

Voting God's Politics

Principles and policies for Christian voters.

“Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.” —Proverbs 31:9

Christians have a moral and civic responsibility to participate in the political life of society. We must, however, remember that God is not a Republican or a Democrat, and prayerfully measure the policies of all candidates against a range of Christian ethics and values. Our broad set of Christian values should inform our political decisions. While we must be careful about translating scripture directly into positions on public policy, the following principles and policies provide a critical framework to shape our perspective on public policy and political leadership. We encourage you to use this guide to educate yourself, then find out the positions and priorities that candidates have taken on these issues. You can write letters to candidates or to your local newspaper, call radio talk shows, and ask questions of candidates directly at forums or town hall meetings. Think and pray about whom you would entrust with the responsibility to lead your community, state, and nation. While the list of issues and things to do in this guide is by no means exhaustive, we pray that it will provide a moral compass to inform prudential political judgments.

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COMPASSION AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE. God shows a special concern for those in poverty and acts in history to lift them up. The Bible teaches that societies should organize so that all members have genuine access to the resources needed to live a decent life and provide for those who are unable to care for themselves.

“They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat ... and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.”

—Isaiah 65:21-22

Work must work and provide for family economic success and security. People who work responsibly should have a living family income in which earnings together with supports for transportation, health care, nutrition, child care, education, housing, and other basic needs provide a decent standard of living and allow for asset and wealth creation. Those unable to work should be supported with dignity. Initiatives such as an increased minimum wage, the Earned Income Tax Credit, individual development accounts, and pay equity for women promote family economic stability.

Children should not be poor. Our nation needs specific and concrete commitments to brighter futures for our youngest and most vulnerable citizens. We should develop and commit to a concrete plan to reduce child poverty by half over 10 years, modeling a similar 1999 pledge by the United Kingdom, which has made considerable progress in achieving this goal.

Extreme global poverty must end. As the basic economic needs of our fellow citizens are addressed, we should also increase efforts to meet basic human needs around the globe. Policies of trade justice, debt cancellation, and increased effective U.S. development assistance should be supported to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals, adopted by 189 nations in 2000 to cut in half the number of people living in extreme poverty by the year 2015. This must include a commitment to increase poverty-focused development assistance by an additional 1 percent of the federal budget.

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PEACE AND RESTRAINT OF VIOLENCE. Our world faces a major challenge of how to resolve conflicts, reduce violence, and defeat terrorism without preemptive war. War has become a first resort instead of the last resort. In a world with terrorists, terrorist states, unilateralist superpowers, and weapons of mass destruction, alternatives to an endless cycle of violence are needed.

“...They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

—Isaiah 2:4

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” —Matthew 5:9

Bring peace to Iraq. Our nation should support a policy of phased withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq that starts immediately and includes disavowing plans for permanent military bases, giving up preferential treatment for American companies in the reconstruction, and waiving proprietary interests in Iraq oil profits. These steps would lead to genuine international participation in safeguarding Iraq's security and rebuilding.

Eliminate nuclear weapons. Our nation should support the elimination of all nuclear weapons. As they have pledged under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the U.S. and other nuclear powers should take steps toward eliminating nuclear arsenals. Countries seeking nuclear weapons, such as Iran and North Korea, must be dealt with through diplomatic negotiations with real pressures and effective incentives rather than by threats of military attack.

Support security and freedom in the Middle East. The U.S. should adopt a policy of fair and even treatment that supports the interests of two states for Israel and Palestine, living in security and freedom. Policies should oppose the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and support an end to settlements. All acts of terrorism must be unequivocally condemned. A real solution must include a Palestinian leadership that rejects terrorism and supports the secure existence of Israel, and an Israeli leadership that grants security and sovereignty to Palestinians.

Strengthen the United Nations and international law to fight terrorism. The United Nations should be adequately funded so that it can be both strengthened and reformed. Our nation should support policies that choose multinational cooperation under the rule of international law and institutions over unilateral preemptive wars to resolve international conflicts. Extensive international and diplomatic pressure is needed to dismantle networks of terror by focusing the world's intelligence capabilities, security systems, legal intervention, multinational policing, and swift international law enforcement against terrorism.

CONSISTENT ETHIC OF LIFE. All life is a sacred gift from God, and public policies should reflect a consistent ethic of life.

“Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you.” —Isaiah 42:5-6

“The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.” —Job 33:4

Dramatically reduce abortion. Our society should support common ground policies that dramatically reduce the abortion rate by preventing unwanted pregnancies, providing meaningful alternatives and necessary supports for women and children, and reforming adoption laws.

End capital punishment. Our nation's use of the death penalty should end. We should not take life to punish wrongful death. There is no evidence that it deters murder. It is easy to make fatal mistakes, as DNA testing has shown. The death penalty is biased against the poor, who cannot afford adequate legal representation, and is racially disproportionate.

Stop genocide. In Darfur and other countries around the world, persecution and mass killing continues. International peacekeeping forces under the United Nations that can protect and save lives should be supported and strengthened.

RACIAL JUSTICE. Full humanity and dignity are denied when people are discriminated against for ethnic or racial reasons, whether intentionally or due to systemic structures.

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” —Galatians 3:28

Reverse racial disparities. The role of race in the persistence of poverty, and the structural racism in the criminal justice system, must be urgently addressed. Our society should support efforts to reverse racial disparities in sentencing and incarceration rates, as well as commitments to end policies that result in practices of police brutality. Policies and programs to eliminate the stark inequality and increasing segregation within our public education system that consigns many children to an inadequate education are crucial.

End environmental racism. It is unjust that hazardous waste dumping sites are far more prevalent in poor and minority communities. Efforts by both the public and private sectors to improve the way hazardous materials are used and disposed of, both at home and abroad, should be supported.

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HUMAN RIGHTS, DIGNITY, AND GENDER JUSTICE. Each human being is created in God's image. Policies should protect human rights and promote human dignity.

"So God created humankind in God's image ... male and female God created them." —Genesis 1:27

"...what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor." —Psalm 8:4-5

Establish humane and holistic immigration policies. Immigration policies should be both compassionate and just. It is important to make our borders secure, but we should do so in humane and realistic ways. Immigration policies should establish a dignified guest worker program that can lead to earned citizenship. Individuals and families already living in the U.S. and working hard should have the option to apply for permanent legal status and eventual citizenship.

End torture worldwide. Torture violates the basic dignity of the human person and degrades everyone involved—policy-makers, perpetrators, and victims. It contradicts our nation's most cherished values. Our nation should support the human rights standards of international law and oppose all policies that permit torture and inhumane treatment.

Stop human trafficking, promote religious freedom, fight HIV/AIDS, and defend the rights of women. Stronger global enforcement and increased economic and political pressure can bring an end to human trafficking. Our society should promote religious freedom around the world. HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment programs should be expanded both in the U.S. and around the world in order to hasten an end to this deadly pandemic. Policies at home and abroad that prioritize women's health and dignity must be championed.

STRENGTHEN FAMILIES AND RENEW CULTURE. Strong families are the essential foundation of a good society. A culture that promotes healthy families is necessary to raise our children with strong values.

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God" —Romans 12:2

Strengthen marriage and families. Our society should commit to policies that promote education and action on reducing teen pregnancy, strengthening marriage and family formation, in-home parenting coaching and support, encouraging responsible fatherhood, preventing the abuse and neglect of children, and reducing and preventing domestic violence. Strengthening families must become a personal and national priority without scapegoating gays and lesbians for the breakdown of the family.

Restore integrity to our civic and business practices. Policies and effective partnerships with all sectors in society can transform our culture of violence, materialism, and consumption. Our society must combat the negative influences of the entertainment and advertising industries, business practices that take advantage of disempowered low-income people, and the corruption of our political culture. The future of our democracy requires real electoral and lobbying reform that eliminates earmarks, controls lobbying, strengthens corruption enforcement, and increases public financing of elections.

Prevent violence. An increasingly violent society is related to our growing prison population, the illegal drug industry, and family abuse. While our communities must have safe streets, it is important that we provide effective mental health, drug, and other treatments, both to prevent people from criminal activity and to get troubled offenders back on the right track.

GOOD STEWARDSHIP OF GOD'S CREATION. The earth and the fragile atmosphere that surrounds it are God's good creation for the sustenance and enjoyment of all things. Our policies must protect creation from interests and activities that damage it.

"God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good." —Genesis 1:31

"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it" —Psalm 24:1

Reverse global climate change. For more than a decade, the scientific evidence has been conclusive: Global temperatures are rising at a steady and alarming pace, due primarily to human activities. Government, businesses, churches, and individuals all have important roles to play in addressing the crisis of global warming. Market-based and cost-effective public policies that work to monitor and control emissions that are harmful to the environment, and policies to raise vehicle fuel economy minimums, are critical.

Prioritize clean air and water. In protecting the air we breathe and the water we consume, we promote the common good. Our nation should enforce and strengthen the protection of these natural commons.

Develop clean and renewable energy. The earth's resources are finite, and we now have the technology to slow our consumption through the use of efficient and renewable energy sources. Our society needs policies and practices that bring the public and private sectors together to develop clean, efficient, and renewable energy sources and consumption methods.

10 Things You Can Do... Before the Election

1. Register to Vote

It's hard to believe, but roughly one out of four people of voting age weren't registered to vote in 2000. For information on how to register, visit a public building, such as a library, or contact the Federal Election Commission (www.fec.gov). If you are already registered, get five other people to register. Working women who are heads of households are the least likely to be registered to vote. Ask.

2. Inform Yourself on the Issues

Study information from your denomination and organizations such as *Sojourners/Call to Renewal* (www.sojo.net), and *Bread for the World* (www.bread.org). Discern your views on issues such as poverty and economic justice, national security, "seamless garment" issues, health care, education, tax policy, the environment, and the role of church and state. Watch the debates with others from your church and community and host a dialogue afterward. What did you agree or disagree with and why? Host discussion groups using the materials in this packet.

3. Write Letters to Candidates

All candidates want to earn your vote. Remember, as a citizen you will be their boss, and as a taxpayer you will pay their salaries. Let them know that as a Christian, you care deeply about issues such as creating a peaceful world, working for economic and social justice, and protecting God's creation. You can find their contact information on campaign materials or on the Internet.

4. Write a Letter to the Editor or Call Talk Radio Shows

Use the power of mass media. Besides the front page, "Letters to the Editor" is the most commonly read section of the paper. The most effective letters are short (250 words), to the point, civil, well-reasoned, and—most importantly—from the heart. Local talk radio reaches thousands of people in your surrounding area. This is a great opportunity to reframe the debate about the Christian values that should inform public policies.

5. Ask Questions at Candidate Forums and Town Hall Meetings

The simple act of asking a question at a town hall meeting is a great way to make candidates go "on the record" with issues you care about. Before you go, research the candidates' records and practice what you'll say. Check your local paper for scheduled events.

6. Organize Your Church

While churches cannot and should not endorse candidates or political parties, churches can and should influence what issues are important to voters and candidates. Ask your pastor or curriculum planner to plan a Bible study or a preaching series on issues relevant to the election. Use the material in this packet to get started. Talk to your church leaders about engaging in constructive dialogue as a congregation about the Christian values that should inform electoral decisions. Also, your congregation has strength in numbers—everything can be done more powerfully with a community than with a single person.

7. Talk to Your Friends and Neighbors

During the election cycle, you will see TV ads, receive phone calls, and greet canvassers knocking on your door who are all asking for your vote. While these efforts can be effective, the people you are most likely to have a healthy dialogue with are people who know and trust you. Speak up about your concerns and listen to theirs.

8. Think and Pray

Our Christian values should inform our political decisions, and because of this, deciding how to vote is never easy. Educate yourself about positions and priorities candidates have taken, and think and pray about whom you entrust with the responsibility to lead your community, state, and nation. The United States is a powerful world leader. Our electoral decisions also affect people across the globe.

9. Volunteer to Help Get Out the Vote

In most communities, there are non-partisan efforts both to register people to vote and to ensure they vote. Voting is empowerment, and efforts are needed particularly in low-income and other disenfranchised communities. To find out what's going on in your state, visit Project Vote Smart (www.vote-smart.org), which helps non-partisan nonprofit and community groups promote voting and other forms of civic participation. On Election Day, arrange to take several of your neighbors to the polls, especially if they have no other way to get there.

10. Vote!!!

The simple act of voting is one of the most empowering actions you can do to create a just and peaceful world. Sadly, about half of voting-age adults do not vote. In the 2000 presidential election, Florida and New Mexico were decided by a mere few hundred votes. If you think your vote doesn't matter, think again.

—Matt Ching and Duane Shank

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