

ELECTION 2016

THINK. PRAY. VOTE.

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 communicate with candidates, speak in community forums, write letters to the editor, engage on social media, call in to radio talk shows, and address candidates at town hall meetings. Ask 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 prudent 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, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, 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.

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. We should support the recent nuclear agreement with Iran and continue with its implementation.

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.

STOP GENOCIDE. In Syria, Congo, Iraq, 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.

RESTRICT NEW FORMS OF WARFARE.

New forms of warfare are 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.

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

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. We need policies and programs to eliminate the stark inequality.

PRIORITIZE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOR MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES. For decades, people of color have been victims of environmental racism, bearing the burden of our society’s garbage as environmental toxins and waste are disproportionately located in their communities. Whether it’s dealing with drinking water in Flint, Mich., or designing how states will meet the goals of the Clean Power Plan, environmental justice must be accounted for in our policies; marginalized communities must not be sacrificed at the altar of expediency.

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 social and economic support 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 applied in racially disproportionate ways.

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

—Job 33:4

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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 Pursuit of Justice

EACH HUMAN BEING is created in God’s image regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, class, religion, or nationality. Our nation’s policies should serve to protect human rights and promote human dignity rather than incite anger, generate fear, and divide our communities.

ESTABLISH HUMANE AND INCLUSIVE IMMIGRATION POLICIES THROUGH PRO-PRODUCTIVE DIALOGUE. Our conversations can serve as models for action and must reflect our values and respect for our immigrant neighbors. We must oppose the criminalization of all immigrants including mothers, children, families, refugees, and asylum seekers. Immigration policies should be both compassionate and just. Legislative priorities should include guaranteed access to due process; an avenue for the 11 million undocumented immigrants residing in the United States to earn citizenship; reunification of families; and an expansion of practical and legal avenues to migrate to the U.S. We should address the root causes of migration. We must urge Congress to do its job and approve a nominee to the Supreme Court. Millions of lives, particularly immigrants, are at risk because of inaction. It is the duty and responsibility of elected leaders to act. We cannot let political ideology perpetuate a cycle of deferred justice.

EMPOWER WOMEN AND GIRLS. We should support the equal participation of women in all spheres of society by championing policies and practices that fortify women’s leadership and dignity, eliminate gender discrimination and abuse, and increase economic empowerment. Health, education, and social services

should be developed so that women and girls of all ages have full access. Women, many of whom live below the poverty line, should be at the center of developing poverty-reduction measures, including but not limited to closing the gender wage gap and expanding paid family-leave programs.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE. Our nation’s criminal justice system violates basic standards of human rights. The conditions of overcrowded prisons must be addressed. Alternatives to imprisonment for nonviolent 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 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. The United States should support the human rights standards of international law and oppose all policies that permit torture and inhumane treatment, as well as 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 must 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

Promote Strong Communities

STRONG COMMUNITIES, families, and social systems that allow every member to thrive are the essential foundation of a good society. A culture that promotes healthy communities 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 and unplanned pregnancy, strengthening family formation, providing support to working parents, encouraging responsible parenthood (including parenting education), preventing the abuse and neglect of children, and reducing and preventing domestic violence.

EQUAL PROTECTION FOR ALL. Our society should support equal protection under the law and full legal rights for all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. We should also affirm the right of faith communities, congregations, and religious organizations to continue to recognize the sacrament of marriage in accordance with their own traditions and interpretation of scripture.

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 indifference. Our society must combat the negative influences of the entertainment and advertising industries, business practices that take advantage of low-income people, and corruption in our political culture.

SUPPORT DEMOCRACY AND VOTING RIGHTS. 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. We must stand against all incursions on voting rights and proportional representation—especially those that affect minority and low-income communities.

PREVENT VIOLENCE. “Tough on crime” policies have led to an era of mass incarceration—without treating root problems. Our communities must have safe streets, therefore it is important to provide effective mental health, drug, and other restorative justice treatments to prevent criminal activity and to guide offenders to become contributing members of society.

TEACH OUR CHILDREN WELL. A quality education should be available to everyone—no matter their home address. We must train and hire effective teachers and promote high expectations for all students. Ensure curriculum materials are honest: Remove political and corporate influence from textbooks.

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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.

PLEDGE TO KEEP fossil fuels in the ground. The latest science tells us that in order to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, between two-thirds and four-fifths of the world’s fossil-fuel reserves must be left in the ground. Discontinue providing fossil-fuel leases on public lands and begin applying a “climate test” to public decisions on

infrastructure. Support policies that clear the way for a clean-energy future and eliminate dependence on outdated carbon-polluting energy systems.

SET A GOAL OF 50 PERCENT CLEAN ENERGY BY 2030. Clean energy represents an enormous economic opportunity—millions of jobs and economic revitalization across the country could be realized if our country becomes a global leader in this vital industry. Promote policies that encourage the development and deployment of clean energy, and do it quickly.

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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