

PASTORS CIVIC RENEWAL TOOLKIT



Introduction

The political polarization we see in society is not what we should see in the church, especially around what people are polarized about. We need to see renewal in the church and renewal that begins with the church. With that, we are calling people to “return to Jesus” and recalibrate with believers around the U.S., moving away from a politics driven by fear to a faithful Christian politic driven by the perfect love of God that casts out fear.

If you find this resource helpful, feel free to share this with whoever you think may benefit.

A word from AACCC’s President

Dear Pastor,

We are facing one of the most contentious political seasons in modern US history and our communities and churches are often sites of potential conflict. However the church is not **blue** or **red**, but we are the Kingdom of God. While we don’t worship the donkey or the elephant, but worship the Lamb of God, it often feels like that Lamb is held hostage to political polarization. With that said, we know that God remains on His throne and his rule and reign will outlast any political party or empire. In this, we rest.

At the same time, we are pastoring in real ways with real people that are often indifferent to politics or extremely engaged with it in ways that make pastoring difficult or hard in a politically polarized world. As one national study showed, the average American places their partisan political identity above their ethnicity, race, and faith. That means that people place greater weight and significance and meaning in their political affiliation than in their faith in Jesus - and sadly, they often conflate the two. This is syncretism and the Bible gives many

examples of how this distorts our faith. If I were to describe the state of Christians and US politics, syncretism is the word I think best describes it. You could say that the system was designed for such deep loyalties.

Pastoring is hard, period. It's even harder when partisan loyalties determine what people understand to be faithful Christians. This needs to be addressed, and the best place to address it is in a Church that Christ claims as his own. To God is our highest loyalty. And only to God is our undying loyalty.

At AACC, we are inviting you to join with Asian American Christians - and non-Asian American Christians - throughout the country in a call for faithful civic renewal. In essence we are calling the church back to Jesus. And this call is fourfold (which all include turnkey resources that you can adapt for your context):

1. **Pray:** You will find a prayer we are inviting people to use or adapt, as language is often difficult to find when it comes to contentious issues (like politics). Our hope is that this prayer invites the Holy Spirit to begin a work of renewal in all our communities.
2. **Preach:** We are inviting people to wisely tackle the political division head on through the Scriptures. Sometime between now and Election Day, we encourage you to preach on the political division and the political syncretism we observe. Included is a potential sermon outline to inform your preaching.
3. **Ponder:** We invite you to consider the implications of Christ's Lordship. We have included a declaration that we have found informative and helpful that you can share with others.
4. **Participate:** We invite you to consider implementing some activities to further engage your congregations in Jesus-centered political reflection. These activities are designed to foster thoughtful dialogue, community involvement, and faithful Christian political engagement.

If you are receiving this, we would love to know how you are participating in this call to civic renewal.

Whether you are able to participate on September 8 or not, we'd love to hear how you led during this season and would love to find ways to share your efforts with others.

Also included are some insights from AACC's Faith and Politics Forum, which we held in Washington D.C. where 45 pastors from throughout the country came to learn, discuss, and advocate with one another and with White House officials on matters that were of importance to the Asian American Christian community and beyond. These insights should help you to see that **you are not alone**. We are here to walk with you. I hope this toolkit serves you in these difficult times.

In Christ,

Raymond Chang

President, Asian American Christian Collaborative



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We are so excited that you are joining thousands of other Asian American Christians (and others) throughout the country in a call for civic renewal. We know that we need to see more faithful political engagement by our community, and we hope this toolkit serves you well. Included here are 5 resources:

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Insights



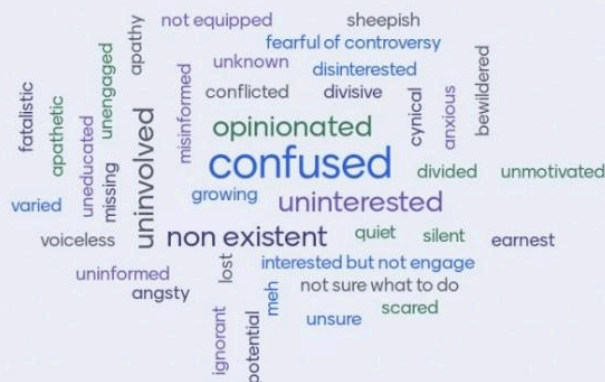
At an AACC's Faith and Politics forum, we asked 45 pastors, scholars, and ministry leaders a few questions on Asian American Christian political engagement. Here is what they shared.

Polling Results

When we asked pastors to describe the state of *Asian American CHRISTIANS* when it comes to politics and political engagement, the number one word was **CONFUSED**. Second to that were two conflicting words: ***opinionated*** and ***uninterested***.

How would you describe the state of the individual Asian American Christian when it comes to politics and political engagement?

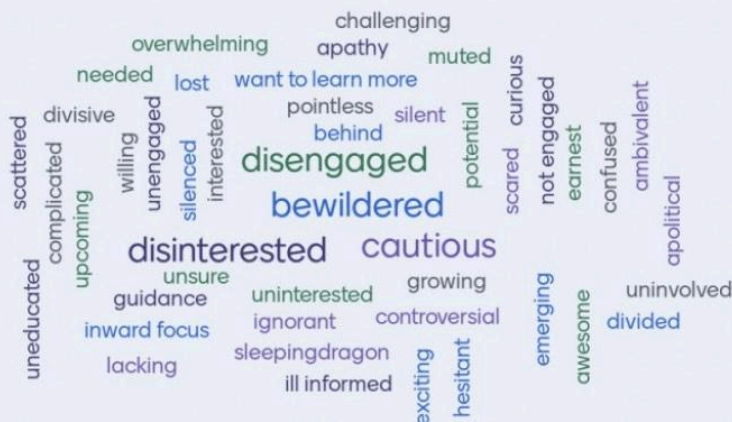
47 responses



When we asked how pastors would describe the state of the *Asian American CHURCH* when it came to politics and political engagement, four words were used: **disengaged, bewildered, disinterested, cautious.**

How would you describe the state of the Asian American church when it comes to politics and political engagement?

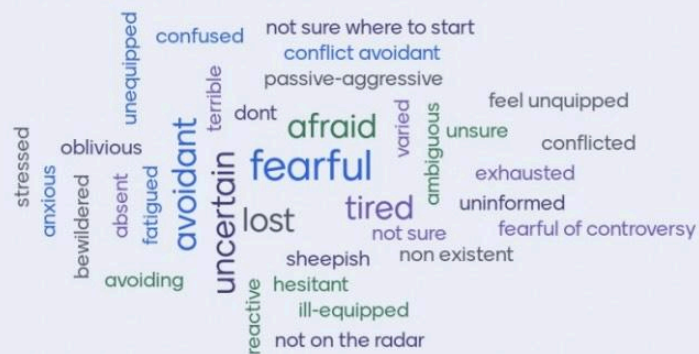
51 responses



When we asked how they would describe *Asian American PASTORS*, when it comes to disciplining their congregations on political issues and political engagement, the dominant word was **FEARFUL**, followed closely by ***afraid, tired, lost, uncertain, and avoidant***.

How would you describe Asian American pastors when it comes to disciplining their congregations on political issues and political engagement?

42 responses



While these insights may not be surprising, they should definitely be sobering to hear and read. If you are feeling ill-equipped to navigate the political landscape, know that you are not alone (in fact, it was one of the words that emerged in the question about pastors).

A Prayer

Below is **a prayer we wrote specifically for the political season we are in**. We believe in the power of prayer. Where we fall short, God more than makes up the difference. Here is a prayer calling for civic renewal within the church. Please feel free to use this directly or adapt it in a way that works for your congregation and community - with or without attributions to us.

Some of you have already prayed for unity in the midst of division, truth in the midst of false claims, and a willingness to work through our differences for the flourishing of all. Others of you are either planning to pray or want to pray, but don't necessarily have the words because of all the million of other things you are carrying. Regardless, we are inviting you to join others throughout the country to pray in your communities.

A Prayer for Civic Renewal:

Lord, we come before you in a time marked by division, fear, and uncertainty.

We acknowledge that you are the God of perfect love—a love that casts out fear and is freely given to us. It is from this love that we are called to love others, including our neighbors and even our enemies. Yet, we often fall short, and for this, we seek your forgiveness.

As we enter another political season where divisions deepen, rhetoric intensifies, and the pressure to fully align with a party or candidate increases, we ask for your guidance. Help us to be a people who are more committed to your love and your kingdom than to any political agenda. May we seek your kingdom and righteousness above all else.

We recognize that for many, including Christians, partisan identity has become more important than identity in Christ. Too often, the two are indistinguishable. Lord, let this not be true of us. For those who affiliate with red or blue, may they not put those affiliations above you or conflate those affiliations with you. Instead, may they be prophetic voices within their parties to move towards a deeper kingdom ethic.

Grant us wisdom and discernment, as you have promised to those who ask. We are in desperate need of your guidance.

We also pray for unity, a unity established through the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ. Too many churches and families have been torn apart by political divisions, revealing the depth of political idolatry among us.

Yet, may we be a people who, together, discern the times and work out our faith in the realm of politics. Let us not be driven by fear, but by a pursuit of what is good, holy, and righteous. May we engage with society in a way that is led by our faith.

We acknowledge that neither major political party fully reflects your kingdom. As we prepare to vote, may we choose candidates who will promote righteousness and the flourishing of all in their policies (which we know both parties will fall short on), understanding that character is essential for leadership. Give us the discernment to choose wisely.

As we navigate this election cycle, help us to be motivated by the love that casts out fear. May we be a people who pursue truth, righteousness, justice, and holiness in all things. Protect the unity you have established, and may our faith shape how we are known and act in the public square. May we be known as people who bring healing and love to a grieving world.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

A Sermon

AN ALTERNATIVE WITNESSING COMMUNITY

John 17:20-23

w/ Mark 12:30-31, 1 John 4:18, Matthew 6:33-34

Kevin Hayashida, Crossroads Community Church

Raymond Chang, Asian American Christian Collaborative

John 17:20–23

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Mark 12:30-31

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

1 John 4:18

“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”

Matthew 6:33-34

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Foundational ideas for preaching on politics

- Whatever your political affiliation, you are welcome to join the body of Christ globally and locally
- Our affiliation should be with Jesus Christ above any political affiliation
- As Christians our posture is a love for God and a love for neighbor that casts out fear
- Our posture should be curious and humble toward others who see things differently
- Our political commitments should be to grace, mercy, truth, righteousness, and justice in policy and in those we cast our votes for
- In all things, we place our trust in the Lord, in whom we are secure and can live

THE BIG IDEA: We can disagree politically, love unconditionally, pursue what is good, true, righteous, and just, and live in unity.

Jesus prays for PROTECTION: protection for unity, protection from division

“Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.” John 17:11b

“By ‘one,’ Jesus is referring to the joint mission that he and the Father had been cooperating on... Jesus is asking that this joint venture would continue with and through his apostles... Notice that Jesus prays for their protection—but not their physical protection. He’s asking the Father to protect them from becoming anything other than one with one another and the Father for the sake of the mission.” - Andy Stanley, *Not In It To Win It*

“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” John 17:18

OUR POSTURE: In the world, but not of the world

“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.” John 17:15–16.

We as Christians must be driven by a love for God and love for neighbor. (Mark 12:30-31)

Postures we must reject and resist:

- Apart from the World
- Against the World
- Attached to the World

(Adapted from Rich Villodas, *God, Politics & the Church* sermon)

What does it mean to be in the world, but not of the world?

It is to be deeply present in the world and radically different from the world.

OUR PURSUIT: Represent the Kingdom of God as individuals

As Christians, we are Kingdom people. We are the people of God and called to be ambassadors for Christ. As such, the *how* and *what* are important.

How we treat others as Christians matters. It reflects our faith in God and whether we have put our trust in him. To be a non-anxious presence means that we can treat those we disagree with, with the love, grace, and truth God offers us.

Seeking, receiving, and pursuing God's Kingdom first, reminds us, in all things, we need not be anxious about anything, for God's sovereignty. (Matthew 6:33-34)

Our God driven love for others can cast out political fears, without compromising on what is righteous and just. (1 John 4:18)

What we pursue is (comprehensive) Kingdom ethics. According to the Psalms, the Kingdom of God is marked by justice and righteousness. We are to reflect the righteousness and justice of God's Kingdom!

Reflect the Kingdom of God as a church community

God calls for obedience on multiple commands, but only calls followers to seek one thing first - the Kingdom.

Our churches are outposts of God’s Kingdom, which our churches are called to reflect and model as a community through faithful presence, service, and advocacy for those the world sees as the least and the last.

Question to reflect on: Would your neighbors miss you if your church disappeared?

THE PURPOSE OF OUR UNITY: So that the world would believe that Jesus is God’s son

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” John 17:20–21.

A PRAYER for the church

Father, make us one, so others meet your Son and see your Kingdom.

APPLICATION: I Will Statements

I will love someone unconditionally who I disagree with politically.

I will show up for my community, driven by God’s love, even if my preferred candidate loses.

Digging Deeper - Reflection Questions

What do you look forward to most - and dread most - about presidential election years?

In your family of origin, did you experience a sense of division and distancing? How does what you experienced in your family shape how you view politics today?

Read John 17:20-23 where Jesus offers a prayer for future believers. In verse 23, Jesus prays for unity. How would you define “unity”? According to Jesus’s prayer, why is unity so important?

How will you show up the day after the election?

What do you need from the church?

A Declaration

In this moment of social conflict and political division, we confess the following Christian convictions:

ONE: We give our allegiance to Jesus Christ alone.

We affirm that Jesus Christ is God's Son and the only head of the Church (Colossians 1:18). No political ideology or earthly authority can claim the authority that belongs to Christ (Philippians 2:9-11). We reaffirm our dedication to his Gospel which stands apart from any partisan agenda. God is clear that he will not share his glory with any other (Isaiah 42:8). Our worship belongs to God alone (Exodus 20:3-4), because our true hope is not in any party, leader, movement, or nation, but in the promise of Christ's return when he will renew the world and reign over all things (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

We reject the false teaching that anyone other than Jesus Christ has been anointed by God as our Savior, or that a Christian's loyalty should belong to any political party. We reject any message that promotes devotion to a human leader or that wraps divine worship around partisanship.

TWO: We will lead with love, not fear.

We affirm that God's saving power revealed in Jesus is motivated by his love for the world and not anger (John 3:16). Because God has lavished his love upon us, we can love others (1 John 4:19). We acknowledge that this world is full of injustice and pain, but we are not afraid because Jesus Christ has promised to never abandon us (John 16:33). Unlike the false security promised by political idolatry and its messengers, the perfect love of God drives away all fear (1 John 4:18). Therefore, we do not employ fear, anger, or terror as we engage in our mission, but instead we follow the more excellent way of Jesus which is love (1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13).

We reject the stoking of fears and the use of threats as a legitimate form of godly motivation, and we repudiate the use of violence to achieve political goals as incongruent with the way of Christ.

THREE: We submit to the truth of Scripture.

We affirm that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, authoritative for faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We commit to interpreting and applying Scripture faithfully, guided by the Holy Spirit, for the building up of Christ's people and the blessing of his world (John 16:13). We believe any true word of prophecy must align with the teachings of Scripture and the character of Jesus (1 John 4:1-3). Likewise, to lie about others, including political opponents, is a sin (Exodus 20:16). Therefore, we commit to speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), knowing deception dishonors God and harms the reputation of his Church.

We reject the misuse of holy Scripture to sanction a single political agenda, provoke hatred, or sow social divisions, and we believe that using God's name to promote misinformation or lies for personal or political gain is bearing his name in vain (Exodus 20:7).

FOUR: We believe the Gospel heals every worldly division.

We affirm the unity of all believers in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:28), and that through his sacrificial death on the cross, he has removed the barriers that divide us (Ephesians 2:14-18), making people from every nation, tribe, people, and language into one new family (Revelation 7:9). We are called to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9), and the counter-cultural unity of the Church is to be a sign to the world of God's love and power (John 13:35; 17:20-21).

We reject any attempt to divide the Church, which is the Body of Christ, along partisan, ethnic, or national boundaries, and any message that says it is God's desire for the human family to be perpetually segregated by race, culture, or ethnicity is a rejection of the Gospel.

FIVE: We are committed to the prophetic mission of the Church.

We affirm that Christ's kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), therefore the Church necessarily stands apart from earthly political powers so that it may speak prophetically to all people, the society, and governing authorities. The Church has been given a divine mission of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). First, we call everyone to be reconciled to God through the proclamation of the Gospel as we teach people everywhere to copy the way of Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20). Second, we seek to reconcile people to one another by addressing issues of justice, righteousness, and peace (Amos 5:24). We accomplish this by loving our neighbors (Mark 12:31), and by engaging our public

life with humility, integrity, and a commitment to the common good as defined by our faith in Christ (Romans 12:18).

We reject both the call for the Church to withdraw from societal issues out of fear of political contamination, as well as any attempt to distort the Church into a mere vehicle of political or social power.

SIX: We value every person as created in God's image.

We affirm that all people bear God's image and possess inherent and infinite worth (Genesis 1:27). Jesus bestowed dignity upon those his culture devalued including children, women, foreigners, the poor, and the infirm, and he taught us that our love, like God's, must extend even to our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). Our faith in Christ, therefore, compels us to act with love and mercy toward all, regardless of their age, abilities, identity, political beliefs, or affiliations (John 13:34-35), and we commit ourselves to advocate for the value of everyone our society harms or ignores.

We reject any messages that employ dehumanizing rhetoric, that attempt to restrict who is worthy of God's love, or that impose limitations on the command to "love your neighbor" that Christ himself removed.

SEVEN: We recognize godly leaders by their character.

We affirm that the character of both our political and spiritual leaders matter. Within the Church, we seek to follow spiritual leaders who display evidence of the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Jesus warned us to be on guard against false teachers who come as wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). These voices will tempt us with flattery, bad doctrine, and messages we want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3). They serve the false idols of power, wealth, and strength rather than the true God. Outside the Church, we will evaluate leaders based on their actions and the fruit of their character and not merely their promises or political success (Matthew 7:15-20). When any leader claims to have God's approval, whether in the Church or in politics, we will not confuse effectiveness for faithfulness, but carefully discern who is truly from God (1 John 4:1).

We reject the lie that a leader's power, popularity, or political effectiveness is confirmation of God's favor, or that Christians are permitted to ignore the teachings of Christ to protect themselves with worldly power.

Conclusion

We stand united in our confession of faith in Jesus Christ, resolved to uphold the truth of the Gospel in the face of political pressure and cultural shifts. We commit to being a light in the world (Matthew 5:14-16), and faithful witnesses to the transforming power of Christ's love. We pray that God's Spirit will revive our Church and strengthen Christ's people to be agents of his presence and blessing in this turbulent age.

To him who is able to keep us from stumbling and to present us before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

Additional Activities

In addition to the prayer and sermon outline, we are offering some activities and resources to help you navigate this season.

1. Share Testimonies:

Incorporate 3-5 minute testimonies into your worship service or another setting, where individuals share their experiences of navigating the political season with faithfulness, putting Jesus above all else.

2. Facilitate a Panel Discussion:

Organize a 10-20 minute dialogue between two individuals with differing political views, focusing on what it means to place Jesus first and how that translates into practical political engagement.

3. Engage in Service Projects:

Coordinate a service project following the church service as a way to demonstrate positive witness and unity during a contentious political season.

4. Record Reflections:

Encourage congregants to record and share their reflections on how the church can faithfully navigate the political season. These recordings can be shared within your community and/or submitted to AACC.

5. Host a Town Hall:

Consider hosting a small town hall meeting after the service to discuss political engagement from a Jesus-centered perspective. If you'd like to invite a speaker for this or any other event, feel free to reach out to AACC for assistance.

Conclusion



By incorporating these activities, we believe your church can deepen its commitment to civic renewal and foster a community rooted in faith driven by love and thoughtful political engagement.

We'd love to hear how things are going. If you are able to share how you've used any part of this toolkit, please let us know by emailing us at hello@aachristcollab.com.

May God bless you in this and every season!