

Connection, Care, and Conscience

A Multifaith Reflection Guide for the 2020 Election Debates

As people living in the United States, we know that the upcoming Presidential election will shape the substance of this country for years to come.

With a global pandemic, uncertain economic times, and violence directed against so many of our communities, we know that the fear, anxiety, and uncertainty of this moment can feel overwhelming. We also know that we draw strength from our traditions, from our diverse spiritual practices, from our connections to one another, and from the tender hope that comes from the truth of our interdependence, and from the strength of so many who are working and organizing towards justice.

With the election looming in the midst of political polarization, it can be tempting to simply stop listening, or to withdraw from participating in the political process altogether. And yet, as people of faith and values, we remain responsible for embodying ethical leadership as we engage with our communities, with the wider public, and with the challenge of civic participation in a time of struggle.

This guide invites you to engage the Presidential and Vice Presidential debates through the lens of your values and what matters to you. We hope that it will ground you in a sense of reflection, compassion, and open-ness as you consider the impact that you can have in this critical election.



Preparing to Watch the Debates

Values

List values that are very important to you. These are concepts that reflect your ethics and beliefs. Some examples are strength, family, kindness, faith, integrity, freedom, and hope. Which ones are most meaningful to you? As you create your list, what do you notice? What moments or experiences have shaped your values over the course of your life? Are the values you list grounded in a particular faith or spiritual tradition?

Issues

Ask yourself, “what issues facing our country are most important to me?” List your top three concerns and write a sentence or two about why each of these matters to you.

Issue

Why this matters to me

Looking Beyond Ourselves

What identities do you hold, and what communities matter to you? This might be a geographical community, like your city, town or state. It might be a group of people, such as African Americans, immigrants, or LGBTQ people. What are the ways that you show you value those communities that matter to you? How does this election impact the identities that make you who you are?

Do you identify as practicing in or belonging to a tradition of religious or spiritual practice? Do you feel a connection to a particular faith tradition or wisdom tradition? Which one?

Think about how that tradition imagines our humanity, our interdependence, and our connection to a creative and loving force beyond ourselves. Where do you see that force being present at this time? How might it be calling you? What might that force be asking of you and of us in this moment?

Different faiths and traditions of spiritual practice approach this question in different ways. We've included some examples below to help spark your reflection, and we invite you to consider how you would ask this question in a way that feels meaningful to your own beliefs and approach. For example:

Jewish: In Jewish tradition, we talk often about a personal and collective ethical responsibility to Tikkun Olam, or the repair of the world. What does Tikkun Olam call us to do in this moment? What does it call you to do?

—Liz Loeb, member of Shir Tikvah Synagogue and Associate Director of Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light

Buddhist: Having had the direct experience of living in the U.S. the past four years, how might watching the debate contribute to the Right Understanding and Right Action path factors in the Noble Eightfold Path? How do the experiences of compassion inform what you choose to know or not know about national politics?

—Pamela Ayo Yetunde, co-founder, Center of the Heart

Christian (Roman Catholic): Catholic Social Teaching holds sacred the life and dignity of the human person, challenges us to live in solidarity with all people, especially the poor and marginalized, and to care for all creation. How do you live these values as you engage in public life? Are these values expressed in public policy offered by the candidates?

—Joan Howe-Pullis, Director of Justice Ministries, Pax Christi Catholic Community, Eden Prairie, Minnesota.

What does **your** tradition say to you?

As you watch the debates

Values

Notice where you see your values reflected. You may want to jot down times when a candidate seems to particularly speak to or embody those values that you share.

Issues

Consider how the candidates are speaking about the issues that matter most to you. What are they saying about them? What solutions are they proposing? Do you agree or disagree?

The Sacred

How is your understanding of something that might be called sacred present here in this moment? What do you think the candidates hold sacred?

After the Debate

What have you noticed or thought about as you look back on the debate?

Did you hear something that intrigued or puzzled you? What three things would you like to know more about?

As a result of what you heard in the debates, what is the next step you feel drawn to take?