

WATERSHED FAITH · MAINLINE PROTESTANT STREAM

MPS Election Defense Toolkit

A Weekend of Preaching & Teaching — October 18, 2026

Watershed Faith / mpstream.faith

Preaching · Teaching · Action, for the four weeks around the midterm election

In Partnership With



Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the
United States and Canada



Faith in Action



Latino Christian National Network



Sojourners / SojoAction



United Church of Christ

How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit exists to support preaching and teaching in congregations about the importance of election protection and election integrity, and to inspire Christians toward civic engagement this midterm election season — specifically toward organizing relationships with local election officials. This document contains the complete content of all six pieces, start to finish — it does not require opening anything else to use.



What this toolkit is for

- To help congregants reflect theologically on the role of the church and people of faith in public life.
- To help pastors and congregations celebrate the role the church can play in reimagining, renewing, and healing democracy in our day.
- To equip members of congregations to protect the vote, protect access to the ballot box, and protect the integrity of the vote — through forging public relationships with local elected officials.

What's inside

A1	Gospel Sermon Ideas — Matthew 22:15-22	Michael Woolf
A2	Gospel Sample Sermon — Render Unto Caesar Your Attention	Michael Woolf
A3	Hebrews 11-12 Sermon Ideas (link out)	Michael-Ray Mathews
A4	Hebrews Sample Sermon — The Race Set Before Us	Michael-Ray Mathews
B1	Faithful Citizenship — 75-Minute Post-Worship Workshop	Matt Hammer
B2	Election Official Research Meeting Guide	Matt Hammer

How the pieces fit together

Section A gives you two sermon options for the Weekend of Preaching & Teaching (October 18) — one from the Gospel lectionary text, one from Hebrews. Use one, or draw from both.

Section B provides direct, actionable steps to take after the sermon. The 75-minute workshop (B1) is designed to be held after worship, and it ends by inviting participants into one of two concrete actions — becoming a Poll Chaplain, or joining a team that meets with local election officials. If your congregation chooses the second path, the Research Meeting Guide (B2) is exactly what that team uses to prepare for and run that meeting. Hand B2 to whoever leads that team as a direct next step out of B1.

MAKING IT YOUR OWN

Every piece in this toolkit is a starting point, not a script. Each section links to an editable Google Doc — open it, choose **File** → **Make a copy**, and adapt the language, examples, and length for your own pulpit, classroom, or context. The copy in this printed toolkit will not change; your copy is yours to edit freely.

Preaching

Two sets of sermon resources for the Weekend of Preaching & Teaching, October 18, 2026 — one grounded in the Gospel lectionary text (Proper 24, Year A), one in Hebrews 11-12. Choose the text that speaks best to your congregation, or use both across the weekend. The full text of both pairs follows on the pages ahead.

A1 & A2 — GOSPEL: MATTHEW 22:15-22

"Render unto Caesar"

"Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." — Matthew 22:21

Three sermon directions from Michael Woolf — **Whose Image Is on You?**, **What Happens When Caesar Runs for God?**, and **Render Unto Caesar Your Attention** — with a full sample sermon built from the third.

A3 & A4 — HEBREWS 11:29-12:3

"The Race Set Before Us"

"Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us." — Hebrews 12:1

Michael-Ray Mathews' sermon-idea attribution and a complete, original sample sermon written for this toolkit.

God vs. Caesar

Sermon ideas for the Gospel reading, Revised Common Lectionary, October 18, 2026 (Proper 24, Year A) – Matthew 22:15-22, "Render unto Caesar." – Michael Woolf

Scripture

Then they sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere and show deference to no one, for you do not regard people with partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it."

And they brought one. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this and whose title?" They answered, "Caesar's." Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." And they were utterly amazed at him.

Sermon Ideas

When it comes to church-state relations there are two places in the Bible that Christians have turned to time and time again – the first is probably Romans 13, with its instruction for Christians to submit to the governing authorities. The second is undoubtedly Mark 12 and Matthew 22, with its King James statement from Jesus, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

I've sat through maybe 100 sermons where this passage was the focus, but usually the speaker only focused on the first part of the statement: "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's." The last part of Jesus' instructions is curiously lacking any analysis. More than that, what I've often seen is an assumption that we know the difference between the things that are God's and the things that are Caesar's. My time on this earth has taught me that we are not as capable of distinguishing between the two as we might think. As we approach this November's election, it is important for the Church to get clarity on what belongs to who.

To that end, here are three sermons that might work depending on your context:

Whose Image Is on You?

Jesus' answer hinges on the image stamped on the coin. By asking the gathered crowd to show him a denarius, he outs them as collaborators of empire and showcases their willingness to practice idolatry, with images on coins forbidden by Jewish law. Caesar's image is on the denarius,

so give it back to Caesar. This is a creative entrypoint for another set of ideas that we see in Genesis. Caesar's image may be on the coin, but God's image is stamped on human beings. Simply put, coinage may belong to Caesar, but people do not.

Whatever happens in November, Christians have to be ready to value everyone as bearing that image of God, and therefore worthy of being able to vote and have their vote counted in a fair democratic process.

What Happens When Caesar Runs for God?

The scene in our scripture reading is tense. Jesus acknowledges legitimate political power, but immediately draws a perimeter around it — there are things that Caesar will never possess, because they are God's. Around election season, it can seem like the promises get bigger and bigger, and the stakes higher and higher. Every candidate seems to be saying that all of history hinges on this one moment, and I think some of them may be right. That being said, we have to acknowledge that God and Caesar have different job descriptions, and ultimate allegiance is only owed to one of those — God.

Render Unto Caesar Your Attention

Democratic institutions cannot function very well when citizens withdraw completely, know nothing about government, or surrender judgment to political tribes. We lose our democracy when we allow our government to disenfranchise voters or debase our democratic process. There are a few things we ought to render to Caesar: voting, learning how institutions work, checking claims, serving on juries, attending meetings, paying attention to local government. That attention is good for the functioning of democracy, and in keeping with Jesus' instruction to give Caesar what is Caesar's, even as we must keep the limits of our allegiance in mind.

See the companion "Gospel Sample Sermon" document for a full sermon built from "Render Unto Caesar Your Attention."

OPEN THE EDITABLE VERSION

[Gospel Sermon Ideas →](#)

Render Unto Caesar Your Attention

A sample sermon on Matthew 22:15-22, Revised Common Lectionary, October 18, 2026 (Proper 24, Year A) — Michael Woolf

A few years ago, I had to limit how much news I was listening to in a day. I found myself scrolling endlessly through the worst of what was happening in the world, and rather than feeling knowledgeable, I ended up feeling depressed. I decided that my attention was better spent elsewhere, and I wanted to free up parts of my life for something better and more faithful than listening to news constantly.

I tell that story, because our attention, like it or not, is a zero sum game. If we're paying attention to something, we are not paying attention to something else, despite claims by your kids that they can read and listen to you at the same time. Where we put our attention has immense power, and it is important that we learn to focus it on the right things.

Whether it's large companies that want to know what you're interested in so they can sell you something later, or algorithms that want to suck you in so that you think about nearly nothing else, our attention is valued at an all-time high these days. I don't know about you, but I have the distinct sensation that there is simply not enough time. Whether it's the rush of family life, work commitments, or even those hobbies that are good for us, there seems to be less and less of it for me these days. With that kind of environment, it is easy to just withdraw from the world that is going on somewhere out there and focus on what I need to make it through my day with the least amount of disruption.

But those persistent forces who are after your attention are not only doing so because it earns them money, but because attention is a powerful force. One prominent philosopher of attention from the 20th century, Simone Weil, put it like this: "Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love. Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer. If we turn our mind toward the good, it is impossible that little by little the whole soul will not be attracted thereto in spite of itself." I think that sounds about right. So, while the Flobots might have put out a song, "There Is a War Going on for Your Minds," perhaps a better title for this moment would have been "There Is a War Going on for Your Attention."

As we turn to our scripture reading, we can see two of the major competitors for your attention — God and government. We often have this sense that ancient people were not like us, that they did not face the same difficulties that we do — perhaps that they were simpler. The Bible makes it clear that that could not be farther from the truth. Instead, we see them confronting the same struggles that we do time and time again. Here, a group of people asks Jesus a question that could put him in danger — "is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?" And Jesus, sidestepping that question, instead puts a question to them after asking them to see a denarius: "whose head is this and whose title?"

That sets up Jesus' iconic statement that gets used far more often than it is understood: "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." Notice the reaction of the crowd — they are "amazed." That's not because Jesus conjured up some neat little endorsement of state power, but because he was proposing something new and exciting about how to balance the power of God and the state. Jesus does not say not to pay taxes, and he does not say that Caesar is illegitimate. He recognizes the appropriate roles that the state can play, but he draws a perimeter around that power.

That perimeter is not specific — it is, as the kids say these days, more of a "vibe" than a hard and fast rule. But Jesus' statement does what all good teaching does — it forces us as the reader to ask the hard question: what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God? Scripture, after all, is not a book of rules, so much as a book of questions, and it helps us ask better, more faithful questions of ourselves and the world around us. And so, we have to ask ourselves where that line is for us.

At the same time, it seems to me that we have to both give the state our attention, while not making that attention synonymous with prayer. The functioning of democracy depends on our engagement and our ability to pay attention to what is going on around us. There are meetings to attend, processes to uphold, dignity for people that has to be fought for. Just because our ultimate allegiance is to God, does not mean that we can abandon this world to whatever might come. Our neighbors live here, our kids go to school here.

Our attention on what the government is and is not doing must be guided by God's morality, however. Matthew 25 tells us that what we do or do not do for the most vulnerable in our midst is what we do or withhold from God. If our engagement can make a difference, and I believe that it can, then we must do so not from a perspective of worshipping the state, but because our attention can make life better for the people that we're called to care about and serve as Christians. Decisions made by governments affect the poor, immigrants, businesses, workers, families, prisoners, children and older adults. They affect people who voted and people who did not. They affect God's children, and we must be active in our work to make the best world possible for them.

And paying attention does not mean that what is happening in our government becomes our sole focus. I actually think that can become its own form of unfaithfulness. I began this sermon by telling you that I had to stop doing precisely that. There is a difference between attention and obsession. There is a difference between being informed and being consumed.

Faithful attention is more intentional than that. It means knowing enough about our government to understand what it is doing in our name. It means voting, certainly, but it also means remembering that democracy does not happen only on Election Day. It happens in school board meetings and city councils, courtrooms, state legislatures, and polling booths.

There is something profoundly banal about all of this. None of this is making the nightly news, and yet it is of vital importance. We must be willing to ask questions of our government — why is a process being rushed? Who benefits from the way things currently are done? Why are some groups of people amply represented in our local, state, and federal government, but others face barriers to not just running for office but also voting?

In the 2024 presidential election, more than 158 million ballots were counted in the United States. Behind a number like that are countless individual acts of participation. I am convinced one of the reasons that we are in a crisis is that democracy sounds like an abstract and administrative word,

but really it is a verb. It is something that we do, and if we do not do it, then it is something that is done to us.

There is something analogous to the way that I think about discipleship in that idea. Faithfulness is not made of grand gestures, but of the slow, steady accretion of acts over time. One of my favorite preachers from the English Reformation, Hugh Latimer, adapted a paraphrase from Lucretius to say, "A drop of rain maketh a hole in the stone, not by violence, but by oft falling." That kind of attention is very different from the attention demanded by our phones.

The algorithm wants us agitated because agitation keeps us looking. Partisan media can tempt us to spend our time watching people we already dislike say things that confirm everything we already believed about them. But democratic attention asks something harder from us. It asks us to look not only at spectacle but at systems.

So perhaps rendering unto Caesar our attention means refusing both extremes. We refuse to worship politics, but we also refuse to ignore it. We refuse to give the government our souls, but we also refuse to abandon our neighbors to decisions in which we could have had a voice.

Our attention belongs ultimately to God. And precisely because it belongs to God, we should be careful about where we spend it, and when we do decide to give it, it ought to be done in a way that we can demand accountability for those who are most vulnerable. In order to properly serve God and bring God's values into being, we have to pay attention to what is happening with Caesar.

[OPEN THE EDITABLE VERSION](#)

[Gospel Sample Sermon: "Render Unto Caesar Your Attention" →](#)

Sermon Ideas – Hebrews 11-12

Michael-Ray Mathews

A note on this resource

The sermon ideas for the Hebrews 11-12 text are drawn from a resource Michael-Ray Mathews originally created for People For the American Way (PFAW) in 2024 for the African American Religious Affairs Program.

Link to the original 2024 PFAW toolkit: <https://www.peoplefor.org/foundation/race-set-us>

See also

The companion "Hebrews Sample Sermon – The Race Set Before Us" document in this folder is a complete, original sermon written by Michael-Ray Mathews specifically for this toolkit, drawing on the same Hebrews 11:29-12:3 text for a broader Mainline Protestant audience.

OPEN THE EDITABLE VERSION

[Hebrews Sermon Ideas \(attribution & link\)](#) →

The Race Set Before Us

Scripture: Hebrews 11:29 - 12:3 — Michael-Ray Mathews

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us." — Hebrews 12:1 (NRSVue)

The Cloud of Witnesses

If you have had the opportunity to see your family tree — the generations of grand and great-grandparents that lived before you — you know what a privilege it is. If you have had the rare fortune of going back six generations to see the names of those whose DNA contributed to your DNA, you have counted up to 126 lives that preceded and inform your life. But if you have somehow been blessed to learn about the lived experiences of these ancestors, you have encountered a profound and tremendous gift. To know the stories of triumph and tragedy, the conditions of joy and grief that shaped the lives of those who lived before us, is to gain insight into one's family, culture, and self.

Apparently, the writer of Hebrews wants their readers to experience the profundity and gravity of knowing where they come from, of knowing something about the people, named and unnamed, who preceded them. They want them to understand and appreciate the ups and downs of their ancestors' lives. They want them to comprehend the power of their collective witness in history: from the emancipated slaves crossing the Red Sea to judges, kings, and prophets "who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight." (Hebrews 11:33-34). And in one of the most visceral passages, the writer ensures that the sufferings and martyrdom of the countless and nameless who were "stoned to death," "killed by the sword," and "sawn in two" were not in vain. In fact, the writer regards these nameless with such respect that they declare that "the world was not worthy" of them.

Broadly speaking, the Protestant tradition has its own panoply of cultural and religious leaders whose witness shaped the struggle for freedom and embodied democratic values. These are leaders, preachers, and prophets who shaped the church and the nation, like Francis Grimke, Walter Rauschenbusch, Georgia Harkness, Reinhold Niebuhr, Pauli Murray, Leontine T.C. Kelly, and Prathia Hall. They preached and organized at the meeting point of personal faith and public life. They insisted that the gospel has something to say about justice, and that justice has something to say

about how faith is practiced. And we are too familiar with the names of everyday citizens who faced injustice and violence to the point of death. In recent memory, we could name Heather Heyer, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Renee Good, and Alex Pretti.

Those just named are part of an even larger cloud of witnesses, in the stands, as it were, cheering us on as we run the race set before us in our moment in history. It is their cultural and spiritual power that strengthens us for the journey.

What Weighs Us Down

Running this race, though, will require more than building, nurturing, and stewarding our power. It will require that we also let go of baggage that weighs us down. In a time when weary leaders have exited public life and the movement for the common good, and when many others are worried they, too, may burn out soon, this ancient letter reminds us to take care of ourselves and one another. It serves as a reminder of the value of taking stock of all that we face and creating pathways to the spiritual grounding and clarity that both inspire and sustain us in the journey.

Indeed, it is distressing to witness the threats to free and fair elections in plain sight. The news of these threats, articulated in policy proposals and narrative frameworks, is demoralizing. In traditional and social media, our algorithms flood us daily and hourly with news about the dire state of our democracy in the US. And even when we know this onslaught could distract from the work, we are still overwhelmed by the number of distractions within and outside our organizing and advocacy work. That is to say nothing of the ongoing crisis of addiction, loneliness, joblessness, houselessness, mental illness, poverty, and war that dominate not only our global, national, and local news, but our lived communal, intimate, and individual experiences. The weight of them dims our outlook on life, democracy and future generations.

Laying aside these weights is no simple endeavor. They are too heavy to pick up and set aside on our own. And so the writer invites the church in a collective journey to address and remove "every weight and the sin that clings so closely." For we need communal spaces to name and lament our grief, pain, and rage. We need shared practices that attend to our deepest needs and create pathways for individual and collective healing. The kind of healing that lights a pathway forward, and makes it possible to lay down our burdens at the riverside.

Persevering in the Transgenerational Race

In an election year, the meaning of "the race that is set before us" seems obvious. Whether we are casual observers of the political world or deeply engaged justice advocates, organizers, and activists, the urgency present in almost every dimension of our lives can make "the race" seem like it will be decided (we hope) on November 3rd. But we know the writer was not talking about a domestic political race. Nor were they talking about whatever endeavor was on the list of things to get done, goals to achieve, or dreams to realize for that early church community. Given the context that sets up the imperative call of this verse, we know that we are talking about a grander vision of the race.

Indeed, the writer has placed this race in the context of an ancient, ancestral race that had been running long before members of the Hebrew community were even born. And this call to run is predicated on the surrounding presence of a host of witnesses who ran the race before them. So this race is not a one-time race, nor is it "the most consequential race of our generation," as we are accustomed to saying almost every cycle. No, this race is generational. Even more, it is transgenerational, transcending all the generations who inhabit the earth today and going back hundreds of thousands of generations. If we can understand the race to be an ancestral one that continues with us (and beyond us), perhaps we can rid ourselves of the urgent need to win this time and instead trust the deeper call to be faithful across time.

Looking to Jesus (past + future)

If we leave it all on the track, if we exert ourselves to exhaustion in this one heat of the track meet, we won't have what we need for the next heat, the next moment of collective engagement in public life. We must situate ourselves in time and history. We must see ourselves as standing together in a vast ancestral river, with the wisdom of our ancestors flowing to us and the hope of our descendants before us. We must act faithfully and urgently in this moment, with a vision for how this moment is connected to past and future moments, past and future communities, and a past and future church.

To navigate such a river or run such a race, we need someone to set the pace for us. We need a pacemaker, someone we can see running just in front of us, setting the tempo, guiding the rhythm, and perfecting our faith. The writer of Hebrews advises the church to look to Jesus Christ, the past and present pacemaker. The ancient and future one, who went before us. In the tradition of his ancestors, he was faithful in the race set before him, enduring the cross and its shame, and he still goes ahead of us.

In a time of democratic crisis, this ancient letter to the Hebrews reminds us that the work of justice and healing is long-arc work. It reminds us that we need the capacity to take a long look back to the greats and grands who ran the race before us. And it means we need to be able to imagine the farther horizon of descendants (not just biological ones) who will discover remnants of our faithfulness in the artifacts and stories preserved about life in the United States in the 2020s. Perhaps they will recognize our spiritual DNA within them and be encouraged to run the race set before them, while we watch from the cloud.

[OPEN THE EDITABLE VERSION](#)

[Hebrews Sample Sermon: "The Race Set Before Us" →](#)

Teaching & Action

These two resources form a single pipeline: a congregational workshop that ends by inviting people into action, and the meeting guide that one of those actions leads directly into. The full text of both follows on the pages ahead.

B1 — 75-MINUTE WORKSHOP

Faithful Citizenship: Protecting Free & Fair Elections

A complete, ready-to-run agenda for a post-worship gathering, ending with two concrete paths into action — Poll Chaplaincy or an Election Official Engagement Team.

B2 — MEETING GUIDE

Election Official Research Meeting Guide

What happens next for anyone who chooses the Election Official Engagement Team path — a full guide for preparing for and running that meeting.

"We do not ask election officials to produce a particular result. We ask them to protect the process that allows the people to produce the result."

Faithful Citizenship: Protecting Free & Fair Elections

A 75-Minute Workshop for Christian Congregations — Matt Hammer



Workshop Purpose

This gathering invites Christians to consider how our faith calls us to protect the dignity of our neighbors and the integrity of our democratic institutions.

This is not a gathering about which candidates or political parties Christians should support. Our concern is the process itself: that eligible voters can participate, election laws are administered impartially, valid ballots are counted accurately, election officials can fulfill their lawful responsibilities without improper interference, and election outcomes are determined by voters.

By the end of the gathering, participants should:

- Understand a Christian theological basis for protecting fair elections.
- Understand how elections are administered and several categories of threats election officials prepare for.

- Have an opportunity to discuss their own concerns, questions and hopes.
- Understand two concrete ways Christians can participate: Poll Chaplaincy and Election Official Engagement Teams.
- Have an immediate opportunity to express interest in either form of service.

75-Minute Agenda

0:00–0:05 | Welcome, purpose and opening prayer

0:05–0:15 | Why Christians should care: Scripture and theological grounding

0:15–0:27 | What could threaten a free and fair election?

0:27–0:42 | Table conversations: What are we hearing?

0:42–0:47 | Harvest from the tables

0:47–0:52 | From concern to faithful action

0:52–1:01 | Action #1: Become a Poll Chaplain

1:01–1:10 | Action #2: Meet with local election officials

1:10–1:15 | Commitments, closing reflection and prayer

1. Welcome, Purpose & Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

The facilitator welcomes people and establishes the nonpartisan nature of the gathering:

"We have gathered because our Christian faith teaches us to care about the dignity of every person, the integrity of our institutions and the fair treatment of our neighbors.

This meeting is not about telling anyone how to vote. People in this room may have very different political beliefs. Our concern is something more fundamental: that every eligible citizen can exercise the right to vote, every valid ballot is counted accurately, election laws are administered impartially, and public officials are able to fulfill their lawful responsibilities without improper interference.

At our gathering today, we will pray, learn, listen to one another, and consider two practical ways that people of faith can help protect a peaceful and trustworthy election."

Opening Prayer

God of justice and truth,

You created every person in your image and call us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Give us wisdom to distinguish truth from falsehood, courage when our institutions are tested, humility to listen to those with whom we disagree, and strength to stand for justice without hatred or fear.

Bless those who administer our elections, those who work at polling places, those who seek to vote, and all who serve the common good.

Help us to be peacemakers, truth-tellers and faithful neighbors.

May our actions honor the dignity you have given every person.

Amen.

2. Why Should Christians Care? (10 minutes)

This should feel more like a brief Bible study than a political presentation. Put a few of these passages on a slide or handout — choose among them, as there's probably not time to do them all. Read through the passage with people, offer your thinking about it, and ask people to discuss.

Old Testament passages

Genesis 1:27 — Human dignity

"So God created humankind in his image."

The starting point is not politics. It is the dignity of the human person. People do not acquire dignity because we agree with them. A person's political opinions, party affiliation, race, neighborhood or economic status do not determine their worth — God grants us all inherent worth and dignity.

Deuteronomy 16:19 — Impartial justice

"You shall not distort justice; you shall not show partiality."

The biblical command is strikingly relevant to public institutions: justice must not depend upon who someone is or whose interests will benefit. For elections, that suggests a straightforward moral principle: **The rules should apply impartially.**

Micah 6:8 — Our responsibility

"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Christian faith does not only ask whether we personally behave justly. It asks us to care about whether our neighbors are treated justly.

New Testament passages

James 2:1-9 — No favoritism: Do not show partiality

"My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?"

James challenges Christians not to treat people differently based on their status or standing. Christian faith calls us to resist favoritism and partiality, especially when some people are more easily disregarded than others. For elections, that suggests a simple principle: **There should be no favored voters and no disfavored voters.**

Matthew 22:39 — Love of neighbor

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus places love of neighbor at the heart of Christian discipleship. Our responsibility is not limited to protecting our own rights and interests; we are called to care about the dignity and fair treatment of our neighbors as well. In an election, **our neighbor's vote matters even when our neighbor votes differently from us.**

Facilitator transition: Democracy isn't itself a doctrine of Christianity. But principles at the heart of a fair election — human dignity, truth, impartiality, accountability, peaceful resolution of disagreement and concern for our neighbor — have deep roots in our faith. That gives Christians a reason to care about the integrity of the process regardless of who wins.

3. What Could Threaten a Free & Fair Election? (12 minutes)

Keep this section short and factual. The goal is informed concern, not fear.

Begin with: American elections are administered primarily by thousands of state and local election jurisdictions. There are many safeguards built into the system. Our task is not to assume the election will fail. It is to understand where problems could arise and why citizens should pay attention.

Explain five categories of concern:

1. Interference with people's ability to cast a lawful ballot. Confusion about eligibility, polling locations, registration or voting procedures can prevent eligible people from voting or result in ballots requiring additional review.

2. Failure to count eligible ballots. Some ballots require additional processing — for example, provisional ballots or mail ballots with correctable deficiencies. State laws determine which ballots qualify and what opportunities voters have to correct problems. The important principle: *Every ballot legally entitled to be counted should be counted.*

3. Pressure on election officials. Election officials can face political pressure, threats, harassment and disputes over how election laws should be applied. The question for citizens is not which political side benefits. It is: *Will officials follow the law and administer it impartially when under pressure?*

4. Disruption of election operations. Election officials prepare for cybersecurity incidents, physical threats, disruptions at polling places, problems with equipment and other unexpected events. Modern election security involves much more than voting machines — physical security, cybersecurity, chain of custody, contingency planning, reconciliation and audits.

5. Misinformation and loss of public trust. False information can spread rapidly before and after Election Day. One particularly important fact to teach: *Election-night totals are not final certified results.* Counting, reconciliation, review of provisional or other outstanding ballots, audits, canvassing and certification continue after Election Day according to state law. Waiting for those processes to finish is not by itself evidence that something has gone wrong.

Key message — put this on the screen:

Our goal is not to assume wrongdoing.

Our goal is to help ensure that the people responsible for administering elections can do their jobs lawfully, impartially, transparently and without improper interference.

4. Table Conversations (15 minutes)

Participants sit at tables of approximately 6–8 people. Ideally, a team from the congregation has been planning this gathering and so a handful of prepared people can be facilitators for the table discussions. Alternatively, ask each table to choose: Facilitator, Recorder, and Someone Who Reports Out.

Introductions: Each person says their name and why they are here.

Guidelines for the conversation:

- Let's make sure that everybody gets a chance to talk who would like to, so I'll keep the time and might ask you to wrap up your comments just so others can speak, too.
- Remember that this is not about political parties or really about us trying to reach some political agreement. This is about what we can do to make sure that the upcoming election has integrity and is free and fair.
- Let's try hard to listen to each other.

Questions for discussion:

- What did you hear that most concerned you or that you most want to understand better?
- What do you think people in our community need in order to trust that an election has been administered fairly?
- What distinctive role could Christians and congregations play that political organizations cannot?
- What would it look like for Christians to be a calming, truthful and courageous presence if conflict or confusion develops around the election?

5. Harvest from the Tables (5 minutes)

Ask each table for one sentence, not a full report: "What is one important thing that emerged from your conversation?" The facilitator records recurring themes on a flip chart or screen. Do not debate the responses.

Then transition: "We've talked about what concerns us. Christian faith asks another question: What are we going to do? We want to offer two very concrete ways to serve."

6. Two Paths of Faithful Action (5 minutes)

Explain that the two opportunities have different purposes.

Presence — Poll Chaplain: Be a peaceful, pastoral presence supporting voters and communities around polling places within the boundaries of applicable election law and the specific poll-chaplain program's training.

Relationship & Accountability — Election Official Engagement Team: Build a relationship with the public officials responsible for administering the election, understand their preparations, communicate the community's expectation of impartial administration, and ask them to make clear commitments to follow the law.

Participants can choose either — or potentially both.

7. Option One: Become a Poll Chaplain (9 minutes)

Have someone familiar with the specific Poll Chaplain program explain: What is a Poll Chaplain? What do Poll Chaplains actually do? What don't they do? What training is required? What rules govern activity near polling places in our state? What happens if a voter needs assistance?

Emphasize that Poll Chaplains are not there to promote candidates or parties or interfere with election workers.

Frame the ministry: Sometimes Christian witness means speaking. Sometimes it means simply being present — calm, compassionate and attentive to the dignity of the people around us.

Give participants a QR code or sign-up card immediately.

8. Option Two: Meet With Your Election Officials (9 minutes)

Explain the model developed for the companion toolkit. Small groups of clergy and lay leaders will request meetings with the officials responsible for administering their elections.

Their purpose is to:

1. **Listen:** Learn how ballots move from voter to counting to canvass and certification.
2. **Understand:** Ask what safeguards exist and what officials are doing to prepare for disruption.
3. **Communicate:** Tell election officials that faith leaders in their community expect election laws to be administered impartially.
4. **Ask for commitments:** Ask officials directly whether they will follow the law, count every valid ballot within their authority, administer the election without regard to partisan consequences, and resist improper pressure from any source.
 - "Can you commit to administering this election impartially, regardless of which candidates or parties benefit from the outcome?"
 - "If you receive pressure from any political party, candidate, government official, private organization or other actor to treat voters or ballots differently because of the political consequences, can you commit to following the law rather than that pressure?"

Explain that participants will not be sent into these meetings unprepared. Each team will receive the Election Official Research Meeting Guide (the next piece in this toolkit) and hold a preparation meeting beforehand to research the official's actual authority, choose the questions, assign roles, identify who will facilitate, select the person providing the theological grounding, designate questioners and a note-taker, and practice asking the commitment questions.

Give participants a QR code or sign-up card immediately.

9. Commitment & Closing (5 minutes)

Give people one quiet minute before asking them to sign up. Say:

"Tonight isn't about asking everyone to do the same thing. Ask yourself: Where am I called to serve? Perhaps your role is to be present with voters as a Poll Chaplain. Perhaps your role is to sit across the table from the people administering our election and build a relationship of support and accountability. Or perhaps you'd like to do both. Perhaps there is another way you are called to strengthen trust and truth in your community. Take a moment to consider what faithful action looks like for you."

Allow people to complete the interest form.

Closing Prayer

God of justice and peace,

Send us from this place as people of courage without hostility, conviction without self-righteousness, and hope without naïveté.

Give wisdom and strength to those entrusted with administering our elections.

Protect those who vote, those who serve, and those who work to ensure that every lawful voice is heard.

When we encounter fear, make us peacemakers.

When we encounter falsehood, make us truth-tellers.

When we encounter injustice, give us courage to act.

And in all that we do, teach us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Amen.

OPEN THE EDITABLE VERSION

[Faithful Citizenship — 75-Minute Workshop →](#)

Faith Leaders for Free & Fair Elections

A Guide for Meeting with Local and State Election Officials – Matt Hammer

Our Purpose

Free and fair elections depend on public officials administering the law impartially, protecting every eligible citizen's right to vote, and accurately counting every valid ballot.

As Christian/interfaith/multifaith clergy and lay leaders, we have a responsibility to care about whether our neighbors are treated with dignity and fairness – not according to their party, ideology, race, neighborhood, or whom they support.

Our purpose is **not to ask election officials to help one party or candidate win**. It is precisely the opposite. We want election officials to know that leaders in their community support them in carrying out their duties impartially and will be paying attention to whether the election is administered fairly.

We want to hear directly from our election officials about how they will protect the integrity of the election – and how people of faith can support a free and fair process.

Step 1: Request the Meeting

Identify the official or officials responsible for administering elections in your community.

Depending on your state, this may be a county clerk, registrar of voters, elections director, board of elections, secretary of state, or another official.

Invite a group of approximately **5–12 clergy and lay leaders** representing several congregations to participate. Ask for a 45–60 minute in-person meeting.

Explain simply: "We are local Christian/interfaith/multifaith clergy and lay leaders who care deeply about free and fair elections. We would like to learn about your preparations for the upcoming election, hear how you will protect the impartial administration and counting of votes, and discuss how faith communities can support election integrity."

Step 2: Hold a 30–45 Minute Preparation Meeting

Meet as a delegation before meeting the election official.

A. Establish the purpose. Agree that your goal is to:

- Build a relationship with the election official.

- Listen and learn about how the election will actually be administered.
- Communicate community expectations that election laws will be applied impartially and every valid ballot will be counted.
- Understand potential vulnerabilities and what safeguards are in place.
- Secure clear commitments from the official about the principles they will follow if controversy or outside pressure arises.

B. Assign roles:

- **Facilitator:** Opens and closes the meeting and keeps it moving.
- **Faith leader:** Provides the theological grounding.
- **Storyteller:** Briefly explains why protecting people's ability to vote matters personally or pastorally.
- **Questioners:** Divide the questions below among 3–4 participants.
- **Commitment questioner:** Asks the final, direct commitment questions.
- **Note-taker:** Records answers and commitments as accurately as possible.
- **Relationship lead:** Gets contact information and handles follow-up.

C. Research the official. Before the meeting, know:

- What authority does this official actually have?
- Who counts ballots?
- Who oversees the canvass and certification?
- What happens when a ballot's eligibility is questioned?
- What auditing procedures exist?
- Who controls custody of ballots and voting equipment?
- What other state or local officials have authority over these processes?

Do not assume that the person you are meeting controls every part of the process.

Feel free to contact electionintegrity@mpstream.faith if you need help figuring out the answers to these questions.

Step 3: Meet with the Election Official

Suggested 45–60 Minute Agenda

1. Welcome, introductions, and opening prayer — 5 minutes

Each participant gives their name, congregation and role in the community.

The facilitator says: "Thank you for meeting with us. We are here as clergy and people of faith, not as representatives of a political party or candidate. We believe elections should be administered fairly regardless of whom people vote for. We want to understand your preparations, communicate our community's expectations, and hear directly from you about your commitment to a free and fair election."

If appropriate, given the setting, someone on the team offers an opening prayer. If so, it may be best for the team to respectfully ask for consent from the election official before offering a prayer.

2. Grounding in faith – 3 minutes

A clergy member might say: "Our faith tradition teaches that every person possesses God-given dignity. Scripture repeatedly calls God's people to justice, truth and impartiality. Deuteronomy commands, 'You shall not distort justice; you shall not show partiality.' The prophet Micah calls us 'to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.'"

"For us, protecting a person's right to participate in choosing their government is one way of respecting the dignity and equality of our neighbors. We do not know — and do not need to know — how our neighbors vote. Our concern is that every eligible voter be treated fairly and every valid vote be counted accurately."

3. Hear from the election official – 10 minutes

Ask: "Can you walk us through what happens to a ballot — from the moment it is cast until the election results are certified?" Then: "What parts of that process are you personally responsible for?" Listen carefully. This portion should be primarily educational rather than argumentative.

4. Questions about protecting the election – 20 minutes

Choose the questions most relevant to your jurisdiction.

Counting votes

- What safeguards ensure that every valid ballot is counted?
- What happens when a ballot is challenged or initially cannot be counted?
- How can voters correct, or "cure," ballot problems when state law permits it?
- How are provisional ballots handled?
- How do you reconcile the number of voters with the number of ballots cast?

Security and accountability

- What procedures protect the chain of custody of ballots?
- Who is present when ballots are transported, processed and counted?
- What auditing or verification occurs before results become final?
- What portions of the counting, canvassing and auditing process can members of the public or authorized observers witness?

Preparing for pressure or disruption

- What are the biggest risks you are preparing for during this election?
- What happens if someone attempts to disrupt ballot counting or other election operations?
- What happens if your office receives an instruction or request from any government official that you believe conflicts with state or federal election law?
- Whom would you consult if there were a dispute about your legal responsibilities?
- What protections are in place so election workers can carry out their responsibilities without intimidation or improper political pressure?

Transparency

- How will you communicate with the public if counting takes longer than expected?
- Where can the public obtain accurate information about ballots counted, ballots remaining and certification?
- How can members of our congregations appropriately observe or participate in the election process?

5. Ask for clear commitments — 10 minutes

This is the most important part of the meeting. A delegation member says: "We know election officials can face enormous pressure. We also know that public servants sometimes have to make difficult decisions. We want you to know that people of faith in this community support election officials who faithfully and impartially carry out the law."

Then ask:

- "Can you commit to administering this election impartially, regardless of which candidates or parties benefit from the outcome?"
- "Can you commit to doing everything within your lawful authority to ensure that every valid ballot is counted?"
- "If you receive pressure from any political party, candidate, government official, private organization or other outside actor to treat voters or ballots differently because of the political consequences, can you commit to following the law rather than that pressure?"
- "If you believe someone is improperly attempting to interfere with your ability to administer the election fairly, will you tell the appropriate authorities and, when legally permissible, inform the public?"

Listen carefully and record the official's answers accurately. Do not demand promises that exceed the official's legal authority.

6. Ask: "How can we help?" — 5 minutes

Finish by asking: "What can responsible faith and community leaders do to help ensure a peaceful, accurate and trustworthy election?" Possibilities may include recruiting poll workers, directing voters to authoritative election information, explaining why final results sometimes take time, encouraging peaceful participation, or helping people understand legitimate observation procedures.

7. Close

End with: "Thank you for your service. We will continue paying attention throughout the election. We hope we can stay in communication with you, and we want you to know that when election officials faithfully and impartially carry out their responsibilities, people of faith in this community will stand behind them. We will keep you in our prayers."

After the Meeting

Within 24 hours, the delegation should meet or have a short call. Write down: What did the official commit to? What concerns remain? What did we learn? What follow-up did the official request? Who will maintain the relationship?

Send the official a short written thank-you summarizing the commitments you heard. This gives the official an opportunity to correct anything you misunderstood and creates a clear record of the conversation.

Then stay in a relationship with the official. The goal is not a single meeting. It is for election officials to know before, during and after Election Day that organized leaders in their community care about impartial election administration — and that the community is paying attention.

The Principle

We do not ask election officials to produce a particular result.

We ask them to protect the process that allows the people to produce the result.

Our commitment as Christians and other people of faith is simple: **No favored voters. No disfavored voters. No partisan administration of the law. Every eligible voter treated fairly. Every valid ballot counted accurately.**

OPEN THE EDITABLE VERSION

[Election Official Research Meeting Guide](#) →

Getting Support

Everything, in one folder

All six pieces above also live as individual, editable Google Docs in a single shared resource folder. Open the piece you want, use **File** → **Make a copy**, and adapt it for your own congregation — the originals in the folder stay untouched as the master copies.

MPS ELECTION DEFENSE TOOLKIT — FULL RESOURCE FOLDER

[Open the folder](#) →

Who to contact

For help with the Election Official Research Meeting Guide — researching your official's authority, or any question about preparing for or running the meeting — reach the MPS team at:

ELECTION SUPPORT

electionintegrity@mpstream.faith

A word on timing

This toolkit is meant to move fast: from the Weekend of Preaching & Teaching on October 18 into four weeks of sustained preaching, teaching, and action leading up to the midterm election. However, there is no single way to use this toolkit. Pick and choose the resources that best fit your congregation's needs. Use what serves your congregation now.

Find this toolkit online

This PDF and the resource folder are both available at **mpstream.faith**, alongside the rest of the Mainline Protestant Stream's resources.