

ELECTION 2012

WHY VOTING MATTERS

*An issue guide
for Christians*



*“Speak out, judge
righteously, defend the
rights of the poor
and needy.”*

—Proverbs 31:9

Principles and Policies for Christian Voters

CHRISTIANS HAVE A MORAL and civic responsibility to participate in the political life of society by prayerfully measuring the proposed policies of all candidates against 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 public policy positions, the following principles and suggested approaches on a range of issues provide a critical framework to shape our perspective on public policy and political leadership. We encourage you to use this guide to educate yourself on these issues. This can inform you as you write letters to candidates or to your local newspaper, call radio talk shows, and ask candidates at forums or town hall meetings questions based on these principles. Think and pray about whom you would entrust with the responsibility to lead your community, state, and nation. We pray that this provides a moral compass to inform prudential political judgments.

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*“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

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.

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. We should support policies that create jobs and spur economic growth, as decent jobs at decent wages are the best path out of poverty. We support anti-poverty initiatives such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, child tax credit, individual development accounts, and pay equity for women.

CHILDREN SHOULD NOT BE POOR. Our nation needs specific and concrete commitments to brighter futures for our youngest and most vulnerable. We must ensure that all our children have adequate and healthy nutrition, access to health care, and a quality education.

BUDGETS AND DEFICIT. In the face of historic deficits, our nation faces unavoidable choices about how to balance needs and resources and allocate burdens and sacrifices. In making these choices, Congress and the administration should give moral priority to programs that protect the life and dignity of poor and vulnerable people. Tax revenues, military spending, and entitlements should all be reviewed and considered in the search for ways to share sacrifice and cut deficits. We should ensure intergenerational justice for all, rather than pitting generations against each other.

VETERANS. Our society should commit to share the costs of war, which have been borne disproportionately by veterans and their families. We should provide those who have served in wartime, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan, with the medical, psychological, and economic support they need when they get home—both with a nondiscretionary stream of funding and with community support for spiritual, employment, and financial needs.

EXTREME GLOBAL POVERTY MUST END. We should 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, including a commitment to increase poverty-focused development assistance by an additional 1 percent of the federal budget. Specific efforts to address maternal and infant mortality, defeating curable diseases such as malaria, and improved access to vaccines should be highlighted. HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment programs should be expanded in order to hasten an end to this deadly pandemic.

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“... 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

Peace and Restraint of Violence

OUR WORLD FACES a major challenge of how to resolve conflicts, reduce violence, and defeat terrorism without pre-emptive 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.

BRING PEACE TO AFGHANISTAN.

The U.S. occupation of Afghanistan must end. The withdrawal of U.S. troops should be continued and accelerated. This should be accompanied by greatly increased public and private assistance for locally based economic and social development programs, controlled and delivered by independent, civilian, non-governmental organizations—faith-based and secular—that have been doing relief and development work for years and have the trust of the Afghan people.

RESTRICT NEW FORMS OF WARFARE.

New forms of warfare are being developed and deployed without adequate attention to international law and basic morality. We oppose the targeted killing by pilotless drone aircraft that is being rapidly expanded by the U.S. and is at risk of being adopted by other nations. The use of cyberwarfare to attack other countries' computer systems is growing. Our policies must support the enforcement of existing domestic and international law as well as developing and ratifying any necessary changes to take these new forms of warfare into account. Protecting civilians from harm should be a priority in all policies.

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 both strengthened and reformed. Our nation should support policies that choose multinational cooperation, under the rule of international law and institutions, over unilateral pre-emptive 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 those who commit acts of terrorism.

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“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

“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

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Consistent Ethic of Life

ALL LIFE IS a sacred gift from God, and public policies should reflect a consistent ethic of life.

DRAMATICALLY REDUCE ABORTION. Our society should support common ground policies that dramatically reduce abortions 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 applied in racially disproportionate ways.

STOP GENOCIDE. In Syria, Congo, and other countries around the world, persecution and mass killing continue. Economic and financial sanctions should be the first resort, with selective intervention by multilateral peacekeeping forces under the United Nations to protect and save lives as a last resort.

“The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”

—Job 33:4

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.

END 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 and 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, which consign many children to an inadequate education, are crucial.

END ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM. It is unjust that hazardous waste dumping sites and sources of air and water pollution are far more prevalent in poor and minority communities. Efforts by both the public and private sectors to reduce and eliminate hazardous materials, toxic chemicals, and air and water pollution—both at home and abroad—should be supported. We can and should provide jobs in clean, renewable energy sources for low-income and minority people.

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*“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

Human Rights, Dignity, and Gender Justice

EACH HUMAN BEING is created in God’s image. Policies should protect human rights and promote human dignity.

ESTABLISH HUMANE AND COMPREHENSIVE 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 that are consistent with humanitarian values. Reform should include a process for all immigrant workers and their families already in the U.S. to earn citizenship upon satisfaction of specific criteria; a reduction of waiting times for separated families to be reunited; and an expansion of legal avenues for workers and families to enter our country and work in a safe and legal manner with their rights and due process fully protected. We should also examine solutions to address the root causes of migration, such as economic disparities between sending and receiving nations.

EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS.

Women are disproportionately living in poverty, and empowering them is one of the most effective anti-poverty measures. We should support the equal participation of women in economic and social policies and strategies for the eradication of poverty. Health, education, and social services should be developed so that girls and women of all ages have full access to them.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE. Our nation’s criminal justice system violates basic standards of human rights. Alternatives to imprisonment for non-violent offenses should be implemented, the system should emphasize restorative over retributive justice, and offenders should have basic civil rights restored after completion of their sentences. Those in prison should not have to endure overcrowded conditions and should have access to education and job training opportunities, as well as re-entry programs that assist in their adjustment to society.

END TORTURE AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING WORLDWIDE. Torture and trafficking violate the dignity of the human person and degrade everyone involved—victims, perpetrators, and policymakers. They contradict 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, and should promote vigorous investigation and prosecution of all forms of human trafficking.

PROMOTE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM. Far too many people in the world continue to suffer persecution because of their religious beliefs, and houses of worship are regularly defaced or destroyed. Our policies should ensure that religious freedom is protected as a basic human right.

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“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 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.

STRENGTHEN MARRIAGE AND FAMILIES.

Our society should commit to policies that promote education and action on reducing teen pregnancy, strengthening marriage and family formation, providing parenting 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.

EQUAL PROTECTION FOR ALL. Our society should support equal protection under the law and full legal rights for all people, regardless of sexual orientation. We should also affirm the right of faith communities, congregations, and religious organizations to define marriage in accordance with their own traditions and interpretation of scripture. The best path forward is a legal system that respects the rights and responsibilities of all couples, gay or straight, and also respects the religious liberty of faith communities.

RESTORE INTEGRITY TO OUR CIVIC AND BUSINESS PRACTICES. Policies and effective partnerships between 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 removes the influence of money from the electoral process, controls lobbying, and strengthens anti-corruption enforcement.

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 to prevent criminal activity and to get troubled offenders back on the right track.

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*“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

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.

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. Those who are suffering first and most from the consequences—heat waves, drought, floods, disease—are those who are least responsible for the problem: the poor, the marginalized, the vulnerable, and God’s creatures. Government, businesses, churches, and individuals must act immediately to avoid the most catastrophic effects. Cost-effective public policies, as well as market-based efforts, are critical to monitor and control emissions that are harmful to the environment and human health.

PRIORITIZE CLEAN AIR AND WATER.

By protecting the air we breathe and the water we drink, we promote the common good. Our nation should enforce and strengthen the safeguards for these natural commons. Protecting public health from the threat of toxins, especially to pregnant women, children, the elderly, and the ill, should be an urgent priority.

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. In doing so, we can protect advances already made toward ending poverty, reducing hunger, stopping the spread of infectious disease, and increasing national and international security.

Taking It to the Polls

VOTING IS IMPORTANT for advancing a more just and peaceful world. Further educate yourself about the positions and priorities candidates have taken, then think and pray about whom you will entrust with the responsibility to lead your community, state, and nation. While no choice is ever perfect, education, prudential judgment, prayer, Bible study, and careful examination of conscience can guide these important decisions.

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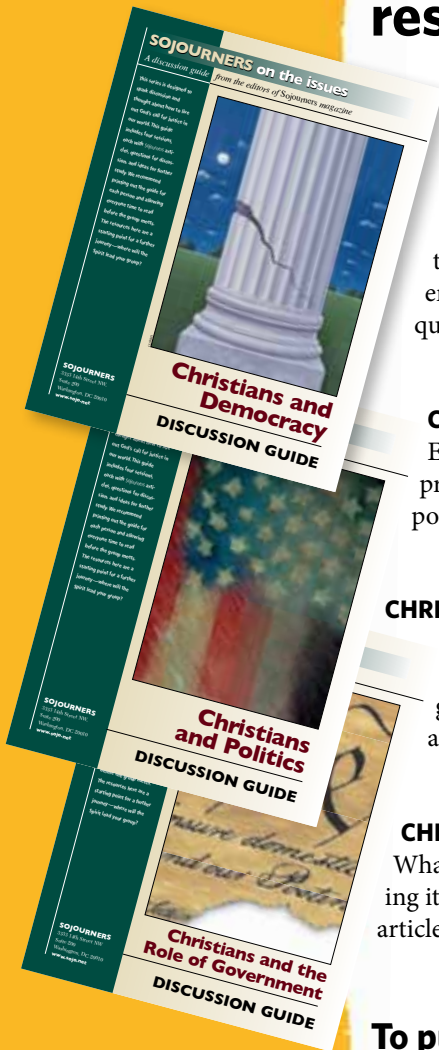
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