

Companion Toolkit

FAITHFUL VOTER GUIDE

& *Companion Toolkit*



North Carolina
Council of Churches

STRENGTH IN UNITY. PEACE THROUGH JUSTICE.

Faithful Voter Guide Companion Toolkit

*A toolkit for Faithful Conversation,
Discernment, and Participation*

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Executive Summary

The [Faithful Voter Guide](#) was created from a simple conviction: our faith shapes how we understand the world, care for our neighbors, and participate in our communities. Voting is one expression of that participation, but faithful civic engagement asks more of us. It calls us to listen, learn, discern, speak truthfully, seek the common good, and remain committed to one another even when we disagree.

This Companion Toolkit was created to help congregations and small groups do just that.

The Voter Guide is an invitation to practice faithful participation in public life and provides an overview of the seven spheres of society: : **Family; Education; Government; Media; Business; Arts & Entertainment; and Religion**. The Toolkit takes a deeper dive into each sphere, offering opportunities for meaningful conversation and reflection.

These sessions are not designed to tell participants what to think or how to vote. Instead, they create space for deeper questions: **What does our faith ask of us? Who is our neighbor? Whose voices are missing? What does justice require? What does love require? And how might we participate in public life in ways that contribute to the flourishing of all?**

This is intentionally **not a curriculum to be completed**. Use one session, several sessions, or individual reflections and questions throughout the season. Adapt the material to your faith tradition, group size, theological perspective, and community.

Most importantly, faithful communities do not have to agree in order to learn from one another. In a time when political differences can easily become personal divisions, we need spaces where people can bring their convictions honestly while practicing curiosity, humility, compassion, and respect.

The goal is not agreement. The goal is formation, learning how to listen well, speak truthfully, and seek the common good together.

May these conversations shape us into people who pursue justice with courage, approach disagreement with compassion, remain grounded in truth, and work to build communities where everyone can flourish. **May our faith shape how we show up, our love shape how we engage, and the common good guide where we go.**

With gratitude and hope,

Susannah Tuttle, MDiv
Director of Strategic Engagement
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How to Use this Toolkit

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is designed to help congregations and small groups engage the Faithful Voter Guide in deeper conversation, reflection, and faithful discernment. It is not a curriculum to be “completed,” but a flexible resource to support honest, respectful engagement across differences of experience, theology, and political perspective.

Use the sidebar navigation to quickly access the section you need. This is a living document and will be updated periodically as new information and resources become available.

What This Toolkit Is

This toolkit is:

- A small group conversation guide rooted in Scripture and Christian faith
 - A resource for exploring public life through the seven spheres of influence
 - A space for mixed perspectives to engage in respectful dialogue
 - A companion to the Faithful Voter Guide, expanding its themes into deeper discussion
 - A tool for faithful discernment, not political persuasion
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What This Toolkit Is Not

This toolkit is not:

- A partisan voting guide or candidate endorsement resource
 - A debate curriculum or argument-based discussion format
 - A space to “win” conversations or convince others
 - A replacement for personal conscience or denominational teaching
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How the Toolkit Is Organized

The toolkit includes:

1. Facilitator Guide for Leaders

A practical guide for those leading groups, including:

- How to navigate disagreement and tension
- Trauma-informed discussion practices
- Time management for sessions
- How to respond when conversations become heated
- Guidance for maintaining a respectful, nonpartisan space

2. Overview of the Seven Spheres of Influence

A framing section introducing the seven areas of public life explored in the Faithful Voter Guide:

- Family
- Education
- Government
- Media
- Business
- Arts & Entertainment
- Religion

Each sphere includes a dedicated session with Scripture, context, reflection, and discussion.

3. Suggested Session Structures

Flexible formats for:

- 30-minute conversations
- 60-minute small groups
- 90-minute deeper study sessions

Groups are encouraged to choose the format that best fits their community.

4. Session Modules (Seven Spheres)

Each session includes:

- Opening reflection and prayer
- Scripture & theological context
- What's happening in North Carolina

- Discussion questions
- Discernment exercise
- Closing practice
- Optional action pathways

5. Appendix

Additional resources for deeper learning, including:

- Additional scripture readings based on the seven spheres of influence
- Recommended reading

Facilitation Guide for Leaders

Introduction: The Role of the Facilitator

Facilitating these conversations is not about teaching participants what to think, but about helping create a faithful space where people can listen deeply, speak honestly, and reflect on how their beliefs shape their understanding of public life.

In this toolkit, disagreement is not a problem to solve, it is part of the sacred work of discernment. The goal is not agreement, but faithful engagement rooted in dignity, curiosity, and care for one another.

Facilitators are invited to hold space for complexity, resist the pressure to “resolve” tension, and guide groups back to shared commitments when needed.

Creating a Covenant for Conversation (Strongly Recommended)

At the beginning of each group, establish shared agreements such as:

- We speak from our own experience (“I” statements)
- We listen fully before responding
- We do not interrupt
- We assume good intentions while naming impact
- We hold confidentiality within the group

This is one of the most important tools for success. Feel free to add or adapt based on your group.

How to Lead a Discussion Where People Disagree

Disagreement will likely emerge in nearly every session. This is expected and welcome when held well.

Core Practices

- Listen to understand, not to respond
- Encourage “I” statements rather than generalizations
- Slow the conversation down when assumptions arise
- Name shared values when perspectives differ (care, dignity, faithfulness)

Facilitator Language You Can Use

- “Let’s pause and hear that again in a different way.”
 - “What values do you hear underneath that perspective?”
 - “Can we hear from someone who experiences this differently?”
 - “Let’s return to the question, not the argument.”
-

Trauma-Informed Discussion Practices

Some participants may carry lived experiences of harm related to the topics being discussed (family separation, discrimination, violence, economic instability, etc.).

Create Safety Through Structure

- Begin and end each session consistently
- Make participation voluntary (no forced sharing)
- Allow silence as a valid response
- Avoid putting individuals “on the spot”

In Conversation

- Do not ask people to justify their pain or identity
 - Avoid graphic details or pressure to disclose personal experiences
 - Be attentive to emotional shifts in the room
-

Closing Reminder for Leaders

Success in this toolkit is not measured by agreement, but by:

- Whether people felt heard
- Whether dignity was maintained
- Whether Scripture was engaged seriously
- Whether participants left with deeper reflection than they arrived with

Family Session

Sphere Session: FAMILY

Opening Prayer

God of every household and every human heart,

We gather as people who have been given to one another, across bloodlines and borders, across difference and distance. Remind us today that you have always been in the business of making family out of strangers, of calling chosen kin from the corners of the earth.

Give us the courage to ask hard questions, the humility to sit with what we do not yet understand, and the love that refuses to draw the circle too small.

Amen.

Opening Reflection:

The Faithful Voter Guide defines family as any community where people give and receive care, across generations and beyond biology. This session takes that definition seriously — and asks what it costs us, and what it calls us to, when we apply it to the families in North Carolina who are most vulnerable right now.

During this session, we will sit with three realities affecting families in our state: policies that affect LGBTQ+ North Carolinians and their families; the impact of immigration enforcement on families in our communities; and the broader question of which families our laws treat as worthy of protection.

We are not here to reach consensus. We are here to see more clearly — and to ask what faithful love requires.

Scripture and Theological Reflection

Ruth 1:16 — “Where you go, I will go. Where you die, I will die. Your people shall be my people and your God my God.”

What the Story Holds

The book of Ruth is set in a time of displacement, famine, and grief. Naomi is a widow in a foreign land, twice bereaved, preparing to return home to Bethlehem. She urges her daughters-in-law to go back to their own mothers' houses. Orpah, weeping, turns back. Ruth stays put.

Ruth's decision to remain with Naomi is not sentimental. It is a covenant act, the kind of radical, defiant loyalty that the biblical tradition reserves for the relationship between God and God's people. The Hebrew word she uses, *hesed*, is the same word used throughout Scripture to describe God's own steadfast love. Ruth is not merely staying with Naomi. She is enacting the love of God toward a woman the world has left behind.

Notice what Ruth's covenant does not require: shared ethnicity, shared biology, legal recognition, or social approval. It requires only this: I will show up. I will stay. You are mine, and I am yours.

This is the measure of family in Scripture. Not who looks alike or who the law recognizes, but who loves, who sacrifices, and who refuses to leave.

What's Happening in North Carolina (Policy Landscape)

This section is for information, not debate. The facilitator may read it aloud, ask someone to read it, or distribute it as a handout before discussion. The goal is a shared baseline of facts.

Families across North Carolina experience policy decisions in deeply personal ways, through schools, healthcare systems, workplaces, and legal frameworks that shape daily life.

1. LGBTQ+ Individuals, Youth, and Families

LGBTQ+ North Carolinians are part of families, congregations, workplaces, schools, and communities across our state. They are children, parents, siblings, grandparents, caregivers, neighbors, and friends. Some are raising families of their own, while others seek communities where they can experience belonging, safety, and love. In recent years, state lawmakers have enacted several laws that affect these families' access to healthcare, legal recognition, and public life.

Recent Changes include

In recent years, North Carolina has seen significant legislative activity affecting LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly transgender youth and adults:

- House Bill 808 (2023) prohibits gender-affirming medical treatments, including puberty blockers, hormone therapy, and gender-affirming surgeries, for most individuals under the age of 18.¹
- House Bill 574 (2023) requires middle school, high school, and collegiate athletic teams to be designated by biological sex and limits participation in women's and girls' athletic teams based on that designation.²
- House Bill 805 (effective July 29, 2025) defines male and female in state law based on biological sex, limits the use of state funds for gender-affirming medical care for incarcerated individuals and others in state custody, and establishes additional requirements related to birth certificates and state records.³

North Carolina has no statewide non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people in employment, housing, or public accommodations. Local protections vary: the Movement Advancement Project identifies three North Carolina cities with ordinances providing full protections in all three areas, while 20 additional municipalities have partial protections.⁴

At the same time, LGBTQ+ North Carolinians continue to experience disparities in mental health, housing stability, and experiences of discrimination. In a 2024 Trevor Project survey of 550 LGBTQ+ young people in North Carolina, respondents reported experiences involving anxiety, depression, and suicide risk, and approximately half said they were unable to access the mental-health care they wanted. The Trevor Project notes that LGBTQ+ young people are not inherently at greater risk because of their identities; rather, stigma, discrimination, and victimization can contribute to increased risk.⁵

For some North Carolinians, recent legislative changes are viewed as efforts to protect children, preserve parental rights, or provide clarity in public policy. Others believe these same policies increase barriers to healthcare, recognition, participation, or belonging for LGBTQ+ people and their families.

As Christians seeking the common good, we are invited to wrestle with these realities in humility. How do we affirm the God-given dignity of every person while engaging sincerely with differing theological convictions? How do our churches become places where people are treated with compassion, honesty, and respect, even when we do not all arrive at the same conclusions? What does faithful love require of us as we seek the flourishing of every neighbor?

2. Immigrant Families in NC

Immigrants are an important part of North Carolina's communities and economy. As of 2023, approximately 9.3% of North Carolina residents—about 1 million people—were foreign-born. Immigrants also accounted for 12% of the state's labor force, including significant shares of workers in construction, agriculture, STEM, and other industries.⁶

Recent changes in state and federal immigration enforcement have created new challenges and uncertainty for many immigrant households.

What Has Changed Since 2024:

- Federal immigration enforcement agents have arrested more than 6,300 people since the Trump administration's second term, according to data collected by the Deportation Data Project. Nearly twice the number of immigration arrests made in N.C. during the previous two years combined.⁷
- In November 2025, "Operation Charlotte's Web" resulted in more than 425 arrests over a single week.⁸
- House Bill 10 (2024), enacted over Governor Cooper's veto in November 2024, requires sheriffs to cooperate with federal immigration authorities, including when an individual is subject to an immigration detainer.⁹
- House Bill 318 (2025), passed over Governor Stein's veto in July 2025, builds on HB 10 by expanding the list of charged offenses that require law enforcement to attempt to determine a person's citizenship status and to notify ICE before releasing someone who has been held on an immigration detainer.¹⁰
- Senate Bill 153 (2026) requires state highway patrol and other agencies to enter into formal cooperation agreements with ICE under the federal 287(g) program, prohibits sanctuary policies by local governments, restricts access to certain state-funded benefits, and limits UNC System institutions' ability to restrict cooperation with federal immigration authorities.¹¹
- Beginning October 1, 2026, federal law will end Medicaid coverage for certain noncitizens who previously qualified under specific immigration categories.¹²
- ICE is expanding detention capacity in North Carolina, with a 1,320-bed immigration processing center planned at the former Rivers Correctional Facility in Winton¹³; ICE has also considered sites in Greensboro and other locations, but no facility is currently operating in the state.

For many immigrant families, the effects of immigration policy extend beyond detention or deportation. Enforcement activity can affect whether people feel comfortable going to

work, school, healthcare appointments, houses of worship, or public places. News Reports from North Carolina following Operation Charlotte's Web documented school absences, business disruptions, and fear among immigrant communities.

These effects can reach beyond those directly involved in an immigration case. Families may face uncertainty about whether a loved one will be able to return home, while schools, employers, congregations, healthcare providers, and community organizations may navigate the consequences of increased enforcement activity. These realities invite us to consider not only how immigration laws are enforced, but also how enforcement affects families, communities, and our shared life together.

As Christians seeking the common good, we are invited to hold these realities together with honesty and humility. How do we care for the dignity of every person while also wrestling faithfully with questions of law, justice, public safety, and belonging? How do our churches become places where immigrants and longtime residents alike experience welcome, truth, and compassion?

3. Reproductive Health, Pregnancy and Family Wellbeing

Every year, thousands of North Carolina families navigate pregnancy, childbirth, miscarriage, infertility, adoption, and decisions about reproductive healthcare. For some, these experiences are marked by celebration; for others, they are accompanied by medical complications, financial hardship, grief, or uncertainty. Public policies surrounding reproductive healthcare shape how families access care, make medical decisions, and support one another during some of life's most vulnerable moments.

North Carolina's abortion laws changed significantly in 2023. Senate Bill 20, enacted over Governor Cooper's veto, reduced the general gestational limit for abortion from 20 weeks to 12 weeks. The law took effect July 1, 2023.

The 12-Week Ban: What Changed and What It Costs¹⁴

- Most abortions are prohibited after 12 weeks of pregnancy, with narrow exceptions, and the law adds additional requirements and restrictions on abortion providers and medication abortion.
- North Carolina law requires an in-person consultation at least 72 hours before an abortion, including medication abortion, except in specified circumstances.
- State law includes ultrasound-related requirements and requires physicians performing abortions after 12 weeks to submit specified information, including an ultrasound image documenting gestational measurements, to the Department of Health and Human Services.
- New licensing and facility requirements for abortion clinics have increased regulatory requirements for providers and raises concerns about potential clinic closures.

North Carolina also continues to face significant maternal-health disparities. According to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, non-Hispanic Black women experienced a pregnancy-related mortality ratio 1.8 times that of non-Hispanic White women in the state's 2018–2020 data. The department also found that 79% of pregnancy-related deaths among non-Hispanic Black women in that period were considered preventable.¹⁵

Access to maternity care also varies geographically. 18% of the state's counties are classified as maternity-care deserts (counties with no hospital or birth center with labor and delivery services and no obstetric care), affecting nearly 61,000 women and 4,000 births annually.¹⁶ Research on North Carolina's rural and low-income communities has also found that longer travel distances to obstetric care are associated with higher rates of severe maternal morbidity and other adverse outcomes.

For many North Carolinians, conversations about reproductive health extend beyond abortion alone. They also include prenatal care, maternal health, infertility treatment, miscarriage care, contraception, adoption, foster care, parental leave, and the resources families need to raise children safely and with dignity.

These questions also include whether every family can access the care and support they need before, during, and after pregnancy. North Carolina continues to face challenges in maternal and infant health, particularly in rural and underserved communities, making access to prenatal, maternity, postpartum, and mental health care an important part of supporting healthy families.

As Christians seeking the common good, we are invited to consider not only our convictions about the beginning of life, but also how our communities support people throughout pregnancy, birth, parenting, and family life. What would it look like for our churches and communities to make the flourishing of children, parents, and families a shared responsibility, through practical care, economic support, healthcare access, and compassionate community?

Discussion Questions

Work through as many of these as time allows. The questions move from personal to communal to civic. Begin where your group is most ready and go from there. You do not need to cover every question.

Personal & Scriptural

1. Ruth's vow to Naomi was a covenant that crossed every expected boundary - ethnicity, religion, and national origin. Has there been a person or community in your life that became family in an unexpected way? What made that belonging real?
2. The Voter Guide mentions "The measure of a family is not conformity but covenant, not who looks alike, but who loves, sacrifices, and shows up for one another." Where do you see this kind of covenant love in your congregation? Where is it missing?

Communal

3. Think about the families in your congregation and in your neighborhood. Are there families who are afraid right now because of immigration status, because of a transgender child, because of economic precarity? What does this mean for your faith community to be family to them?
4. The Voter Guide distinguishes between what fear tells us (family must be defined and defended) and what love reveals (every circle of care is holy). Where do you sense fear shaping public conversation about family? Where do you hear love?
5. N.C. has no statewide non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people. What does it mean for a family to live without that baseline protection? What is the church's responsibility in that gap?

Civic

6. The Voter Guide asks: “Does this candidate appeal primarily to fear and division, or to compassion, responsibility, and our shared commitment to one another?” How would you apply those questions to what you know about candidates in your area, at any level of office?
 7. If your congregation could take one action in the next six months to stand with vulnerable families in N.C., what would it be? What’s one small step toward that?
-

Closing Practice

Choose one of the following to close your sessions:

Option A: A Litany of Belonging

For every family that that law does not recognize...

God Recognizes. We claim them as our own.

For every child who fears that love is conditional...

May our community be the place they learn it is not.

For every parent separated from their children by force...

We do not look away. We do not grow numb. We act.

For the work of making a family in a fearful time...

Give us courage, give us love, and give us each other. Amen.

Option B: Moment of Witness

Invite anyone who wishes to share one sentence: “A family I want to hold in prayer tonight is . . .” Go around the room without comment. Close with a brief prayer naming those mentioned.

Optional: Action Pathways:

Lower Barrier	Deeper Engagement
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Learn who represents you Visit ncleg.gov to find your state legislators and review how they have voted on family-related legislation.	Connect with an immigrant family in your congregation or community Ask your pastor or ministry team whether your congregation has immigrant families who need practical support — accompaniment to appointments, childcare, legal referrals.
Have a conversation Share the Faithful Voter Guide with one person in your life who might engage it differently than you. Invite them to read just the Family section and talk about it.	Support a local organization Connect with organizations working with LGBTQ+ families (Equality NC, PFLAG NC) or immigrant families (ACLU-NC, Latin American Coalition, or your local community organization).
Pray publicly Ask your pastor or worship leader to include vulnerable families in the congregation's prayers of the people — by name if possible, or by need.	Become an informed voter Use the Questions for Discernment from the Faithful Voter Guide to evaluate every candidate you vote for this cycle — at every level, from school board to U.S. Senate.

Sources (Family Session)

1. NCGA: House Bill 808: Gender Transition/Minors: <https://www.ncleg.gov/BillLookup/2023/H808>
2. NCGA: House Bill 574: Fairness in Women's Sports Act: <https://ncleg.gov/BillLookup/2023/H574>
3. NCGA: HB 805: Anti-Trans/School Censorship Bill, ACLU North Carolina: <https://www.acluofnorthcarolina.org/legislation/hb-805-anti-transschool-censorship-bill/>
4. Movement Advancement Project: North Carolina's Equality Profile: <https://mapresearch.org/equality-profiles/nc/>
5. The Trevor Project: 2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People in North Carolina: <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/state-reports-north-carolina-2024/>
6. American Immigration Council - Immigrants in North Carolina: <https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/north-carolina/>
7. NC Local: New ICE Data shows more than 6,300 arrests in NC since Trump took office, nearly double the prior two years: <https://nclocal.org/2026/04/17/ice-data-arrests-nc>
8. WUNC News: Operation Charlotte's Web Raises questions about ICE and CBP transparency: <https://www.wunc.org/2026-02-09/operation-charlottes-web-raises-questions-about-ice-and-cbp-transparency>
9. NCGA: HB 10: Require ICE Cooperation & Budget Adjustments: <https://www.ncleg.gov/BillLookup/2023/H10>
10. ACLU North Carolina: HB 318: Cooperation with ICE Expansion: <https://www.acluofnorthcarolina.org/legislation/hb-318-cooperation-ice-expansion/>
11. ACLU North Carolina: SB 153: Border Protection Act (Anti-Immigrant): <https://www.acluofnorthcarolina.org/legislation/sb-153-border-protection-act-anti-immigrant/>
12. NCDHHS, NC Medicaid Division of Health Benefits: Medicaid is Changing: <https://medicaid.ncdhhs.gov/beneficiaries/medicaid-is-changing#4>
13. The GEO Group, Inc. The GEO Group Announces Contract for Company-Owned 1,320-Bed Rivers Facility in North Carolina: https://investors.geogroup.com/news-releases/news-release-details/geo-group-announces-contract-company-owned-1320-bed-rivers?utm_source=chatgpt.com
14. NCGA: Senate Bill 20: Care for Women, Children, and Families Act: <https://www.ncleg.gov/BillLookup/2023/S20>
15. NCDHHS: Maternal Mortality among Non-Hispanic Black Women in NC: <https://www.dph.ncdhhs.gov/women-infant-and-community-wellness/maternal-mortality-among-non-hispanic-black-women-nc/open>
16. March of Dimes: Maternity Care access in North Carolina: <https://www.marchofdimes.org/peristats/assets/s3/reports/mcd/Maternity-Care-Report-NorthCarolina.pdf>

Education Session

Sphere Session: Education

Opening Prayer

God of wisdom and every curious mind,

You created us as learners: to ask questions, to wonder, to grow. You have placed in every child the capacity for wisdom, and in every community the responsibility to cultivate it. Remind us that education is not just a policy matter but a covenant, a promise we make to one another that every child is precious in your sight.

Give us eyes to see the children in our own communities who need more than they are being given. Give us the courage to demand better for them. And give us the wisdom to know the truth and act on it. **Amen.**

Opening Reflection:

The Faithful Voter Guide opens its education section with a striking line from Proverbs: “Buy the truth and do not sell it — wisdom, instruction, and insight as well.” It is not a neutral verse. It insists that truth has value — that seeking it is worth sacrifice — and that trading it away for something cheaper is a form of spiritual loss.

In a moment when public education in North Carolina is being reshaped by funding decisions made in Raleigh — decisions about where money goes, how much money goes there, and whose children are treated as fully worthy — that biblical insistence on truth-seeking feels urgently relevant.

In this session, we ask: What does every child need in order to flourish? What does faithful stewardship of public education look like? What does the current situation in N.C. public schools require of God’s people?

Scripture and Theological Reflection

Proverbs 23:23 - *“Buy the truth and do not sell it — wisdom, instruction, and insight as well.”*

What the Story Holds

The book of Proverbs is, at its core, a long argument that wisdom is the most valuable thing a person, or a society, can possess. It is more valuable than silver, gold, or rubies (Proverbs 3:14–15). It is the foundation upon which God created the earth (Proverbs 3:19). And crucially, it is not reserved for the wealthy or the powerful. In the very first chapter, Wisdom cries out in the streets, in the public squares, at the gates of the city (Proverbs 1:20–21), available to everyone who will receive it.

The word translated “buy” in Proverbs 23:23 carries the sense of acquiring something at great cost, of prioritizing it above lesser things. And “do not sell it” is a warning against trading truth away either for convenience, comfort, political advantage, or short-term savings.

In the biblical tradition, education, the transmission of wisdom from one generation to the next, is a communal responsibility. Deuteronomy 6:6–7 commands parents to teach the spiritual laws diligently to their children, talking about them at home and on the road, morning and evening. But this was never meant to be only a private matter. The prophets called on the entire community to ensure that orphans and other vulnerable children had access to the same formation in wisdom and justice that others received.

The Faithful Voter Guide puts it plainly: “Every child is worthy of deep investment, encouragement, and opportunity.” This is not a policy preference. It is a theological claim rooted in the image of God present in every human being. To underfund a child’s education because of where they were born or what their family can afford is, in the prophetic tradition, a form of injustice. It is part of the same pattern of injustice repeatedly called out by the prophets again and again.

The Voter Guide also names what happens when education is shaped by fear rather than love. Fear says: control the curriculum, ban the books, silence the history. A people who cannot name their wounds cannot resist their repetition. Fear does not invest in children, it manages them. Love, by contrast, cultivates curiosity, wisdom, critical thinking, and moral imagination. Love invests.

What’s Happening in North Carolina (Policy Landscape)

This section is for information, not debate. The facilitator may read it aloud, ask someone to read it, or distribute it as a handout before discussion. The goal is a shared baseline of facts.

Schools have become one of the most visible places for North Carolinians to wrestle with questions about identity, belonging, parental involvement, academic freedom, and

the well-being of children. While opinions differ about specific policies, many people share a desire for schools that are safe, effective, and supportive places for students to learn.

1. The Voucher Expansion: \$675 million and Growing

In 2013, North Carolina launched the Opportunity Scholarship program as a targeted effort to help low-income families afford private school. Originally, eligibility was limited to households meeting federal free lunch income guidelines, and students had to have attended a North Carolina public school during the previous semester, with limited exceptions.¹

The program has since changed significantly. The initial budget of \$10.8 million has now grown into something fundamentally different.

Where the program stands today:

- In 2023, the NC General Assembly removed all income eligibility requirements, opening vouchers to families at any income level, including the wealthy.²
- In 2024–25, more than 80,000 students received vouchers at a total cost of over \$432 million; the majority of recipients were already in private school before applying.³
- For 2026–27, \$675 million has been allocated to the voucher program.⁴ By 2030, the state will appropriate over \$825 million annually.⁵
- Based on the funding schedule in current law, nearly \$9 billion will have been appropriated for Opportunity Scholarships by 2034–35 if the law remains unchanged.⁶
- In 2024–25, approximately 73% of voucher-receiving schools were religious schools; 71% were Christian-affiliated. 86% of all voucher dollars went to religious schools.⁷
- Many recipients were already in private schools: Of the new scholarship recipients whose prior school enrollment was examined by the state, only 6,710 had attended a North Carolina public school the previous year; most of the remaining new recipients had already been enrolled in private schools.⁸

North Carolina's private-school sector experienced substantial growth in 2025–26. The state had 997 private schools enrolling 143,998 students, an increase of 67 schools and 8,260 students from the previous year. This was the largest one-year increase in the

number of private schools in more than four decades. The growth coincided with the first school year in which the expanded Opportunity Scholarship program was fully funded from the beginning of the school year.⁹

The North Carolina Constitution requires the General Assembly to provide "a general and uniform system of free public schools" and states that equal opportunities must be provided for all students.¹⁰

For North Carolinians, the conversation goes beyond where students attend school. It raises deeper questions about how public resources should be invested, how educational opportunity is defined, and how communities ensure that every child has access to a high-quality education.

Throughout Scripture, communities are called to care for the flourishing of every child, not just our own. Christians may hold differing views about school choice, but our faith invites us to ask how educational systems serve the common good and whether all children have meaningful opportunities to learn and thrive.

2. Teacher Pay: The Only State Going Backward

Behind every education policy debate are real people: students eager to learn, teachers committed to their classrooms, parents advocating for their children, and communities working to prepare the next generation.

How North Carolina funds public education affects teacher recruitment and retention, staffing, student services, and other aspects of school life. Teacher compensation remains one area in which North Carolina ranks near the bottom nationally.

The numbers in North Carolina:

- North Carolina ranks 46th in the nation for teacher pay in 2025-26, down three spots from last year.¹¹ In 2001, the state ranked 19th, falling 26 places in the national teacher-pay rankings over the past quarter-century.¹²
- The average N.C. teacher salary in 2025–26 was more than \$16,500 below the national average of \$76,552, and below every neighboring state: Georgia, Virginia, South Carolina, and Tennessee.¹³
- North Carolina's prolonged budget impasse delayed action on teacher pay in 2025–26, though teachers continued to receive authorized step increases. The 2026–27 budget provides an average 8% raise and a \$48,000 starting salary, but these increases are not retroactive to 2025–26.¹⁴
- In 2024–25, 9,107 teachers left North Carolina public schools, resulting in a statewide attrition rate of 10.11%, slightly higher than the previous year's 9.88% and still above the state's pre-pandemic average.¹⁵

The numbers point to a persistent challenge in recruiting and retaining qualified educators. Low national rankings in teacher compensation, a substantial gap between North Carolina and neighboring states, and more than 9,000 teachers leaving public schools in a single year raise important questions about whether the state is providing educators with the compensation and working conditions needed to remain in the profession. When experienced teachers leave, schools must work to fill vacancies, sometimes relying on substitutes, temporary staff, or teachers working outside their areas of licensure. These challenges can be especially difficult for rural and lower-wealth districts, where schools may have fewer resources to offer competitive local salary supplements.

North Carolina provides a statewide teacher salary schedule, while local districts may provide additional supplements. State law also provides additional funding for low-wealth counties that can be used for salary supplements and other educational needs. As a result, a teacher's total compensation can vary significantly depending on where they work, raising a broader question of educational equity: How much should a child's access to experienced, well-compensated teachers depend on the wealth of the community where they live?

The biblical tradition repeatedly calls communities to treat workers with dignity and to ensure that those who labor are not denied fair compensation. Teachers carry the responsibility of educating and shaping the next generation, yet the statistics show that North Carolina continues to struggle to make teaching a competitive and sustainable profession. For Christians concerned with the common good, teacher pay is therefore not simply a question of education policy or state budgets. It is also a question of how we value the people entrusted with the education and flourishing of our children.

3. The State Budget: What We Just Passed, and What It Means

After operating under continuing budget authority during the prolonged budget impasse, the North Carolina General Assembly passed Senate Bill 257, the 2026 Appropriations Act, and Governor Josh Stein signed it into law on July 7, 2026. The enacted budget totals approximately \$34.4 billion.

What the budget does for education:

- Teachers receive an average 8% salary increase, with larger raises directed toward newer teachers. Beginning teachers get a 17% bump and veteran teachers receive approximately 5%.¹⁶
- Teachers also receive a one-time, experience-based bonus: \$500 for those with 15 or fewer years of experience, and \$1,000 for those with 16 or more years.¹⁷
- North Carolina is investing \$5 million annually in classroom AI tools, including \$2.5 million each for Khanmigo and MagicSchool for at least one year. The State Board of Education has also been directed to develop K–12 AI literacy standards.¹⁸
- The budget directs \$35.8 million in identified savings from the Opportunity Scholarship Program back toward public education priorities. These funds are designated for school nutrition and custodial staff bonuses, middle-school literacy training, and a new K–8 math curriculum.¹⁹
- The 2026–27 state budget provides \$750,000 in recurring funding through the UNC System to Parents for Education Freedom in North Carolina (PEFNC) for “marketing and outreach services related to school choice.” PEFNC is a nonprofit organization that advocates for school choice, including private-school choice.²⁰

What the budget does for education represents meaningful new investment, particularly in teacher compensation and classroom resources, while leaving several longer-term questions unresolved. The larger raises for beginning teachers address one of the state’s challenges in recruiting educators, while the smaller increases for veteran teachers raise questions about how effectively the salary schedule rewards experience and encourages teachers to remain in the profession. The continued concentration of teachers with 15–24 years of experience on the same base-salary step is one example of that challenge.

The budget also directs new resources toward classroom technology, literacy, mathematics, and school support staff, while continuing state investment in school choice. Taken together, these choices reflect competing approaches to improving educational outcomes: increasing compensation for educators, investing directly in public-school programs, expanding technology, and supporting families’ ability to choose alternatives to traditional public schools.

The question for communities of faith is not simply how much the state spends on education, but how those investments are distributed and what they make possible. Education is more than an institution; it is a covenant between generations. Every

budget decision reflects priorities about which children receive resources, which educators are supported, and what opportunities communities believe every child should have. Christians may disagree about the best policies to achieve educational excellence, but we share a calling to ask whether our decisions help every child develop the gifts God has given them, and whether those entrusted with teaching and caring for young people have the support they need to do that work well.

Discussion Questions

Work through as many of these as time allows. The questions move from personal to communal to civic. Begin where your group is most ready and go from there. You do not need to cover every question.

Personal & Scriptural

8. Proverbs says to “buy the truth and do not sell it.” Think of a teacher, mentor, or community that invested in your education. What did they give you that money alone couldn’t buy? What would your life look like without that investment?
9. The Voter Guide describes education as “how we learn to see one another clearly, live justly, and participate in the healing of the world.” How does that vision of education compare to how education is being discussed in public life right now?

Communal

10. The Voter Guide warns that “a people who cannot name their wounds cannot resist their repetition.” Where do you see efforts to limit what students can learn about history, race, gender, or injustice in N.C.? What is at stake when those limits are set?
11. N.C. spends \$675 million on private school vouchers, guaranteed by law, while public school budgets remain subject to tax revenue and competing state budget concerns. Teacher pay continues to fall behind national averages and neighboring states. 84% percent of N.C. children attend public schools. How do we hold together those two realities as faithful people?

Civic

12. The Voter Guide asks: “Does this candidate demonstrate a commitment to ensuring that every child has access to quality education and opportunity?” and “How would this candidate’s leadership affect students and schools that are

under-resourced or struggling?” How would you apply those questions to candidates you know at the school board, state legislature, or U.S. congressional level?

13. Rural N.C. counties cannot match the teacher supplements that wealthy counties offer. A child’s access to an experienced, well-supported teacher is increasingly determined by their zip code. How does your faith respond to a system that produces that outcome?
 14. If your faith community were to take one action to advocate for public education in N.C.: for teachers, for students, for funding equity, what would it be? What is one small step?
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Closing Practice

Choose one of the following to close your sessions:

Option A: A Litany for Every Child

For every child in a classroom with a long-term substitute because the state could not keep the teacher...

You are worth the investment. We will not look away.

For every teacher working a second job to stay in the classroom they love...

Your labor is sacred. You deserve better. We will say so.

For every child in a rural county whose school has less than a child across the county line...

We value you.

For the work of building a state where every child, in every zip code, receives the education they deserve ...

Give us truth, give us courage, and give us each other. Amen.

Option B: Moment of Witness

Invite each person to complete one of these sentences aloud: “One way I will participate in democracy this year is...” or “One person or community whose voting access I will

pay attention to is...” Go around the room without comment. Close with a brief prayer naming what was shared.

Optional: Action Pathways:

Lower Barrier	Deeper Engagement
Check your registration Visit vote.org or the N.C. State Board of Elections (ncsbe.gov) to confirm your registration is current and accurate. Then help one other person do the same.	Become a poll worker or election observer County boards of elections need poll workers and observers for every election. This is a direct form of democratic service. Contact your county board to learn how.
Learn your district Visit ncleg.gov/FindYourLegislator to see who represents you in the state House, Senate, and Congress. Note how they voted on voting-related legislation.	Support voting access in your community Partner with Democracy NC (democracync.org) or Common Cause NC to support voter registration, voter education, and civic engagement in underserved communities.
Talk about it in your congregation Ask your pastor or faith formation team to include voter registration and civic education as part of your congregation’s ministry. Consider hosting a voter registration Sunday.	Contact your legislator If voting access legislation is active in the N.C. General Assembly, contact your state representative or senator to share your perspective as a person of faith. You don’t need a script — your story is enough.

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Government Session

Sphere Session: Government

Opening Prayer

God of justice and patron of every human community,

You have entrusted us to one another. You call leaders to account, you name the corruption of power, and you always stand with those who are pushed out of the circle of protection. Give us eyes to see clearly, courage to speak honestly, and hearts large enough to hold the weight of what faithful citizenship requires.

May this time together make us more faithful to your call and more committed to the dignity of every voice in this democracy. **Amen.**

Opening Reflection:

The Faithful Voter Guide grounds its vision of government in a striking claim: “Every voter carries the image of God, Imago Dei. To suppress a voice is to suppress the divine. Democracy is a spiritual practice of shared dignity.”

That is a bold theological statement. It does not say that democracy is perfect, or that any party has a monopoly on righteous governance. It says that each person’s voice, their vote, their participation in self-governance, is a sacred thing, because they are made in the image of God.

In this session, we consider what is happening to this sacred thing in North Carolina right now. We ask not which party is right, but what the prophetic tradition expects of God’s people in a time when the rules of democracy are being rewritten, redrawn, and contested.

Scripture and Theological Reflection

Michah 6:8 - *“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”*

What the Story Holds

Micah speaks to a people living under corrupt leadership, rulers who have used the structures of law and religion to entrench their own power while the poor and vulnerable are trampled. The prophet does not offer a party platform. He offers a three-part standard: justice, kindness (hesed: that same steadfast covenant love from Ruth), and humility before God and one another.

Notice what Micah does not say. He does not say “do whatever the law allows.” He does not say “stay out of politics.” He does not say “don’t question the rulers, whatever they do.” The prophets, again and again, hold power accountable to a higher standard: the standard of how the vulnerable are treated, how justice is distributed, and whether leaders serve the people or themselves.

The biblical tradition is deeply skeptical of concentrated power. When the people of Israel demanded a king in 1 Samuel 8, God warned them how a king might act, taking their sons for his armies, their daughters for his household, their fields for his officials, and a tenth of their grain and flocks for his servants. “You will cry out because of your king,” God said, “but the Lord will not answer you” (1 Samuel 8:18).

That is not an anti-government text. It is a text about accountability. Power that serves only itself is, in the biblical tradition, a spiritual danger to those it harms and to those who wield it.

We live in a democracy, a form of government that was built, imperfectly and incompletely, on the idea that power belongs to the people. The prophetic tradition does not ask us to be passive in the face of power. It asks us to hold power accountable to the needs of the community. In a democracy, one of the most important ways we do that is through the vote.

When the rules around voting are changed, when district maps are redrawn to diminish votes, when legal challenges attempt to throw out ballots lawfully cast, these are not merely procedural questions. These are justice questions. Micah’s question is relevant: who is being served, and who is being harmed?

What’s Happening in North Carolina (Policy Landscape)

This section is for information, not debate. The facilitator may read it aloud, ask someone to read it, or distribute it as a handout before discussion. The goal is a shared baseline of facts.

Government touches nearly every aspect of daily life: from the schools our children attend and the roads we travel, to the safety of our communities, access to healthcare, environmental protections, and the administration of elections.

The following examples illustrate several areas where governmental decisions have significantly shaped life in North Carolina.

1. Redistricting/Gerrymandering: Drawing the Map to Choose Your Voters

Redistricting, redrawing the boundaries of legislative districts, should happen every ten years after the census. In North Carolina, it is the legislature who draws the maps, so whoever controls the legislature controls the maps and has enormous power to shape election outcomes.

Recent Changes in 2025:

- In October 2025, the Republican-controlled N.C. legislature redrew the state's congressional map mid-decade, following President Trump's public push for Republican-led states to redraw maps to strengthen their congressional majorities. The new map specifically targeted the state's only competitive congressional seat, the 1st District, which was held by Democrat Don Davis.¹
- The 2025 map moved six counties and portions of another county from the 3rd District into the 1st, while moving four counties from the 1st into the 3rd. The other 12 congressional districts were left unchanged.²
- The 1st Congressional District, which has been represented by Black members of Congress for more than 30 years, had its Black voting-age population reduced from 40% to 32% under the new map.³
- A federal three-judge panel allowed the new map to be used in the 2026 election, rejecting challenges that argued the map unlawfully diminished minority voting power and constituted unconstitutional political retaliation.⁴ The legal debate highlights continuing questions about partisan redistricting, racial representation, and the limits of federal judicial review.

Critics described the new map as highly gerrymandered and characterized the 2025 redistricting as electoral retaliation. In a supplemental complaint, the North Carolina NAACP and other plaintiffs argued that the General Assembly's decision to redraw Congressional Districts 1 and 3 in the middle of the decade was specifically designed to weaken the political power of Black voters in the state's historic northeastern Black Belt. They argued that the new map "cracked" the region's Black voting-age population across districts, further diluting Black voting power in a district that had historically provided Black voters an opportunity to elect candidates of their choice.⁵

For many North Carolinians, the effects of redistricting are not immediately visible, but they can shape public life in significant ways. District boundaries influence who

represents a community in the U.S. Congress and the General Assembly, how responsive elected officials are to their constituents, and whether voters feel their voices matter in elections. When districts are highly competitive, candidates often campaign to persuade a broad range of voters. When districts strongly favor one party, elections may be decided long before Election Day, leaving some voters feeling disconnected from the political process.

Communities of color, rural communities, and rapidly growing areas have often found themselves at the center of these debates because the way district lines are drawn can strengthen or diminish their collective voting power. The 2025 map illustrates why redistricting is not simply a question of political boundaries, but also a question of representation, political participation, and whose voices have meaningful influence in government.

Throughout Scripture, God calls leaders to govern with justice, honesty, and concern for the wellbeing of the whole community. The prophets repeatedly challenge rulers who manipulate systems for personal or political gain rather than serving the common good.

For people of faith, redistricting is not simply about political strategy, it is about whether every community has a meaningful opportunity to be heard. Christians may disagree about where district lines should be drawn, but we are called to care deeply about whether our democratic institutions reflect fairness, accountability, and the equal dignity of every person.

2. Voter ID: Who Gets to Prove they Belong

North Carolina has required a photo ID to vote since 2023, following a long legal battle over a law first passed in 2018. The requirement is now in effect for both in-person and absentee-by-mail voting. Voters who do not present an acceptable photo ID can still vote by provisional ballot and use an applicable exception process.

What is in effect and what is coming:⁶

- North Carolina currently requires photo ID for in-person voting. Acceptable identification includes a North Carolina driver's license, certain state-issued IDs, a U.S. passport, a North Carolina voter photo ID, and certain approved student and employee IDs, among others.
- A registered voter who cannot provide an acceptable photo ID may complete an ID Exception Form and vote a provisional ballot. Under current rules, a properly completed exception form satisfies the photo-ID requirement unless the bipartisan county board unanimously determines that the information provided is false.
- Voters who cast ballots by mail must generally include a photocopy of an acceptable photo ID with their ballot or complete an applicable Photo ID Exception Form.
- Free voter photo ID cards are available from any county board of elections, and free non-driver ID cards are available through the N.C. DMV, but advocates note that accessing these requires time, transportation, and documentation that not every voter can easily provide. It is also challenging for homebound citizens to endure the process of procuring these ID cards.
- Senate Bill 921 placed a proposed constitutional amendment on the November 3, 2026 ballot. If approved, it would change the state Constitution so that the photo-ID requirement applies to voting generally, rather than specifically to voters voting in person. The amendment would take effect upon certification of the election results.⁷

Supporters believe voter identification requirements help strengthen confidence in election results by verifying voter identity and creating a consistent process for everyone who votes. Others express concern that obtaining identification or navigating the exception process may present greater challenges for some eligible voters, including older adults, voters of color, people with disabilities, low-income voters, college students, rural residents, unhoused people, and individuals who lack reliable transportation or the documentation needed to obtain identification.

The 2026 constitutional amendment would not create North Carolina's voter-ID requirement; that requirement is already in effect. Instead, it would change the state Constitution so that the requirement applies to voting generally, including methods such as voting by mail. If approved, future changes to the constitutional requirement would require another constitutional amendment rather than simply a change to state law.

Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly calls communities to create systems that are both trustworthy and compassionate. Justice requires honesty and accountability, but it also asks us to pay attention to those who may face greater burdens than others.

The question is not simply whether a rule is legal, but whether it is just. How do we protect the integrity of elections while ensuring that eligible voters can participate without facing unnecessary barriers? Who bears the practical burdens of our election rules, and what responsibility do communities have to help ensure that every eligible person can make their voice heard?

3. Election Administration: Proposed and Newly Adopted Rules

While major legislation draws the most public attention, some important changes to voting in North Carolina happen at the administrative level through rules issued by the State Board of Elections. In 2026, the State Board considered new rules concerning photo identification, voting sites, absentee ballots, and recount procedures. The public-comment periods for these rules have now closed, and several sets of rules were adopted by the State Board in July 2026. Rules adopted by the State Board must also go through the Rules Review Commission process before becoming effective.

Key 2026 Election Rules:

- **Photo ID Exception Rules:** The current rule requires a unanimous vote of a county board of elections to reject a voter's ID Exception Form, a protection designed to prevent partisan rejection of ballots. The rule now changes this to a simple majority vote. Since every county board in N.C. has a 3-to-2 Republican majority, voting rights advocates warn this change could make it easier for a partisan majority to reject an exception.⁸
- **Voting Site Rules:** The State Board adopted permanent rules governing voting-site buffer zones, electioneering areas, and conduct at polling places, including how election officials address loud noise and sound amplification.⁹ Critics say this would stifle voter engagement activities like Souls to the Polls and Stroll to the Polls, organized by Black church communities.¹⁰
- **Non-citizen Voter List Rules:** In April, the State Board adopted rules establishing a process for county boards to flag and challenge registered voters as "potential noncitizens" based on federal SAVE database matches, requiring flagged voters to appear at preliminary hearings to prove their citizenship.¹¹
- On July 20, the State Board adopted new permanent rules governing how county boards address certain deficiencies in returned absentee ballots,

including problems involving envelopes and other ballot-return requirements.¹²

Election rules are designed to create consistent procedures, but the ability to navigate those procedures is not the same for every voter. A voter with reliable transportation, flexible work hours, easy access to government documents, internet access, and familiarity with election procedures may find these requirements relatively straightforward. For an older voter, a person with a disability, someone who is homebound, a low-income voter without reliable transportation, a rural resident who lives far from government offices, or someone who has difficulty reading or completing forms, the same requirements can create additional time, transportation, documentation, or assistance needs. North Carolina provides accommodations, including curbside voting, accessible voting equipment, voting assistance, and assistance for voters in care facilities, but voters must still know about and successfully navigate these options.

While these rules may appear technical, they influence how elections function at the local level. Changes to administrative procedures determine how voters interact with the electoral system in practice: how ballots are processed, how identification exceptions are handled, how voting sites operate, how voter-registration records are maintained, and how absentee-ballot problems are addressed.

Scripture reminds us that justice is often found in the details. Small decisions about procedures, fairness, and accountability can have profound effects on people's lives.

Many people never think about election administration until a problem affects them personally. Yet these procedures help determine whether voting is experienced as orderly, accessible, transparent, and trustworthy.

For people of faith, paying attention to these processes is one way of caring for our neighbors and the health of our communities. Christians are called not only to vote but to participate in the ongoing work of strengthening the civic institutions that enable neighbors to live together in peace, resolve disagreements fairly, and pursue the common good.

Discussion Questions

Work through as many of these as time allows. The questions move from personal to communal to civic. Begin where your group is most ready and go from there. You do not need to cover every question.

Personal & Scriptural

15. Micah asks three things: do justice, love kindness, walk humbly. Which of the three do you find hardest in your own civic life? Why?
16. The biblical tradition is deeply suspicious of concentrated power, from the warning about kings in 1 Samuel to the prophets' challenges to corrupt rulers. How does that biblical skepticism of power shape how you think about the role of government today?

Communal

17. The Voter Guide says: "Democracy is a spiritual practice of shared dignity." What does it mean to you to think of voting as a spiritual act? Does that change how you approach it?
18. What does our community owe one another when the way political districts are drawn may affect whose voices are heard and whose communities have the power to elect representatives? What would a fair and just system of representation look like to us, especially for communities whose voices have historically been underrepresented?

Civic

19. The Voter Guide asks: "Does this candidate demonstrate integrity, humility, and a commitment to serving the common good?" and "How does this candidate use power: to serve others, or primarily to benefit themselves or their allies?" How would you apply those questions to candidates you're aware of at any level local, state, or federal?

20. Some people argue that these kinds of electoral maneuvers are just “politics as usual,” that both sides do it. How do you respond to that from a faith perspective? Is “both sides do it” a sufficient moral framework for God’s people?
21. What is one thing your faith community could do to strengthen democratic participation in your county, not for one party, but for the participation of all people?
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Closing Practice

Choose one of the following to close your sessions:

Option A: A Litany for Democracy

For every person whose voice has been silenced, whose ballot has been challenged, whose participation in democracy has been made harder...

We do not look away. We stand with them.

For the leaders who use power to serve: who walk humbly, do justice, and love kindness...

We give thanks, and we pray for more of them.

For the leaders who use power for themselves, who rig systems, diminish voices, and mistake winning for righteousness...

We pray for their repentance, and we hold them accountable.

For ourselves, as citizens in this democracy who are called to participate, to vote, to speak, to show up...

Give us courage, give us faithfulness, and give us each other. Amen.

Option B: Moment of Witness

Invite each person to complete one of these sentences aloud: “One way I will participate in democracy this year is...” or “One person or community whose voting access I will pay attention to is...” Go around the room without comment. Close with a brief prayer naming what was shared.

Optional: Action Pathways:

Lower Barrier	Deeper Engagement
Check your registration Visit vote.org or the N.C. State Board of Elections (ncsbe.gov) to confirm your registration is current and accurate. Then help one other person do the same.	Become a poll worker or election observer County boards of elections need poll workers and observers for every election. This is a direct form of democratic service. Contact your county board to learn how.
Learn your district Visit ncleg.gov/FindYourLegislator to see who represents you in the state House, Senate, and Congress. Note how they voted on voting-related legislation.	Support voting access in your community Partner with Democracy NC (democracync.org) or Common Cause NC to support voter registration, voter education, and civic engagement in underserved communities.
Talk about it in your congregation Ask your pastor or faith formation team to include voter registration and civic education as part of your congregation's ministry. Consider hosting a voter registration Sunday.	Contact your legislator If voting access legislation is active in the N.C. General Assembly, contact your state representative or senator to share your perspective as a person of faith. You don't need a script — your story is enough.

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Media Session

Sphere Session: Media

Opening Prayer

God of truth and every human story,

You spoke the world into being with a word. You gave us prophets who told the truth when silence was safer, poets who named what could not be named any other way, and disciples who witnessed what they had seen and heard. We live in a time when truth itself is contested, when the tools for distortion have never been more powerful and the structures for accountability have never been more fragile.

Tune our ears to hear what is true. Give us courage to say what we see. And make us people who refuse to look away from the stories that need to be told. **Amen.**

Opening Reflection:

The Faithful Voter Guide grounds this session in a striking claim: truth-telling is not merely a journalistic value. It is a spiritual practice. The Ninth Commandment: *you shall not bear false witness*, is not a rule about courtroom testimony. It is a covenant about what we owe one another in community: the right to know what is real.

We live in a moment when that covenant is under extraordinary pressure. The institutions built to sustain it, local newspapers, public broadcasting, investigative journalism, are weakening. The tools for distorting it: disinformation, deepfakes, algorithmically curated outrage, are stronger than they have ever been. And the political incentives to exploit both trends are abundant.

This session asks not which news source to trust, but what kind of media environment a faithful community is called to cultivate and what is happening in North Carolina right now that should concern all of us who believe truth matters.

Scripture and Theological Reflection

Zechariah 8:16 - “*Speak truth to one another, render judgments that are true and make for peace.*”

What the Story Holds

Zechariah writes to a people returning from exile, a community that has been scattered, silenced, and cut off from their story. The prophet's charge is not merely ethical. It is communal and political: to speak truth to one another is the foundation of a society that can hold together, render justice, and make peace. Without it, the community collapses. Without it, the vulnerable have no recourse. Without it, the powerful can do whatever they wish in the dark.

The biblical tradition understands truth-telling as a form of love. The prophets consistently risked their lives to name what the powerful preferred to hide. Jeremiah was imprisoned for it. Amos was expelled for it. John the Baptist was executed for it. The pattern is consistent: power tends toward concealment, and those called by God tend toward exposure.

Jesus declared, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). This is not a statement about information. It is a statement about liberation. In Christianity, truth is not a commodity to be packaged and sold. It is the oxygen of a just community, and when it is cut off, people suffocate.

Every movement for justice has depended on people willing to tell the truth about suffering when others preferred silence. The abolition movement required people to tell the truth about what slavery looked like, felt like, and cost. The Civil Rights Movement required journalists willing to show the nation what was happening in Birmingham and Selma. The labor movement required reporters willing to document what happened in factories and fields.

Media, in every era, is how communities share reality with one another. When media systems are healthy, communities can name their problems, hold power accountable, and make collective decisions based on shared facts. When media systems fail or are captured by power, the vulnerable lose one of their most important tools for justice.

That is not an abstract concern. It is happening in North Carolina right now.

What's Happening in North Carolina (Policy Landscape)

This section is for information, not debate. The facilitator may read it aloud, ask someone to read it, or distribute it as a handout before discussion. The goal is a shared baseline of facts.

1. News Deserts: When No One Is Watching

North Carolina is experiencing a significant decline in local news coverage. Local journalism does more than report the news; it helps communities understand themselves. It shines light on the decisions that shape neighborhoods, schools, churches, businesses, and local government. When local journalism disappears, communities lose not only information but also accountability, civic participation, and a shared understanding of reality.

The numbers in NC and nationally:

- As of 2026, eight North Carolina counties are classified as news deserts, meaning they have no original source of local news. Another 52 counties are approaching news-desert status.¹
- Between 2004 and 2019, North Carolina lost 22% of its active newspapers and 38% of newspaper circulation. In 2019, six counties had no newspaper and 58 had only one, meaning 64 counties met the then-used definition of a news desert.²
- Nationally, Medill's 2025 State of Local News report identified 213 news-desert counties and another 1,524 counties with only one remaining local news source. Together, approximately 50 million Americans have limited or no access to local news.³
- Medill recorded 136 newspaper closures in 2025, more than two per week.⁴
- WRAL produced [a documentary in June 2026](#) examining the growing number of news deserts across North Carolina, describing what is at stake as communities lose access to trusted local information.

A county without a local news outlet is a county where school board meetings go uncovered, where local government contracts go unscrutinized, where environmental violations go unreported, and where the stories of ordinary people go untold. Research has found that communities experiencing declines in local political coverage can also experience declines in political knowledge and participation.⁵ When there are fewer trusted sources of information, it becomes harder for neighbors to distinguish verified facts from rumors, speculation, or misinformation.

People who live in news deserts tend to be poorer, older, and more rural than those with robust local coverage. That means the communities most dependent on local accountable journalism are the ones losing it the fastest.⁶ The loss of local newspapers can also have financial consequences. A study published in the *Journal of Financial Economics* found that when a local newspaper closes, municipal borrowing costs increase by approximately 5–11 basis points, which researchers estimated could cost municipalities hundreds of thousands of dollars per bond issue. The researchers attributed the effect in part to the loss of local government monitoring.⁷

Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly calls people to speak truth, expose injustice, and protect those whose voices are ignored. The prophets challenged kings, defended the vulnerable, and refused to allow corruption to remain hidden. Jesus himself proclaimed that "the truth will set you free," reminding us that truth is not merely information but a foundation for faithful living. (John 8:31-32)

Local journalism serves a similar civic purpose. It helps communities bear witness to what is happening among them, making it possible for citizens to act with wisdom and hold those in authority accountable. Without trustworthy reporting, it becomes more difficult to recognize injustice, celebrate acts of compassion, or respond faithfully to the needs of our neighbors.

For Christians, supporting a culture that values truth is not simply about consuming news, it is about cultivating honesty, accountability, and a shared commitment to the common good.

2. The Defunding of Public Broadcasting across the Country

For many North Carolinians, public broadcasting provides more than national television and radio programming. It provides emergency alerts during hurricanes, local reporting on community issues, educational programming for children, and trusted information during times of crisis. As traditional newspapers have declined, many public broadcasting stations have become one of the few remaining sources of local journalism.

What changed beginning in 2025:

- In July 2025, Congress approved and President Trump signed a rescissions package that eliminated approximately \$1.1 billion in previously approved federal funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) for fiscal years 2026 and 2027. CPB announced in August 2025 that it would wind down its operations following the loss of federal funding.⁸
- PBS North Carolina lost \$4.8 million per year from the CPB, or 15% of its total budget. It offered voluntary buyouts to most of its 140-person staff, froze hiring, and eliminated vacant positions. Layoffs followed in September 2025.⁹
- WUNC lost approximately \$800,000 annually in federal CPB support, about 5% of its overall operating budget. WUNC has said the funding supported local news, programming, and emergency communications.¹⁰
- Charlotte's WFAE eliminated six positions in July 2025 as it responded to the loss of federal funding and other financial pressures. The elimination of federal funds resulted in the loss of roughly 10% of the station's budget.¹¹

- Most critically: CPB provided funding for emergency alert system infrastructure across the country. Without it, stations may be unable to afford upgrades, putting entire communities at risk during hurricanes and other emergencies.¹²

The federal funding cuts did not eliminate public broadcasting in North Carolina. Stations continue to receive revenue from individual donors, foundations, corporate sponsors, state support, and other sources. However, the loss of CPB funding has required stations to reduce expenses, restructure staffing, and seek additional revenue.

WUNC President Paul Hunton put it plainly: “The minute that emergency alert systems need upgrades, stations aren’t going to be able to pay for them, which really puts our listeners at risk and puts our communities at risk.”¹³

Faith communities understand that accurate information can save lives. During natural disasters, public health emergencies, or moments of community crisis, people depend on trusted sources to make decisions that protect themselves and others.

The Christian tradition teaches that wisdom begins by seeking truth and listening carefully before speaking (Proverbs 18:13). Public institutions that provide accurate, accessible information help communities respond wisely in moments of uncertainty.

When reliable sources of local information disappear, communities may have fewer ways to verify what they are hearing and fewer institutions dedicated to covering local needs. The burden can fall especially heavily on rural communities and people with fewer resources or less reliable access to alternative sources of information.

Christians are called to consider how communication systems contribute to the wellbeing of neighbors, especially those who are most vulnerable during times of crisis.

3. Disinformation: When Falsehoods are Designed to Deceive

The decline of local journalism and the fragmentation of the information environment create new challenges for communities trying to distinguish reliable information from false or misleading claims. Misinformation generally refers to false or misleading information, while disinformation refers to false information that is deliberately spread to deceive or influence people. The distinction matters because not everyone who shares false information intends to deceive.

Social media, artificial intelligence, and rapidly changing technology have made it increasingly difficult to distinguish authentic information from fabricated content.

What we are seeing in North Carolina and nationally:

- After Hurricane Helene struck western North Carolina in September 2024, then-Governor Roy Cooper described misinformation as a “grave” and potentially “deadly” threat. FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell said the volume and type of disinformation surrounding FEMA's response was the worst she had seen following a natural disaster.¹⁴
- The N.C. State Board of Elections maintains an active Combating Misinformation page and a dedicated email address (misinformation@ncsbe.gov) because election disinformation has become a routine feature of every election cycle in N.C., including false claims about voting dates, registration requirements, and election security.¹⁵
- A coalition of N.C. statewide advocacy organizations formally left the platform X (formerly Twitter) in January 2025 due to what they described as its role in spreading harmful disinformation, hate speech, and extremist content under its current leadership.¹⁶
- The growing ability to create convincing synthetic images, audio, and video has added another layer of difficulty to information verification. The World Economic Forum identifies misinformation and disinformation as a leading short-term global risk and identifies broader AI risks as an increasingly significant long-term concern.¹⁷

The challenge is not simply that false information exists. It is that communities must increasingly determine which sources deserve trust, what evidence supports a claim, and whether information has been manipulated or taken out of context.

UNC-Chapel Hill researcher and associate professor, Shannon McGregor, notes that most disinformation does not originate with ordinary people sharing things they believe are true. It originates with political leaders who know what they are saying is false.

“Most of the election-related false information that we see is disinformation, created on purpose to challenge people’s minds, persuade them to vote a certain way,” she said. “We see this mostly being shared from political leaders, political operatives.”¹⁸ When leaders spread lies, they protect themselves from the accountability that truth makes possible.

The Christian tradition places truth at the center of faithful living. The Ninth Commandment prohibits bearing false witness (Exodus 20:16) because lies destroy trust, distort justice, and harm relationships. Throughout Scripture, false testimony is repeatedly used to exploit the vulnerable and protect those in power. Naboth loses his life because false witnesses are brought against him (1 Kings 21). Jesus himself is condemned after false testimony is presented at his trial (Matthew 26:59–61).

The Bible therefore treats truth-telling as more than a personal virtue, it is essential to justice. Communities cannot care for one another well if they cannot agree on basic facts or if fear consistently overwhelms truth.

Followers of Christ are called to be people who seek wisdom, verify information before sharing it, resist the temptation to spread rumors, and approach difficult issues with humility. In a digital age where information moves faster than discernment, Christians have a unique opportunity to model careful listening, thoughtful speech, and a commitment to truth.

Discussion Questions

Work through as many of these as time allows. The questions move from personal to communal to civic. Begin where your group is most ready and go from there. You do not need to cover every question.

Personal & Scriptural

22. Zechariah calls us to “speak truth to one another.” What does truth-telling cost in your own life, in your family, your workplace, your congregation? When is it hard to tell the truth, even to people you love?
23. The Voter Guide says truth is “a pathway toward justice, reconciliation, and freedom.” Think of a time when you learned something true that changed how you acted or what you believed. What made it possible for you to know that truth?

Communal

24. More than half of North Carolina's counties are considered news deserts. Does your county have a local newspaper? Do you know who covers your local school board, your county commissioners, your city council? What happens to those institutions when no one is watching?
25. The Voter Guide distinguishes between what fear tells us ("control the narrative, spread confusion, dismiss inconvenient facts") and what love reveals ("truth-telling is not just journalism, it is a commandment"). Where do you see fear driving the information environment right now? Where do you see love?
26. Public broadcasting in North Carolina has been significantly defunded, stations that provided emergency alerts during Hurricane Helene are now struggling to survive. What is lost when communities lose their public broadcasters? Who is most affected?

Civic

27. The Voter Guide asks: "Does this candidate demonstrate honesty, transparency, and respect for the truth, even when it is inconvenient?" and "Does this candidate strengthen public trust through truthful leadership, or contribute to confusion, division, and distrust?" How would you apply those questions to what you know about candidates in your area?
 28. Disinformation after Hurricane Helene was described by federal officials as the worst they had ever seen. The communities most devastated by the storm were also most targeted by false information. What does that tell us about the relationship between vulnerability and disinformation? What does a faith community's responsibility look like in that context?
 29. If your congregation could take one concrete step to strengthen your community's access to trustworthy information, whether supporting local journalism, building media literacy, or something else — what would it be?
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Closing Practice

Choose one of the following to close your sessions:

Option A: A Litany for Truth

For every community that has lost its local news, every county where no one is watching what power does...

Send truth-tellers. Make us truth-tellers.

For every false story that has divided a family, misled a voter, or endangered a life...

Give us discernment. Give us courage. Give us the discipline not to spread what we have not verified.

For the journalists, editors, broadcasters, and community storytellers who do this work at great personal cost...

We give thanks. We offer our support. We will not take their work for granted.

For the call to bear witness faithfully in a world drowning in noise...

Give us ears to hear what is true, and voices willing to say so. Amen.

Option B: Moment of Witness

Invite each person to complete one sentence: “One source of information I trust, and why I trust it, is...” Go around the room without comment or debate. Then close with a brief prayer for discernment in an age of disinformation.

Optional: Action Pathways:

Lower Barrier	Deeper Engagement
Subscribe to local news If your county has a local newspaper or digital news outlet, subscribe or donate. Even a small subscription helps sustain a reporter covering your community. If your county has no local outlet, consider donating to Carolina Public Press, NC Newline, or EdNC, which cover the whole state.	Support public broadcasting in NC Become a sustaining member of your local public radio or TV station — WUNC, WFAE, WFDD, PBS NC, or another station in your area. Federal funding is gone; listener support is now the primary lifeline.

Practice media literacy Before sharing something on social media, pause and ask: Do I know this is true? Who is the source? What do they stand to gain? The N.C. State Board of Elections (ncsbe.gov) maintains a Combating Misinformation page with resources for checking election-related claims.	Host a media literacy workshop Partner with your local library, school, or community college to offer a media literacy workshop in your congregation's space. UNC's Center for Information, Technology and Public Life (citap.unc.edu) offers research and resources.
Attend a local government meeting In a news desert, a present citizen is a form of accountability journalism. Attend a school board, city council, or county commissioner meeting. Take notes. Tell your congregation what happened.	Contact your legislator about public media Contact your state legislators to urge them to protect state funding for PBS NC and public radio in the state budget. Contact your congressional representatives about the impact of CPB defunding on emergency alert infrastructure in your community.

Media Literacy: Becoming Faithful Consumers of Information

Instead of only asking whether media organizations tell the truth, Christians are also called to consider how we receive information.

Scripture repeatedly warns against believing every voice without discernment (Proverbs 14:15; 1 John 4:1). In today's media environment, faithful citizenship requires slowing down, asking questions, consulting multiple trusted sources, and resisting the pressure to react before understanding.

This process could include practical questions such as:

- Who created this information?
- What evidence supports it?
- Has it been confirmed by multiple reliable sources?
- Does this reporting help me understand my neighbor more fully?
- Am I sharing this because it is true—or because it reinforces what I already believe?

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Business Session

Sphere Session: Business

Opening Prayer

God of the harvest and the worker,

You gave the earth to all in common. You commanded rest for the laborer and the ox alike. You instituted Jubilee, a radical reordering of wealth, debt, and land, because you knew that without intervention, power concentrates and people are crushed. You told us in unmistakable terms: do not muzzle the ox while it treads the grain.

We gather in a state where more than a million people live in poverty, where the minimum wage has not risen in seventeen years, and where the richest five percent hold twenty-eight times the income of the poorest twenty percent. We do not believe this is your design.

Give us courage to name what we see, wisdom to understand what causes it, and the will to act. **Amen.**

Opening Reflection:

The Faithful Voter Guide opens its Business section with a stark claim: throughout Scripture, God consistently sides with workers, debtors, the poor, and those crushed by systems of exploitation. This is not a minor theme. Jesus speaks more about wealth and poverty than any other subject. The prophets devote more words to economic injustice than to any other form of wrongdoing.

The reason is not that money is evil. It is that economic life is deeply spiritual, it reveals what we value, whom we serve, and how we treat one another. Every budget is a moral document. Every wage is a statement about human dignity. Every tax code reflects a vision of who matters and who does not.

In this session we ask that question about North Carolina: whose labor builds this economy, and who actually gets to thrive from it?

Scripture and Theological Reflection

Isaiah 10:1–2 - *“Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights.”*

What the Story Holds

Isaiah does not condemn poverty. He condemns the laws that produce it. The prophet’s “woe” is directed not at the poor but at the lawmakers and rulers who have arranged the legal and economic systems of their society to extract wealth from the vulnerable and concentrate it among the powerful. This is a crucial distinction: Isaiah understands poverty not as a natural state or a personal failure, but as the predictable result of specific choices made by people with power.

The biblical vision of economic life is built on several interlocking commitments. Sabbath, one day in seven, one year in seven, and one year in fifty, was an economic practice as much as a spiritual one. Workers and animals rested. Fields lay fallow. Debts were cancelled. In the Jubilee year described in Leviticus 25, land was returned to its original family, slaves were freed, and debts were wiped clean. The accumulation of economic advantage across generations was deliberately interrupted because God knew that without such interruption, inequality compounds until it becomes permanent.

Jesus enters this tradition and extends it. He heals without charge. He feeds crowds without a business model. He praises the widow’s two small coins over the large contributions of the wealthy, because the widow gave from her poverty. He tells the rich young ruler that the one thing he lacks is willingness to let go of his wealth for the sake of the poor. He invokes Isaiah 61 as his own mission statement: to bring good news to the poor, to release the captives, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, which is Jubilee language.

None of this makes Jesus an economist. But it makes the economy a spiritual matter, one that the church cannot avoid without abandoning something essential to its own faith.

Economists use the term “K-shaped recovery” to describe what happened after the 2020 pandemic: the upper branch of the “K” represents those whose incomes and wealth grew, and the lower branch represents those who fell. North Carolina’s economy, heading into 2026, looks increasingly K-shaped not just in recovery but as a structural condition. The question Isaiah poses is still the right one: who made the laws and choices that produced this shape? And what do God’s people owe those on the lower branch?

What's Happening in North Carolina (Policy Landscape)

This section is for information, not debate. The facilitator may read it aloud, ask someone to read it, or distribute it as a handout before discussion. The goal is a shared baseline of facts.

1. The Minimum Wage: Seventeen Years and Counting

Every day, North Carolinians go to work caring for children, preparing meals, stocking shelves, cleaning buildings, harvesting crops, serving customers, manufacturing products, and providing countless other goods and services that keep our communities running. Work is one of the primary ways people provide for their families and contribute to their communities.

North Carolina's minimum wage has not changed in seventeen years. As of 2026, it remains \$7.25 per hour, the federal minimum, unchanged since July 24, 2009. No other significant wage floor protection exists at the state level.

What the numbers mean in daily life:

- A full-time worker earning \$7.25 per hour for 40 hours a week earns approximately \$15,080 per year before taxes, well below the federal poverty line for a family of three (\$26,650) or four (\$32,150).¹
- A family of four in North Carolina needs an annual income of more than \$97,500 to cover modest living expenses, according to the NC Budget & Tax Center.²
- Tipped workers in N.C. can be paid as little as \$2.13 per hour, with the expectation that tips will bring total earnings to at least \$7.25, a protection that leaves workers dependent on customer generosity for their basic income.³
- House Bill 353, introduced in 2025, proposed increasing the state minimum wage to \$10 in 2026, \$12 in 2027, \$14 in 2028, \$16 in 2029, and \$18 in 2030, followed by annual inflation adjustments.⁴ The bill has not become law.
- North Carolina workers will not be among the 8.3 million nationwide whose states raised the minimum wage in 2026. Virginia, N.C.'s neighbor, raised its minimum wage to \$12.41 in 2025 and indexes it annually to inflation.⁵

The gap between the minimum wage and what many households need to meet basic expenses has become a central issue in debates over wages and economic policy. The Living Income Standard is not a measure of poverty; it is an estimate of what households need to cover basic expenses without relying on public assistance.⁶ From

June 2024 to June 2025, average wages for N.C. workers grew 3.4%, but housing costs grew 3.8% and household energy costs grew 6% in the same period. For workers at the bottom of the wage scale, raises are being outpaced by the cost of staying housed and warm.⁷

The Bible does not treat a poverty wage as a natural condition. It treats it as a policy choice and a moral one. When workers labor full-time and cannot feed their family, the Voter Guide names it plainly: we are called to build economic systems that allow all people, not just the privileged, to live, work, rest, and flourish with dignity. That is not a left or right position. It is a biblical one.

These differing perspectives invite an important question for Christians: How should an economy balance the wellbeing of workers, the sustainability of businesses, and the needs of local communities?

Whether discussing wages, benefits, or economic opportunity, Christians are invited to consider what it means for work to sustain life rather than merely survive it. Our economic decisions should reflect not only productivity and profit but also the dignity of every person created in God's image.

2. Poverty and Inequality: Who Is Left Behind and Why

North Carolina has experienced significant economic growth over the past decade. New businesses, expanding industries, and population growth have created opportunities across much of the state. At the same time, not every community has benefited equally from that growth.

For many families, stable employment remains difficult to find, wages have not kept pace with rising costs, and long-standing disparities continue to shape opportunities across generations.

The current picture in North Carolina:

- In 2024, 12.5% of North Carolinians, more than 1.3 million people, lived in poverty, the 17th highest rate in the country. This figure has shown no significant change since 2023.⁸
- The child poverty rate is 16.2%, meaning more than 374,000 children in N.C. lived in poverty in 2024, the 15th highest rate in the nation.⁹
- Poverty is not evenly distributed: poverty rates are significantly higher among Black, Latine, and American Indian North Carolinians than among white North Carolinians¹⁰, a persistent pattern tied to structural barriers and historical discrimination in employment, wealth-building, and economic opportunity.
- The richest 5% of North Carolinians hold 29 times the income of the poorest 20%. From 2023 to 2024, N.C. was the only state in the nation to experience a statistically significant increase in income inequality.¹¹
- 20 of N.C.'s 40 Tier 1 (most economically distressed) counties have held that designation for more than a decade. 19 counties operate in what analysts describe as a permanent recession, with unemployment rates 20-55% higher than the state average, and are concentrated in the northeast, in counties with the highest percentage of Black North Carolinians.¹²

Poverty is rarely caused by a single factor. Employment opportunities, wages, educational access, housing costs, transportation, healthcare, childcare, historic patterns of discrimination, and public policy all contribute to whether families are able to build financial stability over time.

Research shows that public supports such as Social Security, the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit, and SNAP substantially reduce poverty in North Carolina. A recent analysis estimates that, without these supports, North Carolina's Supplemental Poverty Measure poverty rate would be 26.5%, compared with about 14% with them.¹³

Tariffs imposed by the federal government in 2025 add an estimated additional \$627 in annual costs per consumer in North Carolina, according to the Economic Policy Institute, a burden that falls disproportionately on those with the least ability to absorb it.¹⁴

The Voter Guide calls on us to confront systems that trap people in cycles of poverty, debt, or exploitation, and to measure economic success not only by profit, but by the well-being of people, communities, and the earth itself. When an entire region of our state has been in economic distress for a decade or more, it is not a personal failing of

the people who live there. It is a structural injustice that demands a structural response. Isaiah's question is the right one: who made these laws, and in whose interest were they made?

3. Worker Protections: Rest, Security, and Human Dignity

Most North Carolinians spend a significant portion of their lives at work. The conditions under which people work, including time to recover from illness, care for family members, or respond to emergencies, shape not only individual wellbeing but also the health of families, businesses, and communities.

Questions about worker protections often involve balancing the needs of employees, employers, and the broader economy. They also raise deeper questions about what workers need to live healthy, sustainable lives.

What North Carolina law does and does not require:

- Paid sick leave: North Carolina does not currently require most private employers to provide paid sick leave.¹⁵ Federal law also does not generally require private employers to provide paid sick leave.¹⁶
- No paid family leave requirement. Workers who need to care for a newborn, a seriously ill family member, or their own serious health condition have no state-guaranteed paid leave. They have only the federal Family and Medical Leave (FMLA), which is unpaid and only applies to employers with 50 or more employees.¹⁷
- North Carolina is a right-to-work state, meaning workers cannot be required to join or remain members of a union as a condition of employment. In 2025, just 2.5% of North Carolina's wage and salary workers were union members, compared with 10% nationally, giving the state one of the lowest union membership rates in the country, limiting workers' collective bargaining power.¹⁸
- No state law requiring rest breaks for workers 16 and older. Only children under 16 are guaranteed a 30-minute break after five hours of work.¹⁹
- The N.C. Retaliatory Employment Discrimination Act does protect workers from being fired for filing workers' compensation claims, wage complaints, or safety complaints, an important but limited protection²⁰

The absence of paid sick leave has a direct human cost. When a worker cannot afford to stay home sick, they go to work ill, risking their own health and their coworkers'. When a parent cannot take paid leave to care for a sick child, they must choose

between their job and their child's welfare. These are not abstract policy questions. They are daily realities for millions of North Carolina workers.

Similarly, North Carolina's lack of a statewide paid family-leave requirement means that access to paid time away from work for childbirth, caregiving, or other family needs depends largely on an employer's policies or other available benefits. Federal FMLA protections provide unpaid leave only to eligible employees of covered employers.

From the creation story to the Sabbath commandments, Scripture teaches that human beings are more than what they produce. God commands rest not only for landowners but also for servants, laborers, immigrants, livestock, and the land itself. Rest is woven into God's vision of justice because every person bears God's image.

The question is not simply whether workers have legal protections. It is whether our workplaces allow people to care for themselves, their families, and their communities while contributing their gifts through meaningful work.

Faith invites us to imagine an economy where businesses can thrive, workers are treated with dignity, families are supported, and prosperity is shared in ways that strengthen the common good.

Discussion Questions

Work through as many of these as time allows. The questions move from personal to communal to civic. Begin where your group is most ready and go from there. You do not need to cover every question.

Personal & Scriptural

30. Isaiah names specific lawmakers and calls their laws oppressive. That is strong language. Have you ever thought of a law, a wage law, a labor regulation, a tax policy, as a moral or spiritual matter? What makes it hard or easy to think about economics that way?
31. The biblical vision of Jubilee interrupts the accumulation of economic advantage every fifty years, debts cancelled, land returned, slaves freed. If we took Jubilee seriously as a policy framework, what would it look like today? What would it cost? Who would benefit?

Communal

32. North Carolina was the only state in 2023-2024 to experience a statistically significant increase in income inequality. The richest 5% earn 29 times the income of the poorest 20%. Where do you see this gap in your own community, and where does your congregation stand in relation to it?
33. The Voter Guide says: "Jesus was always on the side of the worker, the debtor, the one crushed by the system." Does your congregation have a culture of talking about economic justice alongside personal finance or individual generosity? What would it take to open that conversation?

Civic

34. The Voter Guide asks: "How would this candidate's economic vision affect workers, families, and those struggling to meet basic needs?" and "Does this candidate prioritize human dignity and shared flourishing, or primarily the accumulation of wealth and power?" How would you apply those questions to candidates in your area right now?
 35. Some bills to raise N.C.'s minimum wage died in committee in 2025, as they have every year for over a decade. Paid sick leave legislation has been stalled for years. What does it say about our civic priorities that these laws cannot pass in North Carolina? Who has the power to change that and how?
 36. If your congregation could take one concrete step to stand with workers in N.C. whether through advocacy, direct service, or congregational purchasing and employment practice, what would it be?
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Closing Practice

Choose one of the following to close your sessions:

Option A: A Litany for Workers

For every worker who has gone to work sick because they could not afford to stay home...

We see you. Your labor is sacred. You deserve better.

For every family that works full-time and still cannot make ends meet...

This is not your failure. It is our collective responsibility.

For the communities in our state that have been economically distressed for a generation...

We will not call this inevitable. We will not look away.

For the vision of Jubilee, where debts are forgiven, workers rest, and no one is trapped...

Make us people who believe this way is possible and who act like it. Amen.

Option B: Moment of Witness

Invite each person to complete one sentence: "One worker in my life, someone I depend on but rarely think about, is..." Go around the room without comment. Then close with a brief prayer naming the workers who were mentioned, and the dignity of their labor.

Optional: Action Pathways:

Lower Barrier	Deeper Engagement
Learn your county's economic snapshot The NC Budget & Tax Center publishes annual Economic County Snapshots for all 100 N.C. counties at ncbudget.org. Look up your county: What is the poverty rate? The median wage? The child poverty rate? Bring what you find to your congregation.	Advocate for paid sick leave SB 622, the Healthy Families and Healthy Workplaces Act, remains in committee. Contact your state senator to urge them to support paid sick leave. The NC Justice Center (ncjustice.org) has resources and action tools.

Review your congregation's own employment practices

Does your congregation pay its staff a living wage? Does it provide paid sick leave? Many churches employ part-time and hourly workers in exactly the kinds of jobs with the fewest protections. Faithful witness begins at home.

Use the Faithful Voter Guide's discernment questions

Apply the Business section's Questions for Discernment to every candidate you vote for this cycle. Ask: How would this candidate's economic vision affect workers and families struggling to meet basic needs?

Support a local worker center or advocacy organization

Connect with organizations working for economic justice in N.C., including the NC Justice Center (ncjustice.org), Action NC (actionnc.org), or your local community organizing group. Ask how your congregation can show up.

Preach and teach on economic justice

Invite your pastor or faith formation team to include the theology of Jubilee, Sabbath, and prophetic witness in worship and education. Economic justice is not a political topic. It is a biblical one.

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Arts & Entertainment Session

Sphere Session: Arts and Entertainment

Opening Prayer

God of every song ever sung in the dark,

You are the first artist, the one who spoke light into being and called it good, who shaped the human body from dust, who planted a garden and walked in it in the cool of the day. You gave us the Psalms, poems of anguish and praise, protest and lament, because you knew that some truths can only be told in song.

We gather in a time when stories are being silenced, when artists are losing the resources to create, and when entire communities are being told that their histories and their experiences are too dangerous to be named. We do not believe this is your design.

Tune our hearts to hear what beauty is trying to say. Open our hands to protect what is threatened. And remind us that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. **Amen**

Opening Reflection:

The Faithful Voter Guide opens its Arts & Entertainment section with a declaration: art helps people tell the truth, heal what words cannot reach, and envision what has not yet existed. That is not a modest claim. It is a claim that art does something essential, something that legislation cannot do, that arguments cannot do, that even theology sometimes cannot do alone.

Scripture understands this. The Psalms are not theology in the traditional sense. They are lament and praise, cry and song. The prophets write in poetry because poetry reaches places prose cannot. Jesus teaches in parables because a story can crack open a heart that a lecture leaves unmoved. The spirituals that enslaved people sang in cotton fields were not mere entertainment, they were theology, resistance, survival, and hope all at once.

When we ask what is happening to arts and culture in North Carolina today, we are asking a spiritual question: whose stories are being told, whose are being suppressed, and who gets to decide?

Scripture and Theological Reflection

Psalm 96:1 - *"Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth."*

What the Story Holds

Psalm 96 is a song of proclamation, an invitation to the whole earth, not just Israel, to join in creative praise. The command to sing a "new" song is striking. It is not a command to sing the old song better, or to preserve the traditions of the past unchanged. It is an invitation to ongoing creativity, to keep making, keep expressing, keep finding new forms for ancient truths.

This creative impulse runs through the entire biblical narrative. God is described as a potter, a builder, a gardener, a singer who rejoices over creation with loud singing (Zephaniah 3:17). Bezalel, the craftsman whom God fills with the Spirit to create the Tabernacle, is the first person in Scripture described as being filled with the Spirit of God and he is filled for the purpose of artistic creation: to make things of beauty for the community of faith.

The Psalms themselves model the full range of human experience in artistic form: anger at God (Psalm 88), lament over destruction (Psalm 137), ecstatic praise (Psalm 150), intimate trust (Psalm 23). Nothing is off-limits. Nothing is too dangerous. Nothing is too painful or too joyful or too politically charged to become a song.

The prophets understood that art is not neutral. Amos challenges Israel's festival music because it has become a cover for injustice, the songs are beautiful but the singers are exploiting the poor. Isaiah uses extended poetic metaphors to make injustice visible in ways that structured arguments could not. The prophetic tradition knows that beauty and truth are not in opposition. Used faithfully, art is one of justice's most powerful tools.

The theologian Walter Brueggemann writes that prophetic ministry has two tasks: to criticize the dominant culture's assumptions, and to energize people with a vision of an alternative future. He calls it prophetic imagination. Art, at its best, does both. It names what is broken. And it makes visible what is possible.

The spirituals named the reality of bondage: "Go down, Moses." They also named the reality of hope: "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." Both were true at once. Both were necessary. That is what the Voter Guide means when it says "the prophetic imagination of the oppressed has always been more powerful than the fear of the oppressor." Art cannot be enslaved, even when artists are. Story cannot be fully silenced, even when storytellers are threatened. Beauty persists.

In North Carolina right now, there are people working hard to control which stories get told, which books get read, and who can afford to make art at all. Those are not neutral policy questions. They are spiritual ones.

What's Happening in North Carolina (Policy Landscape)

This section is for information, not debate. The facilitator may read it aloud, ask someone to read it, or distribute it as a handout before discussion. The goal is a shared baseline of facts.

1. Book Bans and Library Censorship: Who Decides What We Can Read?

Stories shape how we understand ourselves, our neighbors, and the world around us. Children discover empathy through books. Adults wrestle with history through memoirs, novels, and biographies. Libraries and schools provide places where people encounter ideas, perspectives, and experiences that may differ from their own.

North Carolina has been at the center of a national wave of book challenges and library censorship that has intensified significantly since 2023. The targets are not random. They are overwhelmingly books that deal with race, LGBTQ+ identities, and difficult historical truths.

What has happened in North Carolina:

- House Bill 636, the School Library Book Ban, passed the N.C. House in April 2025 on a party-line vote. It would establish “community library advisory committees” (five parents and five school employees) to review all school library materials. Schools that do not comply are subject to civil lawsuits from any county resident, with damages up to \$5,000 per violation. The State Board of Education would maintain a public database of all rejected books. The bill advanced to the Senate, where it remains active.¹
- North Carolina's 2023 Parents' Bill of Rights gives parents a number of rights related to their children's education, including the right to inspect and purchase textbooks and supplementary instructional materials and to review records of materials their child has borrowed from a school library.²
- School library catalogs: State law now requires local school boards to maintain a searchable online catalog of library books available at each school and allows parents or guardians to identify books that their own child may not borrow.³

- North Carolina has been among the states experiencing significant book-challenge activity. In 2023, more than 100 titles were targeted for censorship in North Carolina, with challenges frequently involving books addressing LGBTQ+ identities, race, racism, and other topics related to identity and lived experience.⁴
- In December 2025, the Randolph County Board of Commissioners dissolved the entire Randolph County Public Library board of trustees after the board refused, on a vote that cited the risk of a “slippery slope” toward censorship, to remove a single children’s book featuring a transgender character from library shelves.⁵

Many of these efforts have been presented as a way to give parents greater involvement in decisions about the materials available to their children and to ensure that school libraries provide age-appropriate resources. However, these policies raise broader questions about access to information for entire communities.

When books are removed from school or public libraries because they address particular identities, historical events, or viewpoints, the issue extends beyond parental choice. It becomes a question of whether a small number of individuals or government officials can determine which ideas and stories are available to everyone.

The effects can reach beyond the books that are formally removed. Librarians and educators may avoid acquiring or teaching certain materials out of concern that they will face complaints, legal challenges, or professional consequences. As a result, students and communities may encounter a narrower range of perspectives and have fewer opportunities to engage thoughtfully with history, literature, and the experiences of others.

History demonstrates that censorship often expands over time. Once institutions begin restricting access to ideas because they are considered controversial or uncomfortable, the authority to decide what is acceptable can continue to grow. A healthy democracy depends on people having the freedom to explore different perspectives, ask difficult questions, and discern truth through learning, dialogue, and critical thinking.

The Bible itself contains stories of violence, injustice, betrayal, grief, failure, redemption, and hope. Israel's history is preserved not by removing its difficult chapters but by remembering them and wrestling with what they mean.

Stories are not simply entertainment. They form identity.

The church has long understood that stories help us cultivate wisdom, empathy, and moral imagination. Reading about lives different from our own can deepen compassion, challenge assumptions, and help us better understand our neighbors.

As Christians, we are invited to consider not only what stories we tell but also whose stories are missing, whose voices are difficult to hear, and how communities can encourage both thoughtful discernment and a commitment to truth.

2. Arts Funding: Uncertainty at the Federal and State Level

Music, theater, dance, visual art, literature, and cultural traditions enrich communities in ways that extend far beyond entertainment. The arts preserve history, strengthen local economies, foster creativity, and create opportunities for people of all ages to express joy, grief, hope, and identity.

Across North Carolina, arts organizations serve schools, libraries, museums, community centers, and congregations. Many rely on a combination of public funding, private philanthropy, earned revenue, and volunteer support. Arts organizations across North Carolina are navigating a funding landscape that shifted dramatically in 2025 and 2026, creating genuine uncertainty for institutions that serve communities across the state, from rural arts councils to major cultural institutions.

What has changed:

- The Trump administration proposed eliminating the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) entirely. Congress rejected that proposal for fiscal year 2026, preserving the agency's \$207 million national budget, but the NEA eliminated its Challenge America grant program for FY 2026 and shifted its remaining grant priorities toward projects tied to the nation's 250th anniversary, leaving many arts organizations that had relied on Challenge America grants without a comparable funding source.⁶
- The N.C. General Assembly's FY 2026–27 budget was enacted after more than 1,000 days without a new state budget. The budget maintained funding for the N.C. Arts Council rather than cutting arts grants, a relief for arts organizations facing broader financial pressures. However, it also reduced the governor's appointment authority over the N.C. Arts Council, giving the legislature a greater role in selecting the council's leadership.⁷
- Arts organizations statewide are navigating the elimination of federal DEI-related grants, which funded many programs serving underrepresented artists and communities. The ripple effects are still being measured.

These changes do not mean that public arts funding has disappeared. Rather, the way some public arts dollars are distributed is changing, creating uncertainty for organizations that have depended on particular grant programs.

The arts sector employs hundreds of thousands of people nationally and contributes billions in economic activity, but in communities where arts organizations close or scale back, the loss is not only economic. It is cultural. It is communal. It is, in the biblical sense, a loss of the capacity to sing a new song.

For schools and community organizations, changes in grant structures can affect how they access teaching artists, educational programming, exhibitions, performances, and other cultural resources. The impact will vary by organization and community.

The Voter Guide says we are called “to support artists, educators, storytellers, musicians, and cultural institutions that enrich community life.” Arts funding is not a luxury. In many communities public arts funding is the only thing that makes cultural life possible. When it disappears, the communities that lose it are the ones that can least afford to replace it with private philanthropy.

The question for communities is not simply whether public dollars should support the arts. It is also what role culture and creativity play in the flourishing of communities, who has access to those opportunities, and how public and private resources should be used to sustain them.

3. The Control of Narrative: History, Heritage, and the Telling of Hard Truths

At the heart of every debate about books, curriculum, and arts funding is a deeper question: who gets to tell the story of who we are?

In North Carolina, that question is being answered in real time through policy decisions that determine which histories are accessible, which voices are amplified, and which are silenced.

The landscape in North Carolina:

- The DEI ban (Senate Bill 227, enacted June 2026) prohibits instruction on “divisive concepts” in N.C. public schools. While it preserves the teaching of historical oppression, educators report significant confusion about where the line is. In practice, the chilling effect may result in teachers avoiding topics related to race, discrimination, and marginalized histories even where the law does not technically prohibit them.⁸
- Book challenges are not only individual disputes; they can become organized campaigns. The American Library Association documented 4,235 unique titles challenged nationally in 2025, the second-highest number on record. Nearly 92% of challenges were initiated by pressure groups, government officials, or other decision-makers, while fewer than 3% originated with individual parents. 66% percent of the challenged titles were ultimately documented as banned from libraries, although ALA cautions that its figures represent only reported challenges.⁹
- North Carolina has experienced significant book-challenge activity of its own. The North Carolina Library Association's 2025 censorship survey documented 16 challenges involving 39 unique titles among the libraries that responded. The survey had responses from only 2.7% of North Carolina libraries, so it should be understood as a snapshot rather than a complete count of challenges statewide.¹⁰
- The pressure can influence what educators and librarians choose before a formal ban occurs. Reporting from educators and school librarians describe concerns about challenges, professional consequences, and the need to “step on eggshells” when selecting materials. This is sometimes called *self-censorship*: materials may never be formally challenged because educators or librarians anticipate controversy and choose not to purchase, teach, display, or recommend them.¹¹

The Voter Guide puts it plainly: “A people without their story is a people without their power.” This is not hyperbole. The histories that are suppressed, the books that are removed, the artists who cannot afford to create, these are not minor inconveniences. They are the slow erosion of the capacity of communities to know themselves, to grieve their losses, to celebrate their inheritance, and to imagine their future.

For people of faith, this creates an opportunity for deeper reflection rather than a simple political conclusion.

The Bible is, in many ways, a story of a people remembering. Israel remembers slavery before celebrating freedom. The prophets remember injustice before proclaiming hope. The Gospels preserve the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for generations to come.

Biblical faith does not require God's people to pretend that difficult history did not happen. Instead, Scripture repeatedly calls communities to remember honestly, learn from the past, confess wrongdoing, and pursue reconciliation.

That raises important questions for Christian communities:

How do we preserve difficult histories without reducing people to their worst moments? How do we teach truth without using history to cultivate contempt? How do we make room for stories that have historically been overlooked while remaining committed to accuracy and discernment?

Communities need both truthful memory and thoughtful discernment. The challenge is not simply deciding which stories to tell, but learning how to tell them honestly, responsibly, and in ways that help future generations pursue wisdom, justice, reconciliation, and peace.

Discussion Questions

Work through as many of these as time allows. The questions move from personal to communal to civic. Begin where your group is most ready and go from there. You do not need to cover every question.

Personal & Scriptural

37. Psalm 96 calls us to sing a “new” song, not to preserve the old one unchanged, but to keep creating. Has there been a moment in your own life when a piece of art, a song, a book, a film, a painting, told you a truth about yourself or your faith that you couldn’t have accessed any other way? What made it possible?
38. The Voter Guide says the spirituals sung in bondage “carried the theology of freedom.” Can you think of examples from history or from your own tradition where art was used to resist injustice or sustain hope? What does that suggest about art’s relationship to faith?

Communal

39. The books most frequently challenged in N.C. and nationally deal with race, LGBTQ+ identities, and difficult histories. The Voter Guide says “a people without

their story is a people without their power.” Who loses the most when those specific stories are removed from libraries and classrooms? Who is being protected and from what?

40. Arts funding in N.C. serves rural communities that cannot sustain arts institutions through private philanthropy alone. When that funding disappears, who is most affected? What does your faith say about the responsibility of a community to sustain the cultural life of its most isolated members?

Civic

41. The Voter Guide asks: “Does this candidate value the arts, cultural expression, and honest engagement with history?” and “Does this candidate’s vision encourage creativity, truth-telling, and cultural flourishing, or fear, censorship, and exclusion?” How would you apply those questions to what you know about candidates in your area?
42. House Bill 636 allows any county resident, not just parents of students, to sue a school district over a library book. What does it say about democratic governance when the mechanism for challenging a library book is a lawsuit, rather than a community conversation? What kind of civic culture does that create?
43. If your congregation could take one concrete step to support the arts, protect the freedom to read, or sustain cultural life in your community, what would it be?
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Closing Practice

Choose one of the following to close your sessions:

Option A: A Litany for Artists and Storytellers

For every child who has found themselves in a book, and every child who has not yet...

May every child know: your story belongs here. You belong here.

For the librarians, teachers, artists, and storytellers who do this work under increasing threat...

We see your courage. We stand with you. Your work is sacred.

For the stories that have been silenced, the books that have been removed, the voices that have been told they do not belong...

We will keep telling them. We will keep reading them. We will not let them be lost.

For the call to sing a new song in a fearful time...

Give us imagination, give us courage, and give us each other. Amen.

Option B: Moment of Witness

Invite each person to complete one sentence: "A story, song, piece of art, or creative expression I want to protect is..." Go around the room without comment. Then close with a brief prayer naming what was shared and asking for the courage to keep those things alive.

Optional: Action Pathways:

Lower Barrier	Deeper Engagement
Read a challenged book Check out a frequently challenged book from your local library. The American Library Association (ala.org) maintains an annual list of the most challenged books. Read one and bring it back to your group.	Contact your legislators about HB 636 House Bill 636, the school library book ban bill, is in the N.C. Senate. Contact your state senator to share your perspective as a person of faith on the freedom to read and the role of libraries in your community. The ACLU of N.C. (acluofnorthcarolina.org) has resources and a tracking page for HB 636.

Support your local library Get a library card if you don't have one. Attend a library board meeting. Make a donation to your library's Friends group. Show up to a library board meeting when a book challenge is on the agenda. Your presence matters.	Support local artists and arts organizations Attend a local arts event. Buy a local artist's work. Donate to your local arts council or a N.C. arts organization serving marginalized communities. Visit ncarts.org to find N.C. Arts Council grantees in your area.
Create something Sing a new song. Write a poem. Draw a picture. Share a story. Make something. The act of creation is itself a form of resistance to the forces that would reduce human life to productivity and compliance.	Host a Banned Books event at your congregation Partner with your local library or bookstore to host a Banned Books reading event at your congregation. Invite community members to read aloud from challenged books. Pair it with a discussion of what it means faithfully to protect the freedom to read.

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Religion Session

Sphere Session: Religion

Opening Prayer

God of every people and every tongue,

You have always been larger than our theologies. You have always broken out of the boxes we build to contain you. You gave us faith not as a weapon but as a way of life, not to conquer but to serve, not to dominate but to love.

We gather in a time when your name is being invoked to justify actions that contradict your character, when the language of faith is being used to exclude rather than to welcome, to harm rather than to heal, to accumulate power rather than to give it away. We are not the first of your people to navigate this. We will not be the last.

Give us the wisdom to know the difference between the living God and the idols we build in God's name. Give us the courage to name that difference out loud. And give us the humility to know that we, too, are always in danger of distortion. **Amen.**

Opening Reflection:

The Faithful Voter Guide opens its Religion section with a bracing observation: the same Christian tradition that was invoked to defend slavery also inspired Harriet Tubman. The same faith that blessed apartheid also empowered Desmond Tutu to dismantle it. The same tradition invoked to exclude has also, again and again, been the tradition that opened the door.

This is not a comfortable observation. It is an honest one. Faith is powerful, powerful enough to liberate and powerful enough to destroy. The question is never simply whether someone invokes God. It is always: what kind of God are they invoking, and what is being asked of the rest of us in that God's name?

In North Carolina today, these questions are not academic. They are being decided in legislative sessions, in school board meetings, in courtrooms, and in congregations. This session asks people of faith to engage them, not as observers, but as participants with a stake in the answer.

Scripture and Theological Reflection

James 1:27 - *"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."*

What the Story Holds

James is writing to a community that has gotten confused about the purpose of religion. The people have their rituals. They have their doctrines. They have the language of faith. But James is not interested in any of that. He has a single, stark definition: pure and undefiled religion is care for orphans and widows, the most vulnerable people in his world. Everything else is commentary.

This is not a minor theme. It runs through the entire biblical witness. The prophets, Amos, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, do not spend their energy challenging Israel's theology. They challenge Israel's practice. "Your solemn assemblies . . . I cannot stand," God says through Amos. "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause." The problem is not that Israel worships God. The problem is that Israel's worship has become disconnected from the lives of the vulnerable.

Jesus inherits this tradition and sharpens it. In Matthew 25, the standard of judgment is not doctrinal correctness. It is whether you fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, visited the prisoner. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me." The encounter with God is the encounter with the vulnerable. We cannot separate them.

The Voter Guide names what happens when this biblical standard is abandoned: "The distortion of faith into a tool of domination." This is not a new phenomenon. The same Bible used to justify the Crusades also produced Francis of Assisi. The same tradition that blessed the transatlantic slave trade also produced the abolition movement. The same Christianity invoked by colonizers was also carried by missionaries whose converts ultimately dismantled colonial rule.

What makes the difference? The Voter Guide offers a clear answer: "True religion is caring for the orphan and the widow. It is humility before God, not dominion over neighbor. Love calls us to witness boldly to our convictions while respecting the humanity and freedom of others."

When religion is used to accumulate political power, to exclude those who differ from us, to force one community's beliefs on everyone else, it has, in the biblical tradition, become idolatry. Not because the words are wrong, but because the God being

worshipped is no longer the God of James 1:27. It has become the god of power, of purity, of domination, a god made in our own image.

North Carolina is one of the epicenters of this debate in America right now. The lines run through our churches, our campuses, our legislative chambers, and our families. People of faith need to be in the center of these conversations.

What's Happening in North Carolina (Policy Landscape)

This section is for information, not debate. The facilitator may read it aloud, ask someone to read it, or distribute it as a handout before discussion. The goal is a shared baseline of facts.

1. Christian Nationalism: When Faith and Political Power Become Entwined

Christian nationalism is the belief that the United States is, or should be, a distinctly Christian nation and that its laws and public institutions should reflect a particular understanding of Christian values. While expressions of faith have long influenced American public life, Christian nationalism goes beyond individual religious belief by merging religious identity with national identity and political power.

In recent years, this ideology has become increasingly visible in American politics, moving from the margins of public discourse into mainstream political debates. North Carolina has been one of the states where this trend is especially evident. Legislative proposals, public officials, advocacy organizations, and local political movements have all reflected growing debates about the relationship between Christianity, government, public education, and civic life.

North Carolina at the center of the Christian nationalism debate:

- According to the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), more than one in three North Carolinians (36%) either adhere to or sympathize with Christian nationalist beliefs, a higher rate than the national average.¹
- Support for Christian nationalism is especially strong among frequent churchgoers. In North Carolina, 68% of people who attend religious services weekly qualify as either adherents or sympathizers, underscoring the importance of equipping faith communities to distinguish Christian faith from Christian nationalist ideology.²

- Nearly two-thirds of North Carolina Republicans (65%) qualify as Christian nationalism adherents or sympathizers, compared with 34% of independents and 19% of Democrats.³

These developments reflect an ongoing debate within Christianity itself. Many pastors, theologians, and denominational leaders, including evangelical, Baptist, Catholic, mainline Protestant, Orthodox, and historically Black church leaders, have offered differing perspectives on the relationship between Christian faith, patriotism, religious liberty, and political authority.

Jesus consistently resisted attempts to use political power to establish God's kingdom. When crowds sought to make him king, he withdrew (John 6:15). When questioned about Roman authority, he distinguished between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God (Matthew 22:21). Before Pilate, he declared, "My kingdom is not from this world" (John 18:36).

Throughout Christian history, believers have wrestled with how to witness faithfully in society without confusing allegiance to Christ with allegiance to any nation, political party, or government. Christian nationalism does not only harm non-Christians, it distorts Christianity itself, replacing the God of James 1:27 with a god of political power. That is a theological problem, not a political one.

The question for people of faith is not whether faith should shape public life, it should. The question is whether our public engagement reflects the character of Christ: humility rather than domination, service rather than coercion, love rather than fear.

2. Religious Freedom: Whose Freedom, and for Whom?

The language of religious freedom has become one of the most contested phrases in American public life. Nearly everyone claims to support it. But the question of what it means, and whose freedom it protects, is at the heart of some of the most consequential legal and policy battles in N.C. and nationally.

What is happening in North Carolina and nationally:

- In *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District* (2022), the U.S. Supreme Court held that a public-school football coach's midfield prayers were protected by the First Amendment. The decision emphasized protection for private religious expression by public employees and rejected the lower court's analysis of the Establishment Clause.⁴
- In *Mahmoud v. Taylor* (2025), the Supreme Court held that Montgomery County, Maryland, parents were entitled to a preliminary injunction allowing them to opt their children out of certain instruction involving LGBTQ-related storybooks because the school system's policy substantially burdened their religious exercise.⁵
- North Carolina's Constitution has protected religious freedom since 1776, stating: "All persons have a natural and inalienable right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own consciences, and no human authority shall, in any case whatever, control or interfere with the rights of conscience." That protection has historically been understood to protect all faiths equally and to prohibit government establishment of any single religious tradition.⁶

The core tension is this: religious freedom, properly understood, protects everyone's right to believe and worship according to each one's own conscience. When "religious freedom" is invoked to allow one religious community to impose its beliefs on others through law, or to exempt themselves from laws that protect the rights of others, it has changed meaning. It is no longer about freedom of conscience. It is about legal privilege for one tradition.

Religious freedom is rooted in the conviction that faith cannot be compelled. Throughout Scripture, God invites people into covenant but does not force belief. Jesus calls disciples to follow him freely, never through coercion.

North Carolina's constitutional protection of freedom of conscience reflects a long Christian tradition, particularly among early immigrants (Pilgrims, Puritans, Quakers, etc.) to this country who experienced persecution when governments favored one religious tradition over another.

Religious liberty protects the ability of Christians to practice their faith, but it also protects the rights of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, people of no faith, and countless others to follow the dictates of their own conscience.

As Christians, we are invited to consider how our own freedom is strengthened when every person's conscience is respected and protected.

3. Religion in Public Schools: Where the Lines Are Being Drawn

Public schools serve children from many different religious traditions, cultural backgrounds, and family experiences. They are places where questions about religious expression, parental rights, constitutional protections, and public education often intersect.

In recent years, both legislation and court decisions have reshaped conversations about the role of religion in public schools.

What is happening in North Carolina and in the region:

- In February 2026, the U.S. Department of Education issued updated guidance stating that students and school employees may engage in constitutionally protected private religious expression, while public schools themselves may not sponsor prayer or favor one religion over another. The guidance specifically cites both *Kennedy* and *Mahmoud*.⁷
- North Carolina law expressly protects students' rights to pray, express religious viewpoints, share religious viewpoints with other students, and possess or distribute religious literature under the same general conditions that apply to comparable nonreligious expression.⁸
- N.C. law already permits the display of religious documents in public schools, including the Ten Commandments, provided they have “historical significance.”⁹ Cleveland County Schools considered installing the Ten Commandments in all 30 of its schools under this provision, prompting a warning from the Freedom From Religion Foundation that such a display would likely be unconstitutional and would cost the district significant legal fees.¹⁰
- Courts have repeatedly ruled government-mandated religious displays in public schools unconstitutional. A federal appeals court affirmed that Louisiana’s Ten Commandments law is unconstitutional.¹¹ An Arkansas federal judge called that state’s version “plainly unconstitutional,” noting it “mandates the display of expressly religious scripture” and “is exclusionary of other faiths.”¹²
- The Trump administration has signaled strong support for greater integration of religion into public schools. President Donald Trump has publicly expressed support for a greater role for religion in American public life. In an

Easter 2025 message, he said, “America is a nation of believers” and said, “We need God.”¹³

Genuine religious freedom requires a government that does not privilege any single religious tradition, including Christianity, over others. This is not a progressive position. It is the position of the founders of our nation who enshrined this freedom in the U.S. Constitution. It is a position rooted in the hard-won understanding that when government and religion merge, it is almost always the minority faith, and the minority within the majority faith, that suffers most.

In North Carolina’s public schools today, there are Muslim children, Jewish children, Hindu children, children of no faith, and children whose Christian families hold a wide variety of beliefs. A government mandate to display one tradition’s sacred text does not teach history. It tells some of those children, in a government building, that their faith, or their family’s lack of it, is less American than their classmates’.

North Carolina’s Constitution has protected freedom of conscience since 1776. The founders who shaped early American religious liberty did so because they knew from experience what it meant to be the minority faith in a society where one tradition held state power. Their legacy is not Christian nationalism. It is the conviction that the gospel is persuasive on its own terms, and does not need the coercive power of the state to advance it. When the church needs the government to enforce its beliefs, the church has already lost something essential.

Jesus welcomed children without asking them to first belong to a particular nation, tribe, or political community. Public schools are one of the few places where children from many faiths, and from no faith, learn together.

The Christian tradition has long affirmed that authentic faith cannot be produced through government mandate. Faith grows through witness, community, discipleship, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

As Christians, we are called to ask not only whether our own religious freedom is protected, but whether our neighbors experience that same freedom. We are invited to consider how public institutions can create spaces where people of many convictions are treated with dignity while allowing individuals to live faithfully according to their beliefs.

Discussion Questions

Work through as many of these as time allows. The questions move from personal to communal to civic. Begin where your group is most ready and go from there. You do not need to cover every question.

Personal & Scriptural

44. James defines pure religion as care for orphans and widows. If you were to apply that definition as a measuring stick to your own congregation's life and priorities, what would you notice? Where does your community excel by James' standard? Where does it fall short?
45. The Voter Guide says "the faith itself is not the problem. The distortion of faith into a tool of domination is." Can you think of a time when you witnessed faith being used as a tool of domination, against yourself, someone you love, or a community you know? What did it cost? What did faithfulness look like in response?

Communal

46. The Christian tradition has a long history of wrestling with religious liberty and the relationship between faith and government. What do you know about your own faith tradition's history with religious liberty? How does that history shape how you think about these questions today?
47. If the Ten Commandments were required by law to be displayed in every N.C. public school classroom, what message would that send to the Muslim, Jewish,

Hindu, or non-religious children sitting in those rooms? Does that concern change if you imagine your own child is the one receiving that message as a minority?

Civic

48. The Voter Guide asks: “Does this candidate respect religious freedom and human dignity for people of all faiths and beliefs?” and “How does this candidate speak about those who are different from them, with humility and respect, or with fear and exclusion?” How would you apply those questions to candidates you know of at any level of office?
 49. Christian nationalism claims to speak for Christians. But many N.C. Christians, including the N.C. Council of Churches and its denominational leaders, reject that claim. What is the responsibility of the church when faith is being invoked in its name to justify actions that contradict the gospel? What does faithful public witness look like in that context?
 50. If your congregation could take one concrete step to model what true religious freedom looks like, protecting the right of everyone to believe and worship according to their own conscience, what would it be?
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Closing Practice

Choose one of the following to close your sessions:

Option A: A Litany For True Religion

For every person who has been told that God does not love them by someone who claimed to speak for God...

We bear witness to a different God. The God of James 1:27. The God who cares for the orphan and the widow.

For the ways our own tradition has been used to harm, the wounds that Christianity has inflicted in the name of Christ...

We do not look away. We lament. We repent. We commit to a different way.

For the leaders, past and present, who have distorted faith into domination...

We pray for their repentance. We name their distortion for what it is. We refuse to follow.

For the call to practice a faith that is pure and undefiled, humble before God, compassionate toward the vulnerable, and free from the seduction of political power...

Make us that kind of people. Make us that kind of church. Amen.

Option B: Moment of Witness

Invite each person who wishes to complete one sentence: "A time when faith was used to liberate rather than oppress, in my life or in history, was..." Go around the room without comment. Then close with a brief prayer asking God to make your community that kind of faith.

Optional: Action Pathways:

Lower Barrier	Deeper Engagement
Learn the history of religious liberty in N.C. Read N.C.'s constitutional provisions on religion (Article I, Section 13) and the history of religious liberty in the state, available through the UNC School of Government at sog.unc.edu. Share what you learn with your congregation.	Build relationships across faith traditions Reach out to a local mosque, synagogue, or interfaith council to explore shared civic concerns. The N.C. Council of Churches connects Christian communities with broader interfaith work. True religious freedom requires knowing and standing with the religious neighbors it protects.

Name Christian nationalism from the pulpit Invite your pastor or faith leader to preach or teach on the difference between faithful public witness and Christian nationalism. The N.C. Council of Churches has resources to support this kind of congregational education at nccouncilofchurches.org.	Engage your legislators on religious freedom legislation Track House Bill 776 (NC RFRA) and contact your state legislators about the importance of religious freedom protections that protect all faiths, not only the majority. Share your perspective as a person of faith who cares about genuine liberty of conscience for everyone.
Practice James 1:27 this week Identify one concrete act of care for a vulnerable person or community this week — not as a program, but as an act of pure religion. Then ask: what systemic change would make that individual act unnecessary?	Engage your denomination's public policy voice Find out whether your denomination has a public policy or social justice office and what positions it has taken on religious freedom, church-state separation, and Christian nationalism. Make those positions known in your congregation and to your elected officials.

Sources

1. Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), Support for Christian Nationalism in All 50 States: Findings from PRRI's 2023 American Values Atlas: <https://prri.org/research/support-for-christian-nationalism-in-all-50-states/>
2. PPRI, Fact Sheet: A Close Look at Christian Nationalism in Nine States: <https://prri.org/spotlight/fact-sheet-a-closer-look-at-christian-nationalism-in-nine-states/>
3. PPRI, Fact Sheet: A Close Look at Christian Nationalism in Nine States: <https://prri.org/spotlight/fact-sheet-a-closer-look-at-christian-nationalism-in-nine-states/>
4. Supreme Court of the United States: Kennedy v. Bremerton School District: https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/21-418_i425.pdf
5. Supreme Court of the United States: Mahmoud v. Taylor: http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/24pdf/24-297_4f14.pdf
6. NCGA: NORTH CAROLINA STATE CONSTITUTION Article I: <https://www.ncleg.gov/Laws/Constitution/Article1>
7. US Department of Education, U.S. Department of Education Issues Guidance on Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Schools: <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-issues-guidance-prayer-and-religious-expression-public-schools>
8. NCGA Article 29D Religious Activity and Cultural Expression: https://www.ncleg.gov/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/BySection/Chapter_115C/GS_115C-407.30.html
9. NGA 115C-47 Powers and duties generally: https://www.ncleg.gov/enactedlegislation/statutes/html/bysection/chapter_115c/gs_115c-47.html

10. The Charlotte Observer, Don't display Ten Commandments in schools, warns group opposed to NC district's idea: <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/state/north-carolina/article248447395.html>
11. ACLU, Federal Appeals Court Rules Against Louisiana Law Requiring Public Schools to Display Ten Commandments in Every Classroom: <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/federal-appeals-court-rules-against-louisiana-law-requiring-public-schools-to-display-ten-commandments-in-every-classroom>
12. Arkansas Advocate, Court blocks new Arkansas law requiring Ten Commandments in classrooms: <https://arkansasadvocate.com/2025/08/04/court-blocks-new-arkansas-law-requiring-ten-commandments-in-classrooms/>
13. The White House: Easter 2025: "America is a nation of believers." <https://www.whitehouse.gov/videos/easter-2025-america-is-a-nation-of-believers/>

Appendix

Appendix

The following scriptures offer additional biblical grounding for reflecting on the seven spheres of influence. These passages invite us to consider how our faith shapes the way we participate in the institutions, relationships, and communities that influence our common life. They can be used for personal reflection, small-group discussion, worship, or prayer.

1. Family

Faithfulness in relationships, care for one another, and the formation of future generations

- **Deuteronomy 6:4–9** — Faith is taught and lived within the rhythms of everyday family life.
- **Psalms 78:1–7** — Each generation is called to tell the next generation about God's faithfulness.
- **Proverbs 22:6** — Families have an important role in nurturing and forming children.
- **Micah 6:8** — The values of justice, mercy, and humility should shape how we live with others.
- **Ephesians 5:21** — Christian relationships are grounded in mutual submission.
- **Ephesians 6:1–4** — Parents and children are called to relationships marked by responsibility and care.
- **Colossians 3:12–21** — Compassion, kindness, patience, forgiveness, and love are to characterize family relationships.
- **1 Timothy 5:8** — Scripture emphasizes the responsibility to care for one's household.
- **James 1:27** — Faith includes caring for people who are vulnerable and in need.

Reflection: How can our families become places where justice, compassion, faith, and care for our neighbors are practiced and passed on?

2. Education

Seeking wisdom, pursuing truth, and helping one another grow

- **Proverbs 1:2–7** — Wisdom begins with a willingness to learn and listen.
- **Proverbs 4:5–9** — Wisdom and understanding are portrayed as treasures worth pursuing.

- **Proverbs 9:9–10** — Learning and correction are part of growing in wisdom.
- **Isaiah 1:17** — God's people are called to learn to do good and seek justice.
- **Daniel 1:17–20** — Knowledge, learning, and wisdom are gifts that can be cultivated and used faithfully.
- **Luke 2:46–52** — Jesus is portrayed growing in wisdom and engaging others in learning.
- **John 8:31–32** — Jesus connects discipleship with knowing and living in truth.
- **Acts 17:10–12** — The Bereans are commended for examining what they hear carefully.
- **2 Timothy 3:14–17** — Scripture is presented as a resource for teaching, correction, and formation.

Reflection: How can our schools, churches, families, and communities cultivate wisdom, curiosity, truthfulness, and a commitment to justice?

3. Government

Justice, public responsibility, and the common good

- **Deuteronomy 16:18–20** — Those entrusted with public responsibility are called to pursue justice without partiality.
- **2 Samuel 23:1–4** — Good leadership is associated with justice and righteousness.
- **Psalms 72:1–7, 12–14** — The ideal ruler protects the poor, needy, and vulnerable.
- **Proverbs 29:4** — Justice strengthens a nation.
- **Isaiah 10:1–2** — Scripture condemns laws and policies that exploit vulnerable people.
- **Jeremiah 29:7** — God's people are instructed to seek the welfare of the community where they live.
- **Micah 6:8** — God's people are called to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly.
- **Matthew 22:15–22** — Jesus speaks about the relationship between civic responsibility and allegiance to God.
- **Romans 13:1–7** — Government is discussed in relation to public order and responsibility.
- **1 Timothy 2:1–4** — Christians are encouraged to pray for those in positions of authority and for the well-being of society.
- **Titus 3:1–2** — Believers are called to be responsible citizens and to treat others with gentleness.
- **James 2:1–9** — The church is warned against favoritism and unequal treatment.

Reflection: What does it mean to seek the common good and advocate for policies that protect the dignity and well-being of our neighbors?

4. Media

Truth, speech, listening, and the stories we tell

- **Exodus 23:1–2** — God's people are warned against spreading false reports and following harmful crowds.
- **Leviticus 19:16** — Scripture warns against using speech in ways that endanger others.
- **Proverbs 12:17–22** — Truthful speech and trustworthy communication are contrasted with deceit.
- **Proverbs 18:13** — Wisdom requires listening before answering.
- **Proverbs 18:21** — Words have significant power for life and destruction.
- **Proverbs 26:20–22** — Scripture recognizes how words can fuel conflict.
- **Matthew 12:33–37** — Jesus connects our words with what is present in our hearts.
- **Ephesians 4:25** — Christians are instructed to speak truthfully to one another.
- **Ephesians 4:29** — Our communication should build others up rather than tear them down.
- **Philippians 4:8** — Believers are encouraged to focus their attention on what is true, honorable, just, pure, and worthy of praise.
- **James 1:19–20** — Christians are called to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger.
- **James 3:1–12** — The tongue's ability to influence and harm others is taken seriously.

Reflection: How do we consume, create, share, and respond to information in ways that honor truth and contribute to the flourishing of our neighbors?

5. Business

Work, economic justice, stewardship, and treatment of workers

- **Leviticus 19:9–13** — Economic life should include generosity, honest business practices, and fair treatment of workers.
- **Deuteronomy 24:14–15** — Workers should receive fair and timely compensation.
- **Proverbs 11:1** — Honest measures and fair dealing matter to God.
- **Proverbs 22:16** — Scripture warns against exploiting the poor for personal gain.
- **Amos 5:11–15** — Economic exploitation and injustice are condemned.

- **Micah 6:10–12** — Dishonest wealth and fraudulent business practices are rejected.
- **Matthew 6:19–24** — Jesus challenges the pursuit of wealth and warns that people cannot serve both God and wealth.
- **Luke 3:10–14** — John the Baptist connects repentance with concrete economic and social behavior.
- **Luke 12:13–21** — Jesus warns against defining life by accumulated possessions.
- **Acts 2:44–45** — The early Christian community practiced generosity and shared resources.
- **James 5:1–6** — Wealth accumulated through exploitation of workers is condemned.
- **1 Timothy 6:17–19** — Those with wealth are encouraged to be generous and rich in good works.

Reflection: How can our economic choices, workplaces, businesses, and investments contribute to dignity, fairness, generosity, and the common good?

6. Arts & Entertainment

Creativity, beauty, imagination, and the stories that shape us

- **Exodus 31:1–5** — Artistic skill and craftsmanship are described as gifts from God.
- **Exodus 35:30–35** — God-given creativity is used to serve the community.
- **Psalms 19:1–4** — Creation itself communicates beauty and declares God's glory.
- **Psalms 96:1–6** — Worship is expressed through song, creativity, and proclamation.
- **Psalms 150:1–6** — A wide range of musical instruments and artistic expression are embraced in praise.
- **Ecclesiastes 3:1–8** — Human life is understood through seasons, experiences, and expressions of joy and grief.
- **Matthew 13:1–52** — Jesus frequently used stories, images, metaphors, and everyday experiences to communicate truth.
- **Philippians 4:8** — Christians are encouraged to dwell on what is beautiful, excellent, and worthy of praise.
- **1 Corinthians 12:4–7** — Different gifts are given for the benefit of the whole community.
- **1 Peter 4:10–11** — Gifts are to be used in service to others.

Reflection: How do the art, music, stories, entertainment, and creative expressions we produce and consume shape our understanding of ourselves, our neighbors, and God's world?

7. Religion

Faith communities, spiritual leadership, worship, and public witness

- **Deuteronomy 10:17–19** — God is described as impartial and attentive to the vulnerable and marginalized.
- **Isaiah 58:6–12** — True religious devotion is inseparable from justice, liberation, generosity, and care for neighbors.
- **Jeremiah 7:1–11** — Religious practice is challenged when it becomes disconnected from justice and ethical living.
- **Amos 5:21–24** — Worship without justice is rejected.
- **Matthew 5:13–16** — Jesus calls his followers to be salt and light in the world.
- **Matthew 23:23** — Jesus identifies justice, mercy, and faithfulness as matters of greater importance.
- **Mark 12:28–31** — Love of God and love of neighbor are placed at the center of faithful living.
- **Luke 4:16–21** — Jesus announces good news to the poor, freedom for the oppressed, and liberation for those who are suffering.
- **Acts 2:42–47** — The early church is characterized by worship, fellowship, generosity, and shared life.
- **James 1:27** — Pure religion includes caring for people experiencing vulnerability and keeping one's life oriented toward God.
- **James 2:14–17** — Faith is expected to produce concrete action on behalf of people in need.
- **Galatians 3:28** — The Christian community is called to recognize a fundamental unity in Christ across social divisions.

Reflection: How can faith communities embody the justice, mercy, compassion, reconciliation, and love they proclaim?

Addition Recommended Reading

Short Readings & Resources

- Anthea Butler, ["Beyond Alarmism and Denial in the Dominionism Debate,"](#) *Religion Dispatches*, April 17, 2012.

- Frederick Clarkson, [“‘Unfriending’ America: The Christian right is coming for the enemies of God — like you and me.”](#) *Salon*, June 17, 2023.
- Frederick Clarkson and André Gagné, [“Christian Right Denialism is More Dangerous Than Ever: A Reporter’s Guide to the New Apostolic Reformation.”](#) Religion Dispatches, September 7, 2022. (First in a three part series).
- Jennifer Cohn, [“Dominionism Is on the Ballot in November, but Most Voters Have Never Heard of It.”](#) Bucks County Beacon, October 19, 2022.
- André Gagné, [“American Evangelicals for Trump: Dominion, Spiritual Warfare, and the End Times.”](#) New York, Routledge, 2024.
- Emily Hofstader, [“She’s a Prophet. She’s a Theocrat. She’s the Most Powerful Lobbyist You’ve Never Heard Of.”](#) Mother Jones, September/October 2023.
- Stephanie McCrummen, [“The Woman Who Bought a Mountain for God.”](#) The Atlantic, June 20, 2023.
- Peter Montgomery, [“POTUS Shield: Trump’s Dominionist Prayer Warriors and the ‘Prophetic Order of the United States.’”](#) Right Wing Watch.
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- Mathew D. Taylor and Bradley Onishi, [“Evidence Strongly Suggests Trump Was Collaborating With Christian Nationalist Leaders Before January 6th”](#), Religion Dispatches, January 6, 2023.
- Matthew D. Taylor, [“The peril radicalizing some evangelicals goes beyond Christian nationalism.”](#) Religion News Service, April 4, 2024.

Podcasts

Matthew Taylor and Bradley Onishi, [Charismatic Revival Fury](#) (Overview of the New Apostolic Reformation’s involvement in the January 6, 2021 Insurrection.)

Books

- [The 7 Deadly Sins of Christian Nationalism](#), Carter Heyward
- [The False White Gospel: Rejecting Christian Nationalism, Reclaiming True Faith, and Refounding Democracy](#), Jim Wallis and Eddie Glaude
- [The Power Worshipers](#), Katherine Stewart
- [The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory](#), Tim Alberta
- [The Origins of American Religious Nationalism](#), Sam Haselby

- The Religion of American Greatness, Paul D. Miller and David French
- Listening as Hosts Liturgically Facing Colonization and White Supremacy, Sam Codrington
- Saving Faith: How American Christianity Can Reclaim Its Prophetic Voice, Randall Balmer
- The Psychology of Christian Nationalism: Why People Are Drawn In and How to Talk Across the Divide, Pamela Cooper-White