

FAITHFUL VOTER REFLECTION GUIDE: NORTH CAROLINA

INTRODUCTION

The North Carolina Council of Churches offers this Faithful Voter Guide to help people of faith connect our faith claims with the policy systems that bracket our lives. As people of faith, we are called to pursue God's justice for our communities often grounded in the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament Gospels. The privilege of voting gives us the ability to shape society by supporting candidates who will promote policy initiatives that give each person the tools needed to flourish to that person's God-given potential.

This guide offers a snapshot of the most crucial policy decisions facing North Carolina in the immediate future. We hope it will spark discussion, inspire reflection, and boost discernment in our families, congregations, and communities.

To access our digital guide complete with links that will lead you to more information about specific topics, please scan the QR code to the right or visit our website.



THANK YOU!

We extend our gratitude to the dedicated staff members who have made this Faithful Voter Guide possible. We also thank the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church whose contribution has supported the first printing for distribution of the Faithful Voter Guide. Lastly, we express our appreciation to all the people of faith who have and will actively utilize and benefit from this guide in their communities, contributing to faith-filled decision-making and democratic participation. Together, we have inspired individuals, promoted democratic values, and fostered positive change.

CONTACT US

-  919-828-6501
-  info@ncchurches.org
-  www.ncchurches.org
-  27 Horne Street, Raleigh, NC 27607
-   @ncchurches
-   @northcarolinacouncilofchurches

VOTE YOUR VALUES

FAITH IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

One of the founding principles of our country is freedom of religion, meaning simply each person is free to participate in a religious tradition that suits that person or is free to participate in no religious traditions. The nation cannot force any person to practice a particular religion or adhere to certain religious beliefs. The First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees this freedom. Additionally, Thomas Jefferson clarified the meaning when he explained the “separation of church and state.” However, this constitutional principle does not require people of faith to abandon their beliefs when participating in the democratic process. On the contrary, our biblical values emphasizing justice and care for the marginalized, the pursuit of peace, and just economic principles should guide our civic engagement.

Meanwhile, Christian nationalism, sometimes called dominionism theology, is a threat to both our democracy and our Christian principles. By fusing religious ideology and cultural nationalism it has the potential to damage our diverse society and undermine the rights of individuals who do not adhere to that dominant ideology. By promoting a singular religious worldview within the public sphere, proponents of Christian nationalism risk marginalizing minority religious groups and non-religious individuals and compromising the principles of equality and inclusivity upon which our democracy thrives. We can see evidence of a Christian nationalist agenda in some of our state’s recent policy decisions that discriminate against marginalized communities, deny reproductive rights, mandate public education curriculum, limit LGBTQ+ autonomy, and reverse years of progress on environmental and climate justice.

The Council deeply believes we must address this misuse of the Word of God and issue a direct challenge to this insidious ideology. We welcome you to join justice-seeking people across North Carolina who are naming the truth and denouncing these tactics.



DETAILS ABOUT CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

The tenets of Christian nationalism do not derive from conservative values; they stem from the purposeful misappropriation of Christian values in the very places where people live and worship. Typically, the designation “Christian nationalism” refers to a militant political movement fueled by narrow religious worldviews that often overlap with white supremacist ideas. This form of nationalism is not Christian; it is authoritarian and exclusive, replacing human rights with exclusionary legislation and reversing social well-being with bigotry toward minority groups.

The most obvious manifestation of Christian nationalism is the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR). The NAR promotes a form of theology called “dominionism,” [defined](#) as the “theocratic idea that Christians are called by God to exercise dominion over every aspect of society by taking control of political and cultural institutions.” The “Seven Mountains Mandate,” defines the institutions essential to dominate: government, business, religion, family, education, media, and arts and entertainment. Those who oppose NAR dominionism teachings are often branded by NAR leaders as under demonic control.

Demonizing people with different opinions shuts down conversation and makes compromise impossible, both of which are necessary for an inclusive democracy. Christian nationalists believe their faith community, not the government, holds true political power and guards social policy. This authoritarian and religious supremacy central to Christian nationalism and groups like the NAR are no longer a fringe concern. More and more, political candidates and elected officials are parroting the talking points of such groups.

There are things you can do to counter this anti-democratic movement.

- Local power: Such groups are trying to gain power by acting locally. Find some friends, or perhaps start a group in your religious community, to go to town council and school board meetings. This is currently where the conflict often is. Listen to what is being said, and make sure others present, including your political leaders, know that Christian nationalists do not speak for everyone.
- Elections: Spread the word that our election system is in fact secure. Volunteer for candidates that stand up to such ideology. If there are no candidates, consider running yourself.
- Witness: If there is a community event or educational event that is being protested by Christian nationalists and others, go and lend support to those being silenced.
- Further Resources
 - [The Baptist Joint Commission on Religious Liberty](#) has resources for faith communities, including podcasts and discussion guides.
 - [Faithful America](#), an ecumenical Christian organization, has a list of resources, including sermon talking points.
 - “[Steeplejacking: How the Christian Right is Hijacking Mainstream Religion](#)”, written by former United Church of Christ President and General Minister, John Dorhauer, explores how some congregations have handled conflicts with Christian nationalism.
 - The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America has a “[Study Curriculum on Civic Life and Faith](#)” exploring how civic life and our faith intersect.

NAVIGATING THE N.C. CARBON PLAN

The mandate to care for creation is shared by all major religions. In particular, the book of Genesis instructs humanity to assume responsibility for “the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28). God goes on to explain how the plants and animals and their surroundings are “very good,” making it irrefutable that humans share the task of keeping it very good.

The accelerating climate crisis and the consequences of global warming are the most urgent and dangerous symptoms of our failure. As people of faith, we must call attention to God’s mandate to steward this great gift of Creation. As climate change destroys our common home and puts future generations at risk, we must confess the large role the fossil fuel industry has played, an industry that benefits many of us. In North Carolina we have an unprecedented opportunity to change course and hold the fossil fuel industry and energy polluters accountable through the legal proceedings of the North Carolina Carbon Plan. Signed into law in October 2021, the North Carolina Utilities Commission (NCUC) was directed to take “all reasonable steps” to achieve reductions in carbon emissions from the publicly owned generating facilities of Duke Energy Carolinas and Duke Energy Progress. The Carbon Plan should be an opportunity to reshape North Carolina’s energy future and protect community health. That means no new fossil fuel infrastructure or power plants.

We have the moral responsibility to elect leaders who will respond to the climate crisis. By voicing support for cleaner and more efficient energy, North Carolinians can encourage Duke Energy to invest in more sustainable practices while persuading the NCUC to approve a plan that meets our state’s emission goals. North Carolina decision makers must create a clean energy Carbon Plan that protects people, not fossil fuel profits.

The stakes couldn’t be higher as we approach the 2024 elections. There is still time to avert the most catastrophic impacts of climate change, but we must shift to clean energy now. At the same time, we must help communities prepare for more powerful storms that are sure to arrive because of our past choices. We urge you to vote for candidates who understand that the climate crisis is real and will take meaningful action to repair and restore a right relationship with the gift of creation.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How can I learn about North Carolina’s goals to address climate change and the role of the N.C. Carbon Plan?
2. How do decisions made by the N.C. Utilities Commission affect my community and me?
3. Is there a way for me to share my faith values that will help support climate solutions?

PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS

1. Ask candidates how they are working to support the move away from fossil fuels toward a clean energy transition in North Carolina.
2. Ask for a presentation on the NC Carbon Plan from NC Interfaith Power & Light, an initiative of the NC Council of Churches, with information on how you can become involved!

ADDRESSING HEALTHCARE JUSTICE

Over the course of his ministry, Jesus did more healing than preaching. Everywhere he went the sick came to him for healing or people brought the sick to him when the sick could not come on their own. Healing stories are also found scattered throughout the Old Testament: Elijah raising the widow's son (I Kings 17:17-24) and the healing of Naaman's leprosy after he washed in the River Jordan (II Kings 5). Likewise, the disciples manage some healing success once they are commissioned post-resurrection (Acts 9:36-43).

The common thread in each healing story is restoration to the community—family, social, or religious—from which one is excluded based on the sickness. Being well is about more than physical health. It is about being wholly healthy. Half of the healing stories described in the gospels concern people marginalized by society. In fifteen of those stories Jesus offers healing to someone ignored by the community. Other healing stories have to do with power structures that needed to be dismantled, i.e., healing on the Sabbath. None of the stories report Jesus asking for a co-pay, checking for in-network status, or refusing care on the basis of ability to pay. Jesus was the original universal healthcare provider.

Most of us understand the broad strokes of the broken parts of the American healthcare system. We have the most expensive health care in the world, yet the lowest life expectancy in the developed world. Among developed nations we are the only one not to provide universal healthcare. Those who struggle to obtain affordable, accessible healthcare know this story well. Those who know this story best are disproportionately people of color.

A telling example of this inefficiency is the alarming increase in drug overdose deaths in North Carolina. The rate of overdose deaths among North Carolina residents in 2022 was 27% higher than the United States as a whole. The marginalized population of people who use drugs, and those with mental health illness, has to surmount the stigma barrier within the healthcare system. We should strive to understand these barriers so we can act in compassionate ways to help our neighbors back to wholeness.

Covid has taught us why tying healthcare to employment, making healthcare dependent on family status, or setting income limits on access to healthcare will never work. Access to affordable healthcare, easily achieved by Medicare for All, is the first building block. We urge you to vote for candidates who understand the real cost of healthcare and will work to restore the potential for wholeness to everyone.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How can we ensure that all who qualify for the Affordable Care Act and N.C. Medicaid know about their eligibility and gain access to health care?
2. How can we work together to advocate and educate to make sure we are helping, not hurting, individuals with substance use disorders?

PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS

1. Get involved in the [NC Medicare 4 All Coalition](#) to support actions to achieve healthcare for all!
2. Ask our Project Coordinator of Overdose Response for a presentation on the faith community's response to the opioid crisis, as well as mental health awareness.

INVESTING IN FUTURE GENERATIONS

Sunday Schools were established in England during the 18th Century to serve the children of poor laborers at a time when children were little more than fodder for the capitalist machine. Methodists and Presbyterians were especially engaged in this work and while religious education was a piece of what they did, the real purpose was teaching children to read, write, and do arithmetic. Church leaders knew if those child laborers managed to survive childhood, reading and counting would open doors to a different life.

Things evolved differently in this country with education becoming a public offering rather than a private privilege, albeit with a checkered history to whom it was offered and how it was funded. Once again, those whom the oppressors wanted to keep in chains were denied the right to learn because their oppressors also knew reading and counting opens doors to a different life. The struggle for access to a “sound basic education” continues to this day in North Carolina (Leandro).

Public education is the school of choice in this state, educating nearly 80% of school children. Those of us in the 20% who do not choose public schools for our own children must have a vested interest in public schools because 8 out of 10 of our future neighbors, bosses, employees, doctors, ministers, and teachers will attend public school. Charter schools and private school vouchers siphon funds from this majority group, offering the misleading claim of school choice. In truth, few students from low-wealth backgrounds can afford private school tuition, even with a voucher.

We all know that education for all grew out of our faith communities in their effort to serve the needs of the children around them. Now it's time for the faith communities to support public education in its effort to serve the needs of the children around them. We urge you to vote for candidates who will privilege public schools in budget discussions, offering our children the future they deserve and the chance to flourish to the full potential of their God-given ability.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How can we support the public schools in our local communities?
2. How can we advocate for policies that foster inclusive learning environments?
3. How can we support local educators as they work to narrow the achievement gaps among students?

PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS

1. Explore Pastors for NC Children programs that shed light on the issues facing public school children and advocate for policy solutions.
2. Unceasingly tell your General Assembly representatives and senators to fulfill the recommendations of the Comprehensive Remedial Plan based on WestEd's research and the Governor's Commission on Access to Sound Basic Education.

TRANSFORMING CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEMS

When Jesus told his followers to visit the prisoner (Matt. 25:36), the prisoners were typically in debt. Their visitors supplied many of their daily needs, like food, and brought forward debt repayment, without which the prisoner would die in prison. Today things are a bit different, though we continue to imprison people for their inability to pay fines or post bail. Nearly 70% of incarcerated pre-conviction people remain there because they cannot pay bail even though they are not a flight risk and do not present a threat to society. Furthermore, statistics overwhelmingly show racial bias in our criminal justice system from the initial contact—arrest, arraignment, assignment of bail—to the sometimes bitter end of capital punishment. Along the way torturous practices like solitary confinement affect mental health and human rights.

Jesus' imperative to visit the prisoner is now a call to reform the injustices and biases of the criminal justice system. As recipients of God's grace, we are called to seek restitution rather than retribution and create avenues for restoration rather than punishment. God's gift of life to us contains great responsibility and sometimes the gift is abused. We call that sin. Some sins are large. Taking the life of another might be the largest. Along with life's potential for good or evil also comes the possibility of confession and repentance.

Some people might not change, but it's not our place to rob them of the opportunity. When the state sanctions killing, especially rife with biases and mistakes, we are the evil ones. We need to change and allow God's redemptive work to continue. We urge you to vote for candidates willing to face the truth of our current criminal justice system and begin the process of reforming and humanizing it.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does our faith inform our perspectives on capital punishment, solitary confinement, and cash bail, and how can we advocate for reforms?
2. How can we support initiatives promoting alternatives to punitive measures, prioritize rehabilitation and restorative justice, and ensure fair treatment and due process for all individuals involved in the criminal justice system?

PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS

1. Write Governor Cooper today and ask him to commute all death sentences to prison terms.
2. Request a replica solitary confinement cell to raise awareness and education at your next community event!
3. Learn about Restorative Justice efforts in your community.

CREATING AN EQUITABLE ECONOMY

In the story about the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), most of us are struck by the seemingly unfair behavior of a boss who pays everyone the same thing regardless of how many hours they work. In truth, the denarius that each laborer received was the daily recommended allowance to feed one family. In other words, the laborers were all paid a living wage. Scripture is replete with stories and injunctions on how to create just economic systems, inclusive of wages, taxes, prices, and philanthropy.

As people of faith, we must advocate for an economic system where everyone can flourish. For example, consider paid family leave, available to only 12% of the current labor force. Without this basic benefit, many workers must choose between care-giving for their families or earning money to support their families. Furthermore, rather than having a graduated income tax system where those “to whom much is given, much will be required” (Luke 12:48), we have a fixed tax rate, ensuring that a disproportionate percentage of income from low-wage workers will be diverted to income tax payment. This regressive model not only perpetuates income disparities but also hampers our ability to foster inclusive prosperity. Finally, the stagnation of the minimum wage since 2008 leaves many families struggling to make ends meet, disproportionately affecting low-wage workers who are predominantly women.

As we advocate for economic justice in North Carolina, we must draw upon these foundational principles of our faith. Expanding paid family leave, reforming regressive tax systems, and establishing fair wages are not just policy issues, they are expressions of our commitment to following the teachings of Christ. By taking decisive action on these fronts, we can pave the way for a more equitable and prosperous future for all North Carolinians.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What do you see in our current economic system that reflects compassion and justice?
2. In what ways do economic disparities impact the ability of individuals and families to participate fully in society and live with dignity?
3. What steps can we take as a community to advocate for policies that promote economic justice and uplift those on the margins?

PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS

1. Patronize local businesses that pay a living wage and offer sick leave and family leave. Where we shop is a moral decision.
2. Vote for candidates who will put people over profits and expect corporations to pay their fair share.
3. Sign up for [NC Budget & Tax Center updates](#) to stay informed!

PRESERVING OUR RIGHT TO REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE

In the Christian tradition, there's a difference between the legal and the moral. One's morality is a relationship between the individual and God. The whole point of religious freedom in this nation is that each person makes faith-filled decisions according to that person's read of scripture, the teachings of the tradition, the experiences of those near by, and the reasoning within particular circumstances. The responsibility of the state is to surround the person with the resources needed for whichever decision is best. In our current climate, the moral and the legal have changed places. We now have people imposing their morality on our nation's laws. That's a fundamental shift in the understanding of the "freedom of religion" guaranteed in our constitution. We have a situation where the one pregnant, who is a person, is not valued as a person while the fetus, which is not a person, is granted personhood status. Make no mistake, this is a concerted effort to relegate pregnant people to second-class status and will return us to the dark days of a two-tiered abortion system where those with means have access and those without don't.

There is no moral obligation to have a baby just because you are pregnant. Nothing in the Christian tradition requires it, even if a small segment of Christianity would have you believe otherwise. If our legislators would spend more time allocating money for the actual care of women, men, children, and families, fewer pregnant people would face untenable dilemmas. For starters, all forms of contraception should be free and accessible; childcare and public education should be fully funded; maternal mortality which, by the way, is higher in the U.S. than any other developed country—and even higher for people of color—should be addressed.

The history of abortion is as old as the history of pregnancy. People have always needed this option and, in truth, have always had it. God's primary directive is about all of us taking care of each one of us, but allowing every one of us the freedom to make our own decisions. If we want to address abortion, we need to address the resources that allow each member of society to flourish to the fullest potential. This will go a lot further toward helping pregnant people have more than one choice. Only then can the pregnant person make a good choice, surrounded by family and friends, and supported by a religious community.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Why do you think the US has one of the highest maternal mortality rates compared to other high-income countries? How should this impact our policies around reproductive healthcare?
2. What could society do to ensure that every child grows up in a safe, healthy environment?

PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS

1. Ask candidates how they plan to protect and expand access to reproductive healthcare services in North Carolina.
2. Learn the statistics about who anti-abortion laws impact the most.

PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITIES FROM GUN VIOLENCE

While sensational stories about gun violence dominate the airwaves, we are pointing in a different direction to frame the conversation about guns and safety in our country—The Second Commandment (Ex. 20:4). Right after God commands God’s people not to follow other gods, God commands the people not to have any idols. Idols assume a lot of guises in our world that we don’t immediately understand as idolatry and for many of us, guns are the idols we turn to because we “believe in them” to keep us safe.

Meanwhile, statistics show guns in the home are four times more likely to be used against someone in the home than to protect those in the home. Add to that all the gun-related accidents that occur when guns are not properly stored and most guns are not. It’s been said more people are killed in this country by toddlers than foreign terrorists, yet we fought “the war on terror” for 20 years, while most states have few to no laws mandating safe storage of guns.

Instead of believing the propaganda about safety, we should learn the truth about gun deaths. Mass shootings make the headlines. Schools, worship spaces, military bases are all places the media love to report on. The truth about gun violence is very different. Gun violence happens every day in our homes and in our neighborhoods—one death at a time, few of which become newsworthy.

Gun violence is a public health crisis in our country. When individual rights are at odds with community safety, our faith tradition dictates that we lean toward community safety. Biblically speaking, individual rights are seldom privileged. Instead, the Bible privileges a covenant community where each one is concerned about everyone else. “Love God, love your neighbor,” occurs in a variety of places, nuanced in many ways, throughout scripture. In other words, the rights of an individual are not more important than the safety of the entire community. We urge you to vote for candidates who will place community safety above individual rights and work to create safe places for all of us.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does the imperative to love our neighbors influence the legislation we should promote on gun violence prevention?
2. What steps can we take within our congregations and neighborhoods to promote gun safety education, support survivors of gun violence, and advocate for policy changes that prioritize public safety?
3. How can Extreme Risk Protection Orders (temporary restriction of firearm access) help protect us and our loved ones?

PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS

1. Organize a community forum on gun safety and safe storage. Give away gun locks.
2. Learn the truth about gun violence statistics.

GET READY TO VOTE!

Several changes in voting laws made recently will have an impact on how easy or difficult voting is for many citizens. Most significantly:

- ✓ North Carolina voters will be asked to provide a photo ID to vote. To view acceptable forms of photo ID, visit ncsbe.gov/voting/voter-id.
Your county board of elections is required to provide free photo voter IDs to registered voters in your county. Find your county board of elections office: vt.ncsbe.gov/BOEInfo/.
- ✓ Voters who don't have an ID may fill out an ID exception form when they vote. If you plan to register (or register voters) in 2024, the State Board of Elections is now requiring that new registrants must complete one of the following options in Box 3 on the voter registration form:
 - Provide NC Driver's License or NC DMV ID number or
 - Provide the last four digits of Social Security number or
 - Check a box that states they do not have a driver's license/NC DMV ID number or social security number
- ✓ Mail-in ballots must be received by the county board of elections by 7:30 pm on Election Day.

IMPORTANT 2024 ELECTION DATES

Deadline to Register

Oct
11

You can meet this deadline by registering with your county board of elections or by mailing in a registration form postmarked by the 11th.

Early Voting Period

Oct
17

Nov
2

To find polling places and times for your county, check with your county board of elections or go to ncsbe.gov, under "Voter Tools."

Absentee Ballot Deadline

Oct
29

To vote by mail-in absentee ballot, you must request the absentee ballot by Oct. 29. Visit ncsbe.gov, under "Vote by Mail," to download a ballot request form.

Election Day!

Nov
5

Polls will be open across the state from 6:30 a.m. until 7:30 p.m. Go to ncvoter.org to see where to vote.

To preview your ballot, go to ncvoter.org.

If you encounter any difficulty in registering or voting, call

State Board of Elections at 866-522-4723
Democracy NC's Election Hotline at 888-OUR-VOTE or
the National Election Protection Hotline at 866-OUR-VOTE.

