

Faith

Guiding our votes

sojo.net

A Presidential Forum on
Faith, Values, and Poverty

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. 5 Steps for a Successful Event**
- 2. Publicizing Your Event in the Media**
- 3. Planning Your Event**
- 4. Staying Involved – Vote Out Poverty**

May 2007

Dear Organizer,

Never before have a party's leading presidential contenders taken the stage for a conversation focusing on faith, values, and poverty. But on June 4, at 7 p.m. EDT, Hillary Clinton, John Edwards, and Barack Obama will do exactly that—live on CNN, for *Faith Guiding Our Votes: A Presidential Forum on Faith, Values, and Poverty*, hosted by Sojourners/Call to Renewal.

In the 2004 presidential campaign, solutions to the persistent poverty in our country and around the world were almost never discussed. But this year, we have a chance to change that—starting with this event, and continuing throughout the election season, including a similar forum with Republican candidates in the fall.

As our nation moves toward electing its next president, we must demand the candidates go on the record with real plans for addressing poverty in the U.S. and around the world.

To that end, we're seizing this opportunity to launch our Vote Out Poverty campaign. After the forum concludes, we hope you and everyone at your watch party will visit us online at www.sojo.net and join in pledging to cast your ballot in 2008 based on the candidates' commitment to overcoming poverty.

We are thrilled that you are part of this campaign, and look forward to working together in the coming weeks and months.

Blessings,

The Organizing and Communications teams at Sojourners/Call to Renewal

5 STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL EVENT

With some good planning, organizing a successful watch party will be a rewarding and movement-building experience.

1. **Find a location and time.** First things first: You'll need a place that can accommodate a group of people to watch the forum. We recommend a church hall or other public community center, but you can also host in your home. **Wherever you choose, you'll need a TV to watch CNN or a computer with a fast internet connection to watch online.**

As far as time, the forum will air live from 7 to 8 p.m. Eastern time. If you're in the Eastern or Central time zone, you'll probably want to watch the event live. If you're in the Mountain or Pacific time zone, you'll either want to record the event on VCR or DVR to play back later, or watch online at www.sojo.net/watch starting anytime after 7 p.m. Pacific / 8 p.m. Mountain. Immediately after the forum, at 8:15 p.m. Eastern time, we'll have a special conference call for watch parties, where you can hear reaction from religious leaders and help launch Sojourners' new Vote Out Poverty campaign.

Also make sure to get approval from the powers that be at your desired location, and make sure the space can accommodate the necessary...

2. **Details, details!** The key here is to keep a checklist, but keep it simple. Essentials: A TV (or computer if you're watching online), chairs, a couple of tables, sign-in sheets, pens, clipboards, refreshments, coffee (yes, this IS essential for some), cups, plates, napkins, name tags, and discussion questions (see page 6). You'll also want a speakerphone if you're planning to join us for the special conference call after the event. Now all you need to do is ...
3. **Invite the masses.** Think about the usual suspects in your network, fellow churchgoers, peace and justice groups, etc. Also think about some not-so-usual suspects, like other neighborhood congregations, faith communities with diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, etc.—this is a great opportunity for community building. If it's at a church, make sure there's an announcement in the church bulletin. Last but not least, make sure you post your event at www.sojo.net (click on "host a watch party") so others in your area can find it! Now, to avoid committing the classic blunder of "if a group of prophetic voices speaks, but no one is around to hear it," make sure you...
4. **Invite the media.** Have you ever watched a major news event that is followed by a commercial that goes something like, "Local reactions to blah-bee-blah: News at 11." That's what we're looking for here. We want local media to report on what prophetic voices are saying in your community about the presidential campaign. For more information about how to generate media, see below. All that's left now is to...
5. **Keep the masses engaged.** We hope this won't be the last time you meet with this group of folks. Use a sign-in form to gather the names and contact information of attendees. This way, when your next project rolls along, you'll have a good group to go back to. And don't forget your thank-you notes!

PUBLICIZING YOUR EVENT IN THE MEDIA

Sojourners/Call to Renewal press contact:
Colin Mathewson, Communications Assistant
(202) 745-4625, cmathewson@sojo.net

Below we have put together a few approaches to working with the media. As you organize your event, we urge you to find creative ways to engage the media and share your values. Our goal for this event is to generate media coverage reflective of the values and priorities held by people of faith. Our desire as a faith community is to make our voice heard in the 2008 election season. We want to inform the press about the event and notify them that members of the faith community will be available immediately after the event for reaction.

Overview

Faith Guiding Our Votes comes at an opportune moment in the 2008 presidential campaign cycle—the day between two presidential debates in New Hampshire, one with the Democrats and the second with the Republicans. There will be extensive coverage and analysis surrounding the presidential campaign, but much of it will be horse-race commentary and replays of “gotcha” moments. What we want is to have a prophetic response portraying our religious priorities and moral values. We want your voices and values to be heard and shared directly following the event. As you plan your event it is important to have support from your church or faith-based community. Drafting a media plan and creating a media list are essential tools to help you communicate with media professionals in your city. The following steps will help you organize a plan, build a list, and use it effectively.

Conduct Media Research

You will want to find out which local media outlets cover national, political, and religious events. You can conduct this research on three fronts: print (daily and weekly newspapers, local magazines, and newsletters), radio (your local public radio station and any other stations with talk radio programs), and television (local news stations, including ABC, CBS, NBC, and PBS affiliates). A quick and easy way to find lists of media in your city is to go to Congress.org and type in your zip code under “Browse Media Guide.”

Assemble a List

The next step is to identify specific reporters, producers, and columnists who have covered the presidential campaign in your local news outlets. There are several ways to do this. First, go to their Web site and see which reporters or columnists have written stories, columns, or op-eds on the issue. Some news Web sites will even list reporters by department. You can also call the newspaper’s main switchboard and ask the operator for information about who is covering the 2008 race. He or she will be able to transfer you to the appropriate department. Often, reporters from different departments will cover the same issue from different angles. So you will need names of reporters at the economics, politics, and domestic issues desks.

Once you have names and contact information, use a spreadsheet tool like Microsoft Excel to compile a list. Be sure to include the reporter’s name, media outlet, e-mail address, and telephone number.

Using the List

Once you have a list compiled, you can use the mail merge feature to send press releases, media advisories, or other information via e-mail. Prepare your document to send, send it, and then follow up with phone calls and/or personal e-mails to a few key reporters.

Writing a Press Advisory

Press advisories should be succinct—about half a page—and marked clearly with the words “Press Advisory.”

The first paragraph should include the who, what, where, why, and when of the event. For example: “Members of the faith community will gather at St. Michael’s Church at 7 p.m. to watch the leading Democratic presidential contenders address faith, values, and poverty live on CNN. They will be available to share their reactions to the forum as well as express their own visions for where our country should be heading according to their values.”

The second paragraph of a press advisory should include a deeper description of the purpose of the event and how it was organized. Do not assume the reader will understand the need for an event.

You might want to include a quote from a spokesperson of the organization in charge regarding the purpose of the event. Make it clear and to the point.

At the end of the advisory, type “#” or “-30-.” Then include two contact names with phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Print it on the letterhead of the hosting organization(s).

Follow-Up Calls

A few days after you send the advisory, call the reporter to follow up. Ask for the reporter by name, and then tell them who you are and why you’re calling. Example: “Hi, I’m Jane Lopez, calling from Fellowship Church to make sure you received the press advisory we sent about the presidential candidates forum.” After the reporter answers, ask if he or she has a few minutes to discuss it. Don’t assume a reporter has time to talk—they may be on deadline and will appreciate you asking whether they can talk at the moment. Offer to call back.

For more information on working with the media, including samples and how to write a longer press release for the day of your event to encourage further coverage, check out www.actionforchange.org/launch_guide/reaching_out.html.

PLANNING YOUR EVENT

When June 4 rolls around, you'll want to be prepared for a smooth program. Organizing a successful event is not rocket science, but will require some detail work.

Managing Logistics

Securing a location and time should be your first priority. If you are a member of a church, talk to your pastor or facilities manager about securing a location. A community center or other public place also offers a safe space for visitors. Make sure you visit the space in advance to plan how the room should be set up for the event. You'll need a TV (or computer if you're watching online), chairs, a couple of tables, sign-in sheets, pens, clipboards, refreshments, coffee, cups, plates, napkins, and name tags.

Building a Program

Make sure you build time in your program for people to arrive and settle well before the forum starts and for discussion and fellowship afterward. Also make sure you coordinate with the facilities manager to have enough time for setup and cleanup. Here's what a sample program could look like for a watch party in the Eastern time zone:

- 6:30 p.m. - Gathering and fellowship (15 minutes)
- 6:45 p.m. - Opening discussion and introductions (15-30 minutes)
- 7:00 p.m. - *Faith Guiding Our Values* (1 hour)
- 8:00 p.m. - Post-event discussion (15 minutes)
- 8:15 p.m. - Conference call live from the event (15 minutes)
- 8:30 p.m. - Conclusion and cleanup

The Discussion

Someone (not necessarily you, but it can be) should moderate the discussion. If possible, forming a circle with chairs may be helpful. If the group is relatively small, have everyone introduce themselves. Bear in mind that the people in the room will likely hold diverse opinions, so it's important not to make assumptions about individuals' political views if you want to have an open, honest discussion. The moderator should say this from the outset and encourage those that haven't spoken much to chime in. If members of the media are present, make sure you let folks know that they are making statements "on the record."

Sample discussion questions for before and after *Faith Guiding Our Values*:

- All three candidates have said that their Christian faith informs their politics. How should a person's faith impact their decisions as president? (before or after)
- What can we do as people of faith to make poverty a central issue in the 2008 campaign? (before or after)
- If you were Jim Wallis or Soledad O'Brien tonight, which questions would you ask the candidates? (before)
- What subjects are and aren't being addressed on the campaign trail that matter to people of faith? (before)

- What proposals have you heard from these candidates in the past about poverty? What would you like to hear from them tonight? (before)
- What did you hear tonight that most impressed you? What most troubled you? (after)
- What was one specific proposal you heard tonight that you liked? (after)
- What was one specific proposal you heard that you disliked? (after)

STAYING INVOLVED – VOTE OUT POVERTY

Just as important as getting people to attend is making sure you are able to contact and engage participants for events like this in the future. At the end of the discussion, remind everyone to sign in on the provided sheet and give participants the opportunity to make quick recruiting pitches for organizations that they are affiliated with that might interest other participants. If the event is sponsored by a group such as a church “peace and justice” committee, you may want to bring event calendars with you as handouts.

The June 4 presidential forum on faith, values, and poverty is the beginning of Sojourners’ campaign to **Vote Out Poverty in 2008**. Over the next few months we’ll be asking presidential candidates from both political parties to make a bold commitment to overcoming poverty. We need people around the country to join us, so we’re asking everyone who attends a watch party to pledge to cast their ballot in 2008 based on the candidates’ commitments *and* to recruit 10 friends to do the same. Visit www.sojo.net to sign the pledge.

Moving forward with the Vote Out Poverty campaign, Sojourners will be ramping up our efforts to ensure that the candidates address these critical issues—through “bird dogging” them at campaign appearances, raising up a prophetic voice in the media, and much more. If you and your guests are interested in joining us in this campaign, please contact Amy Ard, National Field Organizer (aard@sojo.net or 202-328-8842, ext. 612) for ways to get involved.

We hope you’ll join us. Together, we can vote out poverty.