

Voter Education

While it is true that churches as 501(c)3 organizations cannot support or oppose a candidate for political office, this does not mean that congregations cannot engage in dialogue about the issues at stake in the elections - including global security, economic policy, environmental safety, public education and health care policy.

In fact, participating in educational activities that help one to become a well-informed and thoughtful voter is a key responsibility for any citizen. There are many ways that congregations can create forums and spaces for dialogue, discussion and faithful reflection on the issues of the day/at stake in the elections.

In Worship and in Church Education

Éaddress issue concerns in the worship life of the congregation, through prayers, sermons and Scripture;

Éinvite members of the congregation with various kinds of expertise to speak about the issues from their experience and perspective - for example, invite public school teachers to talk about public education issues or health care workers to talk about health care issues;

Édiscuss the issues in light of scriptural teaching and the resolutions of the UCC General Synod;

Congregational Education Activities

Éhold a candidate forum at your church;

Évisit nonpartisan websites that provide issue background and candidate positions such as the League of Women Voters website;

Ésharing the task of finding and gathering issue information makes it easier and more fun! [Gather a group of people willing to be researchers, then have each person take an issue and follow that issue discussion in newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Share your findings with each other.]

Éinvite Sunday School children and youth to share their hopes and concerns on the issues;

Éorganize a group from your congregation to attend candidate events and town hall meetings - share your reflections with each other after the event. [You can bring a question or two with you in written form that you have prepared ahead of time.]

Épost issue education material on church bulletin boards and include information in your church's newsletter;

Étalk about the issues with family members and friends

Guidelines for Faithful and Respectful Discussion on the Issues

ÉRealize that the Holy Spirit is present and active in the conversation and has given each participant a part of the truth you are seeking to discern.

ÉFollow the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” - even when you disagree with them.

ÉListen respectfully and carefully to others.

ÉState what you think you heard someone say and ask for clarification before responding, in an effort to be sure to understand each other.

ÉSpeak honestly about your thoughts and feelings. Share personal experiences which help others to more fully understand each other’s concerns and perspectives on the issues. Conversation can be passionate and still be respectful, civil and constructive.

ÉSpeak for yourself, rather than as a member of a group. Use “I”-statements rather than “You”-statements.

ÉFocus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people’s motives, intelligence or integrity.

ÉLift up points of agreement as well as disagreement.

ÉCreate space for everyone’s concerns to be spoken, even when they disagree.

ÉSeek to stay in community with each other even though the discussion may be vigorous and perhaps tense.

ÉKeep an open mind and heart. You may not hear if you judge too quickly.

ÉPray for God’s grace to listen attentively, to speak clearly and to remain open to the vision God holds for us all

[adapted from “Ground Rules for Conversation” (Evangelical Lutheran Church Department for Communication) and “Seeking to be Faithful Together” (adopted by the 204th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA)]