

COMMUNITYRENEWALSOCIETY

A Faithful Guide to Political Action

Introduction

More than anything, as people of faith and goodwill, we are called to take action rooted in the best ideas and values of our faith traditions.

Those best ideas include, but are not limited to, being good stewards of the earth, loving our neighbors, doing good to those who are suffering, and being agents of justice and liberation.

This guide reflects on some of those best ideas and values and weighs how political action in this moment can align with those values.

This is not intended to tell people who to vote for, nor is it an endorsement of any candidate or their platforms.

What Can Churches and Other 501c3s Do?

Churches and 501c3 organizations cannot endorse candidates or tell people who to vote for.

They can however:

1. Talk about issues that are important to their communities.
2. Give people information about voting. That includes important dates and deadlines
3. Talk about the importance of voting, generally.
4. Share nonpartisan voter guides.
5. Talk about issues and the election from the pulpit.

Sample Vote Message

Below is a way that religious leaders can talk about elections and voting at church:

- **Name the Context**
 - In just a few days early voting will end in Illinois. Then on November 5, we will have the final opportunity to cast our ballots. Polls will be open from 6 AM to 7 PM CT.
- **Move Beyond the Presidential**
 - Yes, we get to vote for president between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump. And, while those are the names many of us know, there are other names on the ballot. We also get to decide things like judges and city council members.
- **Lift Up the Issues**
 - While I cannot tell you who to vote for, it is important that all of us who can show up for ourselves and our communities. Vote for love. Vote for justice. Vote for our friends who suffer beyond our shores.
- **Urgency**
 - It's a five-minute action that goes a long way to decide who leads, but also what happens on the issues we care about and to communities we love.
- **Invite Action**
 - Say yes, if you plan to vote!

Questions the Faithful Should Ask

1. What issues do I care about?
2. What positions do candidates take on issues such as healthcare, an economy that favors everyday people, and ending racism?
3. How can voting improve not just my life, but the life of people and communities I care about?
4. Who are the kinds of people who support this or that candidate?
5. Who has the organizations I belong to endorsed?
6. What local offices are on my ballot?
7. Which candidate most aligns with the values I have and the issues I care about?
8. What are the needs of the people and communities to which I belong, and what are the candidates saying about those needs?

Vote for Those Who Are Suffering

In the story of the good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37, Jesus talks about a Samaritan who sees a man on the side of the road. The man has been beaten and robbed. He was also passed up by others. The Samaritan performs a neighborly act when he stops, puts a man on his horse, and takes him to safety.

In the same way, voting can be an act of love and justice towards our neighbors who are suffering.

When we vote in this election, let us think about and cast our attention on those who have been left on the side of the road to die and how we can take political action that lifts them up.

- Let us consider the people and communities harmed by police violence.
- Let us consider the need for safe spaces for Trans and gender-nonconforming people.
- Let us think about the folks at our borders.
- Let us think about formerly-incarcerated people who might not be able to vote.

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Vote to Liberate the Oppressed

In the United States, many people live under systems of oppression. Sometimes it seems that racism, sexism, and homophobia are the order of the day.

Let us remember though, that those systems are informed and maintained by elections and the political decisions that we all get to make.

Also, beyond our shores, there are people suffering under oppressive and repressive regimes.

As we cast our vote, we should think about people in Haiti, Palestine, Sudan, and Ukraine.

Let us wrestle with this question: How will our choices bring aid, support, and attention to our neighbors in those places?

Vote to Slow Climate Change

This summer, we saw a lot of devastation caused by hurricanes. So many people were displaced and lives lost.

The fact is, the severity of storms is getting worse. This is because of climate change.

We can all take action to slow or reverse climate change. The people we vote for have much to do and say about that!

Let us think about the future of our planet in this election.

We can no longer deny that climate change is happening and that it is spurred by human action.

As we vote, let us think about how our choices will either slow climate change or ignore it all together.

Vote in Defense of the Poor

In Luke 4:18, Jesus says that he has been anointed to proclaim good news to the poor and throughout the gospels, the condition of the poor is brought into focus a number of times.

Similarly, in modern times, we must take political action with poor people in mind.

We must ask ourselves, who are the people advancing policies and ideas that will help people get out of poverty?

Our communities need good jobs, better wages, and economic opportunities for the most vulnerable.

When we vote in this election, let us vote with the least, last, and left behind on our hearts and minds.

From Chicago to Gaza

When we show up to vote in this election, as people of faith our minds and hearts should be on the people and bodies huddled together seeking refuge in Palestine.

To date, the death toll of people killed in Gaza exceeds 43,000. The next United States president has the power and the relationship to do something about this!

CRS joins with many people and organizations in calling for an end to the war on the Palestinian people.

We vote in this election as an act of solidarity with those who are suffering in Palestine.

Voting as the Start, Not the End

Voting is not a perfect science, nor is it a complete antidote to all that ails us. That is to say, all of our problems and conflicts will not be resolved by new political leadership.

But political leadership matters. That leadership sets the tone for our communities and country. That leadership is also often a signal of the kinds of things that are both possible and acceptable.

With that in mind, we see voting as an act that helps to till the soil/ground for us to plant the seeds of our hope. By voting we start or participate in a project that goes well beyond voting, but one to which voting is still important.

In most cases, it takes about 5 minutes to vote. Those 5 minutes are perhaps the most well-spent 5 minutes of the year. With 5 minutes we can help install leaders that pave the way for a lot of good, even if not perfect.

State-Wide Ballot Measures

In addition to electing candidates for office, voters will also have the chance to weigh in on some ballot measures:

- Should any candidate appearing on the Illinois ballot for federal, State, or local office be subject to civil penalties if the candidate interferes or attempts to interfere with an election worker's official duties?
- Should the Illinois Constitution be amended to create an additional 3% tax on income greater than \$1,000,000 for the purpose of dedicating funds raised to property tax relief?
- Should all medically appropriate assisted reproductive treatments, including, but not limited to, in vitro fertilization, be covered by any health insurance plan in Illinois that provides coverage for pregnancy benefits, without limitation on the number of treatments?

Vote Locally

Local elections play a huge part in determining the terrain of our struggle in Chicago. We should consider the many struggles that we are engaged in and ask where these candidates stand.

- COOK COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY
- COOK COUNTY CLERK (UNEXPIRED 2-YEAR TERM)
- COOK COUNTY CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT
- MWRD COMMISSIONERS (6-YEAR TERMS)
- MWRD COMMISSIONERS (UNEXPIRED 2-YEAR TERM)
- CHICAGO BOARD OF EDUCATION IL SUPREME COURT (DISTRICTS 1 AND 4)
- IL APPELLATE COURT JUDGE
- COOK COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT JUDGES
- COOK COUNTY SUBCIRCUIT JUDGES

Vote Locally Subcircuit Judges

These judges play a huge role in the local battles to free people who have been wrongfully incarcerated and against mass incarceration. Here are some of the districts that will be on the ballot.

- 3rd
- 4th
- 5th
- 7th
- 8th
- 10th
- 11th
- 12
- 13th
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20

A Call to Action

Below is a call and response that congregational leaders can use during worship on November 3rd:

Leader: In this election we have many choices to make. We are not just choosing candidates, but we are stating our commitments and positions on important issues.

Response: We commit to weighing the issues and candidates carefully. We vote for ourselves and our communities.

Leader: We have seen and heard the cries of the oppressed people of the world, and we take action that might bring them relief.

Response: We vote with them in mind.

Leader: We know that while important, voting is not a panacea. After voting we must work together to build beloved community.

People: We commit to voting and building.

5 Things To Say To People With Whom You Disagree

We live in a moment in which politics can be very divisive. As people of faith, it is, in many ways, up to us to reintroduce civility to political discourse. Civility, however, is not to be confused with allowing evil and destructive ideas to go unchallenged.

Let us work to bring our people and loved ones together to have civil conversation. Here are some examples:

1. Tell me your story. Help me see how you have come to this idea or position.
2. What do you mean by that? How did you come to that understanding?
3. I want to share my own experience and the experience of the people and communities that I love.
4. While I disagree with you on this, I want to explore where we are aligned.
5. I want to invite you to consider another perspective...

Talking With People Who Say They Won't Vote

Not voting can also be a political act. And people sometimes don't vote because they have valid concerns and disagreements with candidates. With that in mind, it's good to:

1. Ask why. Don't assume that is just apathy. Ask folks why they are not voting.
2. Share your own story and why you are committed to voting. Stories compel people more than judgement.
3. Ask about the issues they care about and try to connect those issues to voting and politics.
4. Sometimes national politics can feel overwhelming. Invite folks to think about local offices. After all, all voting is local! In IL, there are many local offices up for election. Those local offices have day-to-day impact on our lives.
5. Don't beat people up—especially young voters! Share your story. Share about the issues. Give information that is compelling. Invite folks to reconsider.
6. Where folks struggle with the importance of voting, invite them to consider how else they might work for change in their communities.

Beyond Voting

If we can, we have a moral responsibility to vote.
But voting is just the first step in building a healthy democracy.

As people of faith and goodwill, there are some things we can do beyond voting:

1. We can volunteer to make calls, knock on doors, and help turn our community to vote.
2. We can talk to our friends. Use this guide to have at least 5 conversations and get folks to join you at the polls.
3. We can work and organize on issues. Elections are only a small part of the work to build a strong democracy. Join others in organizing for policy and practical change.

Important Dates

October – November 3: Early voting period in Illinois. In Illinois, exact dates vary by county. Find out early voting dates here: <https://www.elections.il.gov/>

October 31: Absentee ballots must be received.

November 5: The last day to vote. Polls open at 6 AM and close at 7 PM.

Illinois has same-day voter registration. This means you can register to vote right up until Election Day.

There are special polling places for same day registration and voting visit: <https://www.elections.il.gov/>

For More Information

- Visit CommunityRenewalSociety.org to take our Voter Pledge and join others in our movement.
- Visit candidate websites for more information on their platforms and positions.
- Check out the recordings of the debates between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump.
- Visit Vote.org for general information on voting.
- Visit Elections.IL.Gov.
- For more information on what churches and other 501c3 organizations can do, visit BolderAdvocacy.Org.