

Christian Principles in an Election Year

Our Christian faith compels us to address the world through the lens of our relationship to God and to one another. Public discourse is enhanced as we engage civic leaders on the values and ethics affirmed by our faith. At the same time, religious liberty and the integrity of our democracy will be protected as candidates refrain from using faith-based organizations and institutions for partisan gain. We offer these 10 principles to those seeking to accept the responsibility that comes with holding public office.

 **1. War is contrary to the will of God.** While the use of violent force may, at times, be a necessity of last resort, Christ pronounces his blessing on the peacemakers. We look for political leaders who will make peace with justice a top priority and who will actively seek nonviolent solutions to conflict.

2. God calls us to live in communities shaped by peace and cooperation. We reject policies that abandon large segments of our inner city and rural populations to hopelessness. We look for political leaders who will re-build our communities and bring an end to the cycles of violence and killing. 

 **3. God created us for each other, and thus our security depends on the well being of our global neighbors.** We look for political leaders for whom a foreign policy based on cooperation and global justice is an urgent concern.

4. God calls us to be advocates for those who are most vulnerable in our society. We look for political leaders who yearn for economic justice and who will seek to reduce the growing disparity between rich and poor. 

 **5. Each human being is created in the image of God and is of infinite worth.** We look for political leaders who actively promote racial justice and equal opportunity for everyone.

6. The earth belongs to God and is intrinsically good. We look for political leaders who recognize the earth's goodness, champion environmental justice, and uphold our responsibility to be stewards of God's creation.

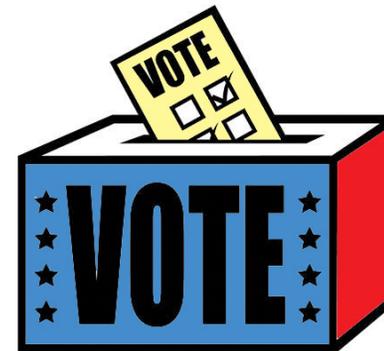
 **7. Christians have a biblical mandate to welcome strangers.** We look for political leaders who will pursue fair immigration policies and speak out against xenophobia.

8. Those who follow Christ are called to heal the sick. We look for political leaders who will support adequate, affordable and accessible health care for all. 

 **9. Because of the transforming power of God's grace, all humans are called to be in right relationship with each other.** We look for political leaders who seek a restorative, not retributive, approach to the criminal justice system and the individuals within it.

10. Providing enriched learning environments for all of God's children is a moral imperative. We look for political leaders who advocate for equal educational opportunity and abundant funding for children's services. 

Finally, our religious tradition admonishes us not to bear false witness against our neighbor and to love our enemies. We ask that the campaigns of political candidates and the coverage of the media in this election season be conducted according to principles of fairness, honesty and integrity.



These principles were developed by the National Council of Churches. For more information, visit www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us.

Group Study Guide to "Christian Principles in an Election Year"

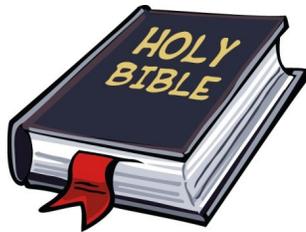
1. Open the session by inviting all participants to pray together the prayer that Jesus taught, contemplating carefully the words they are praying. Follow the prayer with 60 seconds of silence.

2. Read the "Christian Principles in an Election Year." While all the principles are important, ask the group to prioritize these issues, listing them from most critical to less critical.

3. Examine the following biblical texts. You may want to have two or three people read and discuss each text rather than having the entire group read all the texts.

- Micah 6:6-8; Amos 5:21-24
- Matthew 7:7-12
- Mark 12:28-34

- Isaiah 65:17-25
- Hebrews 13:1-9a, 16
- Psalm 104



For each passage consider these questions: What words particularly stand out as you think about the 10 "Christian Principles in an Election Year?" What is the guiding gospel principle in this text? What does the text have to say about your Christian responsibility toward your neighbor and/or the earth?

What additional biblically based principles would you include on this list that speak to the issues identified in the 10 principles?

4. Discuss ways to find out a candidate's record/platform on the issues identified in the 10 principles: 1. war/conflict; 2. urban decay; 3. foreign policy; 4. economic justice; 5. racial justice; 6. environmental justice; 7. immigration; 8. health care; 9. criminal justice; and 10. public education and children's services. Possibilities include looking on the candidates' Web sites or calling their campaign headquarters. You can write the candidates about specific concerns and expect a response from their offices. This contact can be made online. It is important that Christians educate themselves about the issues and the candidates' views.

If a candidate is an incumbent seeking reelection, review his/her voting record. If the candidate is seeking a first term, what has he/she said about each of these 10 issues? As you study each candidate's record or platform, ask these questions with regard to each of the 10 issues and reflect on them in light of your study of the above biblical passages.



1. Who benefits the most from each position taken by the candidate?
2. Who bears the cost of this position?
3. What are the immediate implications of this position?
4. What are the long-term implications of this position?
5. What must be given up or sacrificed to pursue this position?

5. To conclude the session have the participants close their eyes and sit quietly. Then ask, "O God, what is your yearning for us in this important election year?" Allow time for silent reflection, and then invite those who wish to respond aloud to do so. End this time with a prayer of thanksgiving for God's presence and guidance in our lives as we seek to be faithful Christian disciples.

"Nobody will ever deprive the American people of the right to vote except the American people themselves and the only way they could do this is by not voting."

-Franklin D. Roosevelt

This study guide was developed by constituent leadership and staff of the National Council of Churches USA. For more information, visit www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us.

