those racial and economic lines and advocate for stronger, broader communal bonds rather than using a local focus as an excuse to turn a blind eye to injustice.

The book exhorts Christian leaders and communities to be flexible and to follow Jesus' example of showing love—and enacting good political practices—in ways that fit the moment and the people involved. Nonetheless, Kane does not lose sight of Christian hope for the in-breaking of justice and love that God promises. It is often right for churches to act locally and some of their actions may seem small, but they can do so in a spirit of prayer that the lowly be lifted up, the mighty cast down, and the hungry filled with good things.

Some readers may perceive the tone of this book to be overly optimistic and may want suggestions for a more robust response to current government policies that harm the poor and vulnerable, attack rights to freedom of

religion and speech, and embrace violence rather than peace. Kane, however, is fully aware that abuse, conflict, and exclusion do happen. He offers a thoughtful, albeit limited, exploration of the ambiguities of forgiveness, abuses by those in power, and the difference between finitude and sin.

Kane's primary purpose is to get past the idea that "church politics" can only mean bad things and to demonstrate how the governance and daily activities of church life can show God's love in many ways. He sees a path forward for the work of church politics in shaping interdependent communities in Spirit-filled ways. Kane's clear and hopeful articulation of this path makes this book an excellent resource for clergy and lay leaders seeking a foundation for their congregations.