

GET OUT THE VOTE

Voting is something we do as individuals. Elections are something we do as a community.

A ballot cast in a curtained booth or on a kitchen table looks like a private act, and in a real sense it is. But the work of getting a ballot cast (registering, reminding, planning, driving, watching kids, asking the question one more time) belongs to everyone. Inviting your friends, family, and neighbors into an election is inviting them into deeper belonging and shared responsibility for the place you live. Our Faith Our Vote calls this voting with love: love for the neighbor standing in line beside you, the one who couldn't get a ride, the one who didn't think their vote mattered, and the one who hasn't been asked.

Decades of political science research point to the same finding: the single strongest predictor of whether a person votes is whether someone they know and trust personally asked them to—a friend, a neighbor, a fellow congregant. You.

Show Up

Even in presidential years, roughly 40% of eligible Americans don't cast a ballot. In midterm years, that number is closer to 60%. In local and off-cycle elections (the ones that decide your school board, your sheriff, your city council, your judges), turnout often falls below 20%.

The reasons are real and rarely about apathy. People work shifts that overlap with poll hours. They moved recently and didn't update their registration. They don't have a ride. They were never asked. They tried once, hit a problem, and gave up. They are disillusioned by national politics and don't realize how much local elections shape their daily lives. New voting restrictions and polling place closures in many states are likely to make the next election harder, not easier.

The good news is that nearly every one of those barriers has a neighbor-shaped solution.

Tell Your People

Start with a list. Pull out your phone. Open your church directory. Think through your family, your closest friends, the people in your small group, the parents on your kid's team, the folks you see at coffee hour. Who on that list might not vote this year without a nudge?

Then nudge.

A text that says "Hey, are you registered at your current address? Election Day is [date]. Want to make a plan together?" outperforms almost any other GOTV tactic ever measured. It works because it's personal, specific, and turns voting from a private intention into a shared commitment.

Gather a few friends from your congregation for an evening of texts and calls in the two weeks before the election. Each person works through their own list (their small group, their pew section, the parents at their kid's Sunday school class, a section of the church directory) while sitting in the same room. You answer each other's questions

about deadlines and polling places as they come up. You celebrate when someone confirms a plan. Order pizza, put on music, make it a thing. The work is faster, the awkwardness of cold-texting evaporates when everyone is doing it at once, and the people you're reaching feel the warmth of a church that has organized itself around their participation.

When you talk to people, help them make a real plan. Voting research is clear that intentions become actions when people answer three questions:

When will you vote? Election Day, early voting, or by mail?

Where will you vote? Look up the polling place or drop box together.

How will you get there? Walking, driving, ride from a friend, on the way home from work?

The plan does the work. Once someone has answered those three questions out loud to another human, they are more likely to follow through.

Remind people, too, that the ballot does not end at the presidency. Most of what shapes daily life (housing policy, school curricula, transit, policing, water quality, library funding) gets decided in the races at the bottom of the ballot. Encourage them to vote the whole thing.

Help Out

Some neighbors face barriers no amount of reminding will solve on its own. This is where the church can act as a body.

Your Our Faith Our Vote committee can organize:

A ride-share system to the polls. Recruit congregants with cars and flexible schedules to drive neighbors who don't drive, can't afford the gas, or live far from their polling place. Coordinate by sign-up sheet at coffee hour or through a shared spreadsheet.

Election Day childcare. Working parents and single parents often skip voting because they can't bring kids to the polls or wait in a long line with them. Recruit teens in your congregation (this is meaningful service work for youth who can't yet vote themselves) and adult volunteers to staff a few hours of supervised childcare at the church on Election Day so parents can vote.

A "voting buddy" system for first-time voters. Pair experienced voters with people voting for the first time, whether 18-year-olds, newly naturalized citizens, or longtime nonvoters finally taking the step. Walk them through what to expect at the polling place. Go together if they want company.

Multilingual support. If your congregation includes members for whom English is not their first language, find out what language assistance is available at local polling places and connect people to it. Voters have a federal right to bring someone of their choice into the booth to help them read or interpret the ballot.

Frame these supports as community rhythms rather than charity. Everyone needs a ride sometimes. Everyone has been a first-time voter. The point is that no one in your congregation should miss an election because of a barrier your community could help clear.

Build the Habit Across Generations

The lowest-turnout group in American elections is young people, and it has been for decades. One reason is structural (they move more, they're newer to the rolls, they face more registration friction), and one reason is habit. People who vote in their first three eligible elections become lifelong voters at much higher rates. The first few times are the most important.

This is a two-way conversation.

If you are a parent, aunt, uncle, grandparent, or trusted older friend: Talk with the young people in your life about voting before they turn 18. Explain why you vote and what it has meant to you, including the times it was hard or you weren't sure your vote mattered. Invite them to come with you to the polls when they're young so the polling place feels familiar by the time they can cast their own ballot. When they turn 16 or 17, help them pre-register where state law allows. When they turn 18, make sure they're registered at the right address (school or home) and walk through their first ballot with them. Even children who are too young to vote can write postcards, canvass with you, or help at a registration drive.

If you are a young person: You are often the connective tissue your family didn't know it needed. The grandparent who hasn't updated their registration since moving. The parent who has stopped voting because they've grown cynical. The cousin who turned 18 last spring and has no idea how to start. The youth group friend whose family doesn't talk about elections. Your nudge carries weight precisely because it's coming from someone they love. Text three people this week. Ask if they're registered. Send them the link. Then ask again in October.

Voting is one step in a much longer life of civic and faithful engagement. It is not the whole of citizenship. But it is a real and recurring opportunity to show up for your neighbors, for the most vulnerable, and for the kind of community you want to belong to. Every conversation you have between now and Election Day makes it more likely that the people you love will show up too.

Spread the Word About Election Protection Resources

Become a Poll Worker or Poll Chaplain

There are many ways you can help ensure a safe and accessible election. One way is for the Our Faith Our Vote committee to recruit poll workers and poll chaplains. Poll workers are election officers who volunteer to help run a polling location. Poll chaplains are lay people and clergy whose presence at the polls is meant to deescalate and keep the peace. Both roles can provide credible information on Election Day and help things go smoothly. Make sure your committee knows who in the congregation is a poll worker or chaplain so that they can help your committee stay informed, and your committee can help support these front line workers on Election Day. You can learn more at <https://www.powerthepolls.org/> and <https://www.turnout-sunday.com/volunteer-chaplain>.

Your committee can also organize congregants to provide food and water or act as faith observers at the polls by standing outside of the polling location with nonpartisan signs (check local election guidelines before planning).

Educate Others on the Election Protection Hotline

In advance of the election, your Our Faith Our Vote committee should also circulate the Election Protection Hotline to your congregation. If you have any questions about voting or if you or someone you see at the polls encounter difficulty when attempting to vote, you can call the Hotline and then reach out to your Our Faith Our Vote Committee to help find a solution. If you are at your polling location when you face this difficulty, find a poll worker or poll chaplain who should be able to help.

The national, nonpartisan Election Protection coalition of which the United Church of Christ is a member, was formed to ensure that all voters have an equal opportunity to participate in the political process. Made up of more than 100 local, state and national partners, Election Protection works year-round to advance and defend the right to vote.

Election Protection provides Americans from coast to coast with comprehensive voting information on how they can make sure their vote is counted. Election Protection focuses on the voter - not on the political horse race - and provides guidance, information and help to any American, regardless of who that voter is casting a ballot for.

If you have any questions about voting or encounter difficulty when attempting to cast your ballot call the Election Protection Helplines!

866-OUR-VOTE

Administered by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights

866-VE-Y-VOTA

Administered by the NALEO Educational Fund

888-API-VOTE

Administered by APIAVote & AAJC

