



ELECTION ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

Episcopal Public Policy Network

THE
Episcopal
CHURCH





FAITHFUL ENGAGEMENT

On November 8, 2016, our nation will head to the polls to determine a number of consequential ballot initiatives and elections, including that of the 45th president of the United States. Official Episcopal policy recognizes voting and political participation as acts of Christian stewardship. As Christians, we are called as individuals and as part of congregations and dioceses to engage in conversation on public policy issues, to develop voter registration and issue education campaigns, and to protect voting rights. A faithful commitment to political participation aligns with our Baptismal Covenant's promise to "strive for justice and peace and respect the dignity of every human being." This toolkit from the Episcopal Public Policy Network (EPPN) will provide guidance as you and your congregation engage in the electoral process faithfully, responsibly, and legally.

As followers of Jesus, we can live out our call to care for our neighbors as ourselves by engaging in the public square. Decisions made by elected officials have great impact on issues such as creation care, civil rights, and hunger. If we are to care for the whole body of Christ, we must have a say in the political process that impacts each part of it.

Beyond voting, our engagement in the electoral process should include protecting and upholding voting rights, equipping others to take part in the electoral process, and calling for civility and respect in the public square.

This toolkit is designed as an introduction to election engagement for Episcopal congregations eager to participate in the electoral process. We encourage you to have conversations in your congregation to decide which options for engagement make the most sense for your community and to discern where your strengths could make the most impact.

GETTING STARTED

Nonpartisan Congregational Involvement in Elections

Churches, as nonprofit organizations, must follow certain guidelines when participating in elections. Churches may not campaign, openly or otherwise, for or against candidates for public office. However, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) permits churches to involve their members in the political process by helping them to understand the issues, registering and encouraging them to vote, and inviting candidates to address them. For more resources on what your church legally can and cannot do during election season, please visit http://www.nonprofitvote.org/all-resources/?tax_gs_topics%5B%5D=staying-nonpartisan&wpas=l. The IRS also offers a guide for election engagement activities, titled "Tax Guide for Churches and Religious Organizations," available here: <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/pl828.pdf>.

GETTING STARTED

Engagement Timeline

In order to cast a vote, you must be properly registered in your precinct. Each state has different voter eligibility guidelines, registration deadlines, and ways to register. For this reason, it is important to research specific information about your state's requirements before getting involved in voter registration efforts. In some states you may be able to register online, send in a National Mail Voter Registration Form, register in person, or fill out an absentee ballot. The Episcopal Church's Office of Government Relations provides specific information about each state's requirements: <http://advocacy.episcopalchurch.org/episcopal/EpiscopaliansVote>. Find more information on voter registration guidelines here: <https://www.usa.gov/register-to-vote>.

Once you are registered to vote, research the issues at stake in the election and the platforms of each candidate. In this toolkit, we share several educational resources for you and your community, related to issues of significance.

Once you are fully informed on the issues, get prepared to head to the polls. You will need to research the location of your polling place and any documents needed to vote. Most states require photo identification, but because each state is different, it is very important to know the requirements ahead of time.

After you vote, let your community know you cast a ballot! Share on social media, call friends to remind them to vote, drive people in your community to the polls, or provide snacks or water to people waiting in line at polling places.

You don't have to plan events around everything, but you might commit to at least one or two means of engagement and then build a schedule for how you will execute these events.

If you are planning an event, be sure to let the community know by placing posters on community boards, informing local media, and sharing on social media. Invite reporters (print, electronic, bloggers) to the event. This offers an opportunity for your church to provide leadership in the community, and it is a great way to invite community members to get to know your church.

At each step along the way, your congregation has a nonpartisan role to play. Following are specific methods for effectively engaging Episcopalians in your community in the electoral process.

ELECTION ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Once you understand the guidelines for engaging in the electoral process in a nonpartisan way, start thinking about opportunities for engagement. It is helpful to think through the voting process timeline before you get started.

There are a number of ways for your congregation to get involved in the election this year, from holding a voter registration drive to hosting a candidate forum. These suggested activities are meant to inspire you and to provide simple rules for how your congregation can be a part of the electoral process.

ELECTION ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE

	IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES	ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE
JANUARY-JUNE	Political parties hold primary elections throughout the country from January-July.	
JULY	Major political parties hold national conventions. After parties hold their nominating conventions in a presidential year, the general election begins.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold Bible study and discussions in your community about faith in the electoral process.• Register new voters and update voter registration information for those who have moved.• Hold forums with local and state candidates.• Take the Episcopal Pledge to Vote.
AUGUST-SEPTEMBER	Tuesday, September 27 is National Voter Registration Day.	
OCTOBER	Voter registration closes in many states. In many states, voter registration closes up to 30 days before Election Day. Make sure you know when your state's voter registration closes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make sure new voters have registered and those that need to update their information have done so before the deadline.• Help voters request mail-in or absentee ballots if they are unable to vote at the polls on Election Day.• Encourage voters to learn about early voting centers in their area.
NOVEMBER	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Absentee and mail-in ballots are due. Most absentee ballots must be postmarked before Election Day. We recommend sending your voted ballot as early as possible to make sure it is received.• Tuesday, November 8 is Election Day.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remind voters to mail their absentee ballots by the deadline, which you can find on your state elections website.• Get out the vote. Encourage your community to vote on Election Day.

OPTIONS FOR ACTION

Registering voters: Host a nonpartisan voter registration drive at your church. Consider setting up a table during coffee hour for members of the congregation to get information on the election and to register to vote. In preparation, you will need voter registration forms or, if your state allows it, a computer for people to register online. Rock The Vote has a step-by-step guide to assist you in your voter registration drive: <http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/field/voter-registration-how-to.pdf>. Remember, if you do this, you may not encourage people to vote for a particular party or political candidate.

Engaging young adults: Engage with young adults in your congregation that may be eligible to vote for the first time. Consider this as an opportunity to have dialogue about why people of faith are called to participate in the electoral process. You could allocate time during Sunday School to talk about voting, help young adults to register, and discuss policy issues of importance in the election. As you create your election engagement plan, ask young adults in your congregation to help lead these initiatives.

Hosting a candidate forum: A candidate forum, where candidates can directly interact with the community, can be a great tool for engagement. Invite candidates, congregants, and community members into your church in order to get a direct understanding of candidate platforms. Consider partnering with other houses of worship or community organizations to host the forum. Here are some general guidelines for hosting a nonpartisan candidate forum:

- You must invite all candidates in the race to participate, and most of those invited must agree to participate.
- If there are two candidates in the race, and one declines to debate, you may not hold the event.
- You may not ask slanted questions that benefit one candidate or allow one candidate to always have the final word.
- For more information on how to host a candidate forum, go here: http://www.nonprofitvote.org/all-resources/?tax_gs_topics%5B%5D=engaging-candidates&wpas=l.

Taking the Episcopal Pledge to Vote: Take the Episcopal Pledge to Vote! The EPPN is calling on Episcopalians to go to the ballot box this November. It is critical that our voices are heard, so make a pledge that you will vote in the general election. Take the pledge here: <http://advocacy.episcopalchurch.org/episcopal/EpiscopaliansVote>.

Helping to Get Out The Vote (GOTV): When the election comes around, it is important to encourage members of your congregation to get to the polls. In your GOTV efforts, you may not promote a particular party or candidate. Here are a few suggestions for GOTV efforts you could do in your church:

- If your church has a changeable message sign, use it to remind people to vote.
- Around Halloween, if your youth group is trick-or-treating for canned goods, have them take along thank-you cards (or door hangers) reminding folks that Election Day is November 8.
- Include information in your weekly bulletin insert or newsletter about the election, such as links for people to find their polling place, hours the polls will be open, and information about early voting.
- Urge members of your congregation to take the Episcopal Pledge to Vote.

- Have a breakfast and then gather the attendees to go vote afterward. (If you already have a group with a regularly scheduled breakfast, then it is easy to incorporate this).
 - Host a dinner/rally for people who just voted.
 - After a church service, canvass surrounding neighborhoods or cars in local parking lots reminding people to register to vote/request absentee ballots/vote.
 - On Election Day, provide refreshments for people standing in line to vote. Again, this activity must be nonpartisan.
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ISSUE ENGAGEMENT

It's important to educate yourself on the variety of issues at hand in this election. One issue of singular importance to Episcopalians and all people of faith is poverty at home and around the world. Followers of Jesus are called to care for "the least of these." How will candidates plan to address poverty once elected to office? Encourage candidates and congregants to think about these questions. The Episcopal Church, through an ecumenical organization called the Circle of Protection, works to highlight the importance of poverty solutions in the presidential candidate platforms. You can do the same with candidates in your community.

OPTION FOR ACTION

Ask all candidates running for office in your community to film a short video or to prepare a written response that answers the question, "What would you do as [position] to offer help and opportunity to hungry and poor people in the United States and around the world?"

If candidates respond to your video request, you can post the videos online for all people in your community to view. If you post the videos, be sure to include the question you asked and explain that you requested responses from all candidates. If you do not receive a response from all candidates, then you should simply write that all candidates were invited to respond and some responses are pending. You also can hold a discussion on the videos from presidential candidates and local candidates by using the Circle of Protection Discussion Guide: <http://circleofprotection.us/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/candidate-video-study-guide.pdf>.

Circle of Protection homepage: <http://circleofprotection.us/>

ELECTION PROTECTION

Through legal exclusion and intimidation, the right to vote has been denied historically to certain groups of people in the United States, and it continues to be threatened today in many states. Since 2010, several states

have implemented new voting restrictions that range from shortened early voting periods to strict photo ID requirements. These types of laws most directly affect minorities, the poor, students, and the elderly, as these groups may not own government identification or may not be able to take time off from work or school to vote on Election Day. Episcopal policy passed by Executive Council in 2013 calls on Episcopalians to advocate for the protection of equal voting rights for all Americans. Ensuring that all people have access to the ballot in this election is part of our faithful call to engage in the political process.

Your state may have implemented new rules about voting registration, early voting options, and documentation required at the polls. As noted earlier, it is a good idea to look up whether your state has new voter laws and to inform those in your congregation about any changes. Find a list of states with new voting restrictions since 2010 here: <http://www.brennancenter.org/new-voting-restrictions-2010-election>.

Episcopal resolution on protecting the ballot: <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2013/10/17/a-summary-of-executive-council-resolutions-6/>

OPTIONS FOR ACTION

Contact your members of Congress and urge them to support the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015.

- EPPN action alert: <http://advocacy.episcopalchurch.org/episcopal/EpiscopaliansVote>
- Voting Rights Advancement Act information: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/885/all-info>
- Participate in a conversation online on protecting voting rights using the hashtag #RestoreTheVRA

Report if you have difficulty voting, such as experiencing extremely long waits to cast a ballot, receiving deceptive robocalls saying there is no need to vote, or experiencing intimidation at a polling place: <http://www.866ourvote.org/>.

Make a poster or send a mail notice about new voting restrictions that may affect the people in your congregation.

CIVIL DISCOURSE

How can Episcopalians infuse and demonstrate civility in this election? And how can we foster civil and constructive dialogue within our own communities? For Episcopalians, civility is rooted in our Baptismal Covenant to “respect the dignity of every human being.” Our faith calls us to see Christ in all people, and our words, actions, and messages in the public square must honor that conviction. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry says that we, as members of the Jesus Movement, are called “to go into the world to share the good news of God and Jesus Christ, to go into the world and help to be agents and instruments of God’s reconciliation.” We are called to be witnesses in the public square, to speak with courage and strength for the healing of the whole body of Christ. Our actions and words must be rooted in the good news of God. In this election season, people of faith can lead by calling for and participating in civil dialogue and respectful listening.

OPTIONS FOR ACTION

In October 2014, The Episcopal Church held a forum titled “Civil Discourse in America: Finding Common Ground for the Greater Good.” Consider playing the webcast for your congregation in an educational forum or inviting members of the community to watch and discuss the webcast. The Episcopal Church developed a Facilitator’s Guide for this forum, and it is ideal for use in group discussion.

- “Civil Discourse in America” forum webcast: <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/civil-discourse-event>
- Facilitator’s Guide: http://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/civil_discourse_facilitators_guide_1.pdf

Write an op-ed explaining why civil discourse in the public square is important to you as a person of faith. Consider asking other religious and community leaders to sign with you.

Connect with other faith groups in your community to discuss and implement a plan to speak out for civil and respectful dialogue in the public square.

Write a Covenant for Civil Discourse and invite candidates running for office in your community to sign it.

- An example covenant from the Maine Council of Churches: <http://mainecouncilofchurches.org/mcc-programs-2/covenant-for-civil-discourse/>

Read, share, and discuss the “Word to the Church” on civil discourse and our political climate issued by the House of Bishops in March 2016, found here: <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2016/03/16/episcopal-bishops-issue-a-word-to-the-church/>.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Episcopal Public Policy Network landing page on election engagement: <http://advocacy.episcopalchurch.org/episcopal/EpiscopaliansVote>
- Rock the Vote: <http://www.rockthevote.com/>
- Nonprofit Vote: <http://www.nonprofitvote.org/>
- Information on voting rights: <http://www.brennancenter.org/issues/voting-rights-elections>
- Policy for Action: <http://cqrcengage.com/episcopal/file/PocEWf9Lpbg/OGR%20Policy%20for%20Action%202016.pdf>
- Circle of Protection: <http://circleofprotection.us/>
- Episcopal policy on election engagement: http://episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/executive_council/EXCresolution.pl?exc_id=EXC022004.35

CONCLUSION

“O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us, in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

(Book of Common Prayer, p. 824)

This prayer from the Book of Common Prayer, titled, “In Times of Conflict,” can be a light to us during this election season. Whatever our political affiliations, we must recognize that God has bound all of us together into this common life; our votes, our support, our visions for the future all have consequences not only for us, but also for the world.

As Jesus reminds us in Matthew 15:18, “The things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart.” These things have the ability to harm others or help them. As we engage in the electoral process, we ought to commit ourselves to a path that allows the full flourishing of humanity, letting our mouths reflect hearts that are changed by the love of Christ.

Faithful people will, of course, honestly disagree with each other regarding the proper scope and methods for the political process. Loving God and our neighbors does not mean giving our unthinking assent to platforms simply to avoid conflict. Loving God and our neighbors does, however, entail working diligently and unceasingly to show God’s love to a broken world.

Please keep us updated about your election activities – we want to know how you are engaging in the election. Share photos or stories from your events on social media using the hashtag #EpiscopaliansVote, or email eppn@episcopalchurch.org with your experiences.

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This toolkit was created by The Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations.

Please email eppn@episcopalchurch.org with any questions or comments.

2016

