

SPEAK OUT, SPEAK UP, SPEAK WISELY

V★TE 2018

More Americans than ever before, including people of faith, are becoming politically engaged, and our politics seem to be growing ever more divided. Fractious times can be even more challenging for faith leaders like us to engage the moral issues of the day, as our traditions demand, without descending into incivility and extreme partisanship that have become so familiar.

As you prepare your sermon, meditation or homily, please consider these eight suggestions to help you speak wisely as you guide the members of your congregation to use their voices and engage the world around them.



**INTERFAITH
ALLIANCE**
PROTECTING FAITH AND FREEDOM

In the same way that a stranger on the street has a certain set of expectations when learning you are a clergy person, your audience, whether your own congregation or another, will hear what you say with similar expectations. When you speak, remember that you represent your faith community and ground your remarks in your tradition.

1

However difficult, try to remain focused on principles and values rather than personalities and opinions. Doing so may enable more people in your audience to hear and grasp your message.

3

While many of us take political positions based on our personal faith, we should be cautious not to confuse the two. I may support or oppose a specific policy because of what I believe, but that does not mean I believe my position on modern political issues is textual. And, while my position on an issue may align with a partisan political agenda, that does not mean I believe that agenda has the authority of my faith tradition.

5

Remind your congregants that the respect they desire for their deeply held beliefs is the same respect people with different sets of beliefs also deserve. The respect we all seek is protected by the Constitution, which preserves our freedom to personal belief and religious observance, and our country's historical belief in the separation of religion and government.

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The text and teachings of your tradition should anchor and inform your message. However, be wary of being selective or stripping scripture of its context to justify your conclusions.

2

By word and example, insist on respect, even in moments of disagreement. Some of our congregants may be leading the marches, and some may still be working to understand why the march is needed. We must meet each of our congregants where they are.

4

When directly addressing current moral and policy issues, avoid explicitly or implicitly endorsing a partisan political agenda or candidate, or making prescriptive recommendations about which candidate or political agenda congregants should support or oppose. Doing so may not only cause division within your community, but also may put your status as a nonprofit institution in jeopardy.

6

Have courage! There is a positive and healing role for religion in public life that encourages civic participation, fosters community activism and challenges religious political extremism. So, do not be afraid to tackle challenging moral and policy issues if you feel called or compelled to do so. Even in moments of disagreement, most people will respond with respect and integrity to the respect and integrity with which you lift up a set of teachings from your tradition.

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