Operation Family Meeting

Talking to those who taught you to live a life of love, justice, equality, compassion, and decency.
Engaging in Hard Conversations

Change begins with us. We are grateful that you are willing to be a change agent, and to begin the conversations which will shift the moral narrative around this election!

We know what a Trump victory will bring. Over the last four years, the Trump administration has walked an immoral path, stoking the fires of racism, inciting violence, and dodging accountability. Their platform remains unchanged, and we can expect more of the same: more hate speech, more tax cuts for the wealthy, more immigrant children in cages, more rapid climate change, more heartache...all while the toll from Trump’s mishandling of COVID-19 surpasses record deaths.

Joe Biden and Kamala Harris stand poised to help us heal our nation. They will lead with **hope instead of fear, love instead of hate, and unity instead of division**. It is important that people of faith are clear about this choice, and that by our efforts our faith itself will be known.

With so much of this season's political talk focused on Evangelical Christians, the mainstream people of faith can feel forgotten by career politicians and by the media, who are both quick to place religious people into monolithic identity boxes. It can feel isolating and erasing, as if no one can represent us as people of faith.

Often voters have no one to talk to about this. They may not have friends who are interested in voting differently, they may have been taught that the political was never polite conversation. For some of these voters, especially the older Evangelicals, family members are the only possible points of contact for having these hard conversations. That’s why your commitment to have these conversations is so important!

**Hard conversations...**
- Make people reflect on their values.
- Show a willingness to engage in deep conversation.
- Go the extra mile to connect with undecided voters you have a relationship with.
- Engage in persuasive dialogue with relationship centered outcomes.
We hope that this guide can help you have those hard conversations.

Why engage in this activity? What are your goals? What is necessary to say? What is driving you? We are all approaching this from different places but we know that the Trump Administration is deeply out of alignment with our morals and values. We have to have this talk.

Inside this guide you will find:

- Discussion Outline 4-7
- Telling Your Story 8-9
- Preparing Yourself 10
- Hard Topics 11-12
- Resources 13-14

Please use and share this guide in whatever context you find necessary. Again, welcome on this journey. An easy path is never promised, but none of us must travel it alone. We are grateful you are here.

In solidarity,
The New Moral Majority • Vote the Common Good
Discussion Outline

Having conversations with our loved ones can be hard, especially in such a volatile climate. But these conversations are not impossible and they can be done in a compassionate way. We are offering a few tips to help you make these conversations easier.

As you think about who you want to talk to, keep these guidelines in mind. Think about ways you can make this a more comfortable and welcoming conversation, even if you strongly disagree with the person. Always remember that behind strong statements are often deep fears. Listening for and figuring out those fears can transform a conversation beyond issues into something more meaningful.

This is hard. Don’t be discouraged, nor be driven by any specific outcome in the moment. These outcomes vary greatly and may include continuing conversations with other voters, consideration of a non-Trump vote, or even affecting a swing state balance. You may never know the actual outcome of this conversation and that is alright.

This is a broad overview of conversation facilitation with some possible discussion questions. More detailed resources for guidance follow.

Begin with Love
- If you go into this conversation in battle mode or with an air of superiority, you’ve already lost. It is natural for anyone to jump into a posture of defense if they feel threatened or attacked. You cannot insult or shame someone into agreeing with you.
- Return frequently to gratitude, an expression of love. Thank your conversation partner for being there, for talking with you, especially when the talk gets tough.

Prepare Carefully
- **Who?** Identify your audience. Who do you feel called to speak with about this election? Are they someone who has struggled with how to vote? Do they need help with discernment?
- **Where?** Choose a time and place where everyone feels comfortable. Consider neutral and positive spaces, go for a walk or plan a picnic.
- **When?** If you are worn out at the end of the day, have the conversation earlier when you have more emotional energy. Did you get a good night's sleep? Have you eaten well and stayed hydrated?
• **How?** Lead with values and practice your story or supporting points ahead of time. If you struggle with memory, especially in stressful situations, it’s okay to have a cheat sheet with you on paper, on your phone, or in your planner.

**Stay Calm, Be Engaged**
- Be vulnerable by accessing a place of genuine emotion. Are you avoiding overly assertive language? How would you respond if the roles were reversed?
- Use active and genuine curiosity. When eliciting a story, actively listen.
- Our job is to show vulnerability, real emotion, authenticity, love, and joy, not just pain or sadness. Follow stories and questions with genuine curiosity. Actively listen and ask probing questions that elicit more stories.

**Clearly State Core Values**
- What core values do you have in common?
- What are the most important core values you hold that influence your vote?
- What about your values makes you passionate about the issues or candidates?

**Know the Issue**
- If you know that there are certain issues that are important to your conversation partner, make sure to research those ahead of time.
- Know where the candidates are on the issues that are most important.

**Tell Your Story**
- Beginning with a personal story relieves tension and establishes a mutual sharing-based space.
- If possible, use a real story from your own life.
- How does your story relate to why you are passionate about this election?
- See “Telling Your Story” in this document for additional effective ways to tell your story.

**Be Firm, But Thoughtful**
- Positively assert your point without attacking or blaming.
- Define yourself - “this is what I think and believe” while recognizing that others may see it differently.
- If someone rejects your point of view, remember they are not rejecting you. They are rejecting the idea. In these settings, it’s important to make that distinction.
Have Constructive Conversations

- Focus on your own feelings, hopes, and concerns. Use “I” statements when sharing your view. “You” statements can be easily interpreted as an attack.
- Avoid comparisons, cliches, taglines, or looping in the opinions of others, especially unnamed others.
- Return to gratitude. Thank your conversation partner both for the willingness to engage and the time spent. Both are valuable.

Listen Deeply

- If you want to be listened to, you need to listen deeply as well. Listen not to plan your next rebuttal, but to deeply understand the hopes, pains, and concerns of the other person.
- Explore areas of commonality as they appear.
- Acknowledge their position. This phrase can be helpful, “I acknowledge your position and promise to weigh it carefully before taking any action.”

Admit Ignorance

- Even when you are strongly committed to your candidate, you may be asked a question to which you don’t know the answer. It’s okay to admit that.
- You can always say, “I’m not sure about that, but I’ll get back to you.”

Let Go of Winning

- While this sounds counter-intuitive, it is actually quite important. Changing ideas takes time. Changing deep-seated beliefs takes even longer. Keep the conversation short and don’t repeat or insist upon your ideas. If this conversation goes well, you can always have another conversation after the other person has had some time to process. Less is more.
- While our hope is that we can meet people in the middle, there are people that won’t change. If you sense that you’re not making progress in the conversation, it’s okay to walk away.
- Focus on getting away from rhetoric and towards personal engagement with the issues. If that isn’t working, walk away and try again later.

Make an Ask

- Consider what you’re willing to ask. The ultimate goal is to move undecided voters towards voting for Biden- Harris. “After discussing our stories, values, and issues, are you willing to vote for Biden in this election?”
● If the conversation has felt positive and gone well, you can request that your conversation partner continue the dialogue by talking with others.
● If they won’t vote for Biden, consider asking them to not vote for Trump, even offering a potential 3rd party candidate.
● Regardless of your conversation partner’s chosen candidate or issue, encourage them to form a voting plan.

Discussion Questions:
Having a place to start the conversation is always helpful. Here are some discussion questions to get you going and to help you refocus the conversation if it gets off topic. Additional question resources can be found on our Resources page in this guide.

1. I know there are some big issues around the election. What are you most concerned about?
2. What issues will help you decide who to vote for?
3. How does your faith inform who you are voting for? Where do you see that lining up with Scripture and tradition?
4. Would you be surprised to know that Joe Biden/Kamala Harris believes...
5. What is your biggest hope for our country? What is your biggest fear for our country?
6. Have you made sure you’re registered to vote? Do you have a plan for voting?
7. Have you changed which party you support? What issues have inspired you to do that?
8. If you could fix one thing in America right now, what would it be?
9. Is there anything I can do to help you understand a certain issue more clearly?
Telling Your Story

There are many ways to tell your story when engaging in hard conversations. You may choose to begin your time together by asking if you can tell a personal story, or you may respond with one if asked in the course of your conversation. Regardless, you will be ready to share what you develop here.

Brainstorm In this step, you will think up as many different answers as you can for each question without any editing or judgement. That comes later. For now, say or write down the first thing that comes to mind.

- **Audience and Intent**: To whom and why? Did someone ask? Will this be public?
- **Turning points or Important moments**: Are there times or experiences that come to mind when you think about faith and politics? Moral action? Were there sermons or lectures or rally speeches you’ve heard that had an impact?
- **Themes and Content**: What kinds of issues come up for you often, or are recurring events in your life? Are you drawn to issues of justice for immigrants? Of political integrity? Of stewardship of Creation? Do not be overwhelmed by a deluge of items nor dismayed if you can only think of three.
- **Chronology and Timelines**: When did this happen? Over time? In a moment? Does the story precede even your own involvement? Will it continue past the same?

Find a Hook In this step, you will hone in on your specific story, on “how” you will tell it. You could focus on a theme and how you see it in many places, use time to move through a changed understanding, or relay insights and lessons from experience or education. There are many ways to enter telling your own story, and some will fit in some situations, and others elsewhere.

- **Audience and Intent**: Do you have a common experience or shared friend? Shared sacred space or particular goal alignment?
- **Turning points, Important moments, Influential people**: Of all of these things, which lends itself well to a short story that matters to you? Did a mentor, teacher, pastor introduce you to an idea that mattered to you? Did you witness an event that made you see something differently, or hear a story that did the same?
- **Themes and Content**: What kinds of issues come up for you often, or are recurring events in your life? Are you drawn to issues of justice for immigrants? Of political integrity? Of stewardship of Creation? It is okay if you have many examples or just a few.
- **Chronology and Timelines**: Often, simply tracing an idea/event/revelation over time can provide all the structure and organization any story needs.

**Tips for Story-Telling**
- Establish expectations of non-interruption at the outset. Hold to it. You will invite questions at the end, and you should relay this.
- Slow down. This is virtually always true, meet, and right so to do. Breathe.
- Work from an outline. This will help you hit all of the important points without sounding stilted.

**Videos as Story-Telling Modes** *Is the idea of doing this way too hard? But you feel called to speak? Do you want to do this but can't really imagine what it would sound like? Here are three examples of regular people talking about these hard things.*

- Partner Pastor Kim Ryan has developed a [video](#) about his spiritual journey regarding this election. In it, he lays out a revelatory conversation with The Holy Spirit in which he was led to examine Micah 6:8.
- Partner Sarah Rye Ryan shares her insights and awareness over this issue as she discusses her own background as a lifelong Evangelical in this [video](#).
- Partner Rev. Jessica Abell has made a [video](#) about her own political and civic work as spiritual ministry and call.
Preparing for the Conversation

It is totally normal to feel anxious about having these conversations. Anxiety can make us feel insecure, nauseous, and scared. Those are all valid feelings. Acknowledging that before the conversation can be helpful in setting yourself up for success.

Focus and Feelings
- When these feelings arise, what is behind them? Are they based in previous interactions?
- Take a few moments before engaging to do something meaningful. Read something from your favorite book, listen to a favorite song, pray, or go outside. Engaging with something that encourages you will give you strength for the conversation.
- You may want to take this one step further and practice prayer, grounding, or meditation. Find your center. You may want to remember a time when you felt deep gratitude or happiness. Capture that image in your mind. If you get flustered during the conversation, recall that image, and refocus on the task at hand.

Boundaries and Time
- If you’re worried about how things will go, set a time limit. Give the conversation 20 minutes. If you feel good at 20 minutes, you can always expand it. If you feel you need to leave, then you can say, “I’m sorry but I need to get going.” It’s okay to prioritize your time and wellbeing.
- This may be especially helpful with someone that often takes up too much time. You can state the time limit up front and then stick to it during the conversation. That’s not selfish, that’s respecting everyone’s time to make sure you talk about what you want to talk about.

Accountability and Closure
- If you can, bring another friend or family member along to the conversation. Being in a group can be easier than being one on one. Having someone on your team can be helpful, even if they are just there to be present.
- Sometimes the only thing we can do is walk away. That’s okay.
- If you are meeting with someone in person and they won’t wear a mask or social distance and you feel unsafe, it’s okay to leave.
- If you feel the situation has become hostile, it’s okay to leave.
- If you feel the conversation is just looping around the same things, it’s okay to end the conversation.
Hard Topics

While we cannot anticipate every question or path your conversation will take, we’ve provided some guidance on a few of the common topics.

Climate Change and Environmental Justice

- **Not a Partisan Issue:** The shift of environmental protection into the arena of partisan battles is new and must be rejected. This is an important issue this election for many reasons. It may be important to note that Kamala Harris has a solid record as an environmental justice advocate. There are several groups that represent a faith-based voice and some links can be found on our Resources page.

- **Intersections of Realms of Justice:** Climate change will adversely affect those with the least - in fact it already has. While other issues of justice and equity are validly pushing their way to the forefront in our lives right now, the pending climate crisis is always present, and has a role in all the other crises of our day. The Sierra Club puts this relationship well in its COVID statement:

  “The COVID-19 crisis has not passed and continues to disproportionately harm Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people and other communities of color. The pandemic has revealed how the communities hardest hit are often the same communities that suffer from high levels of pollution and poor access to healthcare. The fight for environmental justice cannot be separated from the fight for racial justice.”

Reproductive Rights

- **Audience Alert:** Never begin a conversation with this topic when engaging with lifelong conservatives, evangelical Christians, or Catholics. Let them ask you. Be ready with ways to focus on compassion in ways that work for you authentically.

- **Organizations:** There are many active faith-based voices in the world of Reproductive Rights. The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice is an Interfaith group with many resources and is led by Chief Executive Officer Rev. Katey Zeh. Links for their work are on the Resources Page.

- **Moral Political Statements:** Late-term abortions are the latest reproductive health piece under attack, and this primarily works due to the horrific lies believed about them, about why women have them, and about the viability of those fetuses to live at all. During Pete Buttigieg’s Presidential bid, he said this in a town hall as his response to a question about late-term abortions:

  "So, let's put ourselves in the shoes of a woman in that situation. If it's that late in your pregnancy, that means almost by definition you've been expecting to carry it to term."
"We're talking about women who have perhaps chosen the name, women who have purchased the crib, families that then get the most devastating medical news of their lifetime, something about the health or the life of the mother that forces them to make an impossible, unthinkable choice."

"That decision is not going to be made any better, medically or morally, because the government is dictating how that decision should be made."

**Voting Outside of Party or Church**

- **Issues of Identity:** For many people, being the member of a specific party is bound up with their own sense of self. Emphasize that voting for Biden and Harris is not an abandonment of their beloved party but perhaps a chance for it to re-set from the path it is on. Try the image of getting on a train going a direction down the tracks. You aren’t living on that train forever. There are other trains—that's how it works. But for now, the Biden/Harris train is heading away from Disaster Station.

- **Bucking Authority:** For many people, a vote for anyone other than Trump will be going against the direction of their pastors or faith leaders. While you may find common moral ground, getting through the difficulty of choosing differently will be a real concern. Partner Sarah Rye Ryan shares her insights and awareness over this issue as she discusses her own background as a lifelong Evangelical in this video.

- **Inspiration and Clarity:** Partner Pastor Kim Ryan has developed a video about his spiritual journey regarding this election and you may find it useful. In it, he lays out a revelatory conversation with The Holy Spirit in which he was led to examine Micah 6:8.

**Get Out the Vote as Spiritual Action**

- **Church and State:** For many, the mixing of religion and politics is not something we do, something we talk about, nor are even realms that touch each other. But for many, voting and citizen engagement are spiritual disciplines. Partner Rev. Jessica Abell has made a video about her own political and civic work as spiritual ministry and call.

- **Embodied Action:** Using our bodies as a change agent, as an extension of our spiritual commitments, is part of what it means to be human. Whether that means filling out your ballot and taking it to the drop box, or standing in line in solidarity with those around you as you wait to vote, using your body to take action reflects a commitment to making the world a better place for everyone around you.
Resources

Content Guides
- Broad Moral Issues - [https://www.newmoralmajority.org/about-2](https://www.newmoralmajority.org/about-2)
- Reproductive Freedom - [https://rcrc.org](https://rcrc.org)
- Pastoral Response on Reproductive Rights - [https://kateyzeh.com](https://kateyzeh.com)
- Faith and Climate - [https://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org](https://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org)
- Faith, Climate and Policy - [http://www.nrpe.org](http://www.nrpe.org)
- Resources for Pastors - [https://www.votecommongood.com/resources-for-pastors/](https://www.votecommongood.com/resources-for-pastors/)
- Immigration & Faith - [https://baptistnews.com/article/400-faith-leaders-ask-trump-to-end-immigrant-family-separations/#.X4dvDi2z1p8](https://baptistnews.com/article/400-faith-leaders-ask-trump-to-end-immigrant-family-separations/#.X4dvDi2z1p8)
- Abortion in Church - [https://youngclergywomen.org/how-to-talk-about-abortion-in-church/](https://youngclergywomen.org/how-to-talk-about-abortion-in-church/)

Non-Partisan Get Out The Vote ("All Souls To The Polls") Information
Go to [https://www.newmoralmajority.org/all-souls-to-the-polls](https://www.newmoralmajority.org/all-souls-to-the-polls) to:
- Register to vote (online, in every state that still allows it)
- Apply for a mail-in ballot (in every state that still allows it)
- Check their voter Registration
- Find out where to vote
- Sign Up for Election Reminders (text and email)

Conversation Assistance
- StoryCorps - [https://storycorps.org/participate/great-questions/](https://storycorps.org/participate/great-questions/)
Video Resources
- A Young Evangelical Invites Hard Conversations
  https://youtu.be/PE_JtRXLvFE
- An Evangelical Take
  https://youtu.be/Yeg_2_DC8gY
- Voting As a Spiritual Act
  https://youtu.be/e4ImXnhzGtQ

Research & Information
- Up to Date Voter Data  http://www.electproject.org
- Biden/Harris Campaign  https://joebiden.com