Politics is often a dirty word, but political processes are simply the way communities organize their everyday lives. For people of faith, public policy is never merely politics. It is a way of living out the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. The problems in our world often seem too big to confront. We see injustice every day and feel that change can’t or won’t happen. But our faith is infused with hope and built on a foundation of action.

Voting is a natural extension of faithful action. Elected officials make decisions which have wide-reaching impact. In turn, we have an enormous opportunity to create positive change within our communities by engaging with our legislators, voting, and encouraging others to join our civic action. Below are action steps on what you can do to become an educated voter. We have also provided suggestions on how to engage in a faithful and respectful discussion about anything but especially helpful when it comes to “talking politics.”

Another way to profoundly impact the future of our democracy and the health of our communities is by completing the United States Census. As people of faith, we need to lead the way to ensure that everyone is counted. To be counted, you must complete the Census questionnaire by Sept. 30. An undercount could cost our state and local communities billions of dollars for programs and impact Congress representation. As of Tues., Aug. 11, only 64% of Pinellas residents had responded.
ACTION STEPS:

- **Check Your Voter Status**: check here for your voter registration and voting status including your polling place, sample ballot, and vote-by-mail ballot status. On this page, you can also find your current district and voting location.

- Register to Vote: Florida offers [online voter registration](http://www.voteflorida.com). You can register by mail to vote in Florida by printing a voter registration form, filling it out, and mailing it to your local election office. You can also register to vote in person if you prefer.

- Check out important national [election dates](http://www.vote.org).

- Census 2020: Learn more about the Census or take the Census online at [www.My2020Census.gov](http://www.My2020Census.gov), or by phone (in English 844-330-2020 or in one of 13 languages).

TIPS FOR FAITHFUL AND RESPECTFUL DISCUSSION

- Realize that the Holy Spirit is present and active in the conversation and has given each participant a part of the truth you seek to discern.

- Follow the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” – even when you disagree with them. Listen respectfully and carefully to others.

- State what you think you heard someone say and ask for clarification before responding, to make sure to understand each other.

- Speak honestly about your thoughts and feelings. Share personal experiences to help others more fully understand your concerns and perspectives on the issues. Conversations can be passionate and still be respectful, civil, and constructive.

- Speak for yourself, rather than as a member of a group. Use “I” statements rather than “You” statements. Focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people’s motives, intelligence, or integrity.

- Look for and lift points of agreement as well as disagreement.

- Create space for everyone’s concerns to be spoken, even when they disagree.

- Seek to stay in community with each other even though the discussion may be vigorous and perhaps tense.

- Keep an open mind and heart. You may not hear if you judge too quickly.

- Pray for God’s grace to listen attentively, speak clearly, and remain open to God’s vision for all of us.

[Adapted from 1) Our Faith Our Vote in 2020 by the United Church of Christ and 2)“Ground Rules for Conversation” (Evangelical Lutheran Church Department for Communication) and “Seeking to be Faithful Together” (adopted by the 204th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA)]