

RUNNING FOR OFFICE IN A MULTI-FAITH NATION



INTERFAITH
ALLIANCE

PROTECTING FAITH AND FREEDOM

V★TE 2012



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In 2008, political candidates on both sides of the aisle used religion as a political tool . . . you don't need to resort to these same, often manipulative tactics when communicating with voters about who you are and what you believe.

Religion plays a vital role in our communities. Religious values inform appropriate patriotism and inspire political action. Although religious beliefs and practices can and should impact American politics, religion's influence on politics warrants close scrutiny.

More and more, religion is being used as a tool to influence policy and advance political strategy. And, increasingly, one voice is taking precedence over another. America's shared values are being replaced by values that advance only particular sectarian interests. Religion's powerful healing force is being severely compromised.

America contains a vast diversity of people. Religion should elicit respect and facilitate understanding among all of them. Real solutions for the problems addressing our nation will come only from people who respect and appreciate diversity. The Interfaith Alliance, as the strong and inclusive religious voice that America wants and needs, offers this guide as a means of affirming the integrity of religion and protecting the vitality of our democracy.

COMMUNICATING RESPECTFULLY IN THE WORLD'S MOST RELIGIOUSLY DIVERSE NATION

There is a lot of pressure these days for candidates to "reach out to people of faith," to "look more religious" or to "talk more about your faith." But what does that really mean? Should you follow this advice?

Campaigns are about winning. We know that you want to win the race in which you are involved. Winning informs every move you, your consultants, your staff and your surrogates make.

When it comes to incorporating religion, values and the language surrounding them into your campaign, no one set formula is in place for you to follow. Some candidates have strongly held religious views and are looking to draw on their beliefs to make a personal connection with voters. Other candidates are looking solely to win an election and see religion as part of a strategy. Of course, many candidates are somewhere in the middle of these characterizations.

This publication is designed to help you strike a balance between your desire to communicate policies that resonate with all of your constituents and your desire to incorporate religion into your campaign in a manner that reflects your personal identity, respects religious diversity and does not erode the integrity of religious authority.

APPROACHING RELIGION WITH INTEGRITY

1. YOU CANNOT FAKE AUTHENTICITY

Some candidates talk about matters of faith quite naturally. Others use religious language cynically, not because it is an honest expression of their values, but because many people are drawn to a vocabulary of religion even if that vocabulary and the passion with which it is delivered do not square with a candidate's views.

The manipulation of religion is as common as stump speeches in today's political campaigns. But, in the end, it is a losing strategy. Indeed, the campaign trail is littered with politicians who lost because voters found their discussions of faith to be inauthentic and insincere – nothing more than posturing for political purposes.

Voters can smell a phony; they can spot a candidate who uses faith as a political ploy – and they don't like it. So the best advice for candidates, when it comes to discussing religious matters, is to be yourself and speak from the heart.

SOME TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND:

- Recognize the influence of religion in this nation and demonstrate knowledge of and respect for the diversity of American beliefs.
- Just be who you are. Speak about religion if it is natural to do so. But do not fake it; people can spot a religious fake a mile away.
- People's perception of your beliefs about religion will be determined by what you do more than by what you say.
- Take a good look at what religion is about – what qualifies as religion and how to incorporate that meaning into your work whether or not you use overt religious language.
- Give evidence of an interest in religion that is about religion, not about politics or turning religion into politics.
- You can – and should – express real appreciation for religion without having to speak of it in a manner that suggests, contrary to the Constitution, that there is a religious test for public office in this nation.

It is religious to do the work of politics and government well without ever voicing a religious phrase. In fact it's more religious than constantly using religious language without ever doing the challenging work of guaranteeing liberty and justice for all people in a diverse and pluralistic society.

2. "PEOPLE OF FAITH" IS NOT A VOTING BLOC

It's a serious mistake to consider people of faith as just another bloc of voters like farmers, labor unions or corporate executives. Candidates from all ends of the political spectrum are getting more pressure from both voters and the media to "reach out to people of faith." But the terms "faith" and "religion" hold vastly different meanings for many people.

There is great diversity within the religious community. Women, for example, may disagree with parts of the religious traditions with which they identify. Evangelicals are far more diverse than the stereotype that has been applied to them. Almost half of African-Americans consider themselves "born again Christian." In 2004, one-third of Hispanic voters self identified as Protestant. Even more interestingly, a report issued in 2006 by the Barna Group found that 76 million adults have "not attended any type of church service or activity, other than a special event such as a funeral or wedding, during the past six months... And in the eyes of these individuals, absence from church life does not indicate a lack of commitment to the Christian faith." If we divide the one source that can bring us together – religion – where will we look for mutual understanding, common ground and reconciliation?

When you are pushed to "reach out to people of faith," push back. What does "people of faith" mean to you, to your staff? Are you speaking in generalities? Are you talking about outreach to churches, synagogues, mosques? Are you talking about evangelicals, Reform Jews or just anyone who attends worship services? Are you talking specifically about Christian people of faith? How will you respect and be inclusive of all faith traditions when communicating to the voters in your district or state and signal a recognition of people who hold no religious beliefs?

Informed by experience, Interfaith Alliance wants to challenge your thoughts and strategies on “reaching out to people of faith.” You find teachers in schools, doctors in hospitals and farmers in their fields, but you find people of faith everywhere, not just in houses of worship.

3. DON'T SUGGEST THAT SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY CAN BE TRANSFERRED INTO POLITICAL AUTHORITY

One crucial component about knowledge of religion is a commitment to the forgotten virtue of humility. Religious leaders don't know enough about God, holiness or transcendent mystery to be able to declare a candidate as the “chosen one.” In fact, voters should be frightened by political leaders who claim to know the mind of God or the dictates of any deity.

4. TALK ABOUT YOUR FAITH, NOT THE FAITH OF YOUR OPPONENTS

If religion is important to you personally, you should talk with the public about how your faith guides your public policy choices. The best way for candidates to include religion as part of a campaign message is to honestly describe it as a source of their wisdom, strength and morality. Conversely, it is neither good politics nor good religious practice to cast doubts and aspersions on the personal beliefs and religious convictions of opponents. Talk about *your* faith, not *your* opponents’.

5. RESPECT RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

In the current environment, candidates should leave no doubt in the minds of any American regarding their support for the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom and their opposition to the institutional entanglement of religion and government. Terrific pressure exists to move our nation away from a commitment to pluralism and toward an endorsement of special privileges for the majority faith's point of view – a development that would spell a sure deathblow to religious liberty.

Think about how your faith will impact your deliberation and support for policy matters. Are you prepared to consider the Constitution, rather than your faith, as the highest authority for serving the people whom you represent?

In your public statements, keep in mind that most American communities are religiously diverse. People from different faith traditions will be eager to know how your beliefs will affect your public service, whether or not you will use your public office to

advance only the values and interests of your particular religion, etc. In short, they want to be assured that you will respect differing religious beliefs and affiliations.

6. DON'T LET YOUR OPPONENT OR THIRD PARTY GROUPS CLAIM TO SPEAK FOR ANY PARTICULAR FAITH

It should go without saying that no candidate can claim to speak for God. But some candidates still try to make voters think they speak for a particular faith. That's a political mistake, and one you shouldn't let go unchallenged. No faith tradition is politically monolithic; we all translate our religious teachings differently when it comes to politics. So if an opponent suggests he or she is speaking for an entire religious faith, call him or her on it, or make sure someone else does without questioning or belittling the candidate's religious commitment. Let voters know you understand they make their own decisions.

SPEAKING IN HOUSES OF WORSHIP

Political candidates welcome opportunities to make public appearances during a campaign, but an invitation – sought or offered – to speak at a house of worship raises questions for the candidate, and ultimately, for the house of worship. Federal tax laws place restrictions on what houses of worship can and cannot do in relation to political campaigns. People in the pews care about these laws and take into consideration a candidate's respect for them as well.

7. IF YOU CHOOSE TO SPEAK IN A HOUSE OF WORSHIP, RESPECT IRS GUIDELINES AND RESPECT THE INTEGRITY OF RELIGION

So far as the IRS is concerned, houses of worship are, and should be, a partisan-politics-free zone. Candidates who go to a house of worship and appeal directly for votes can trigger an IRS investigation that could jeopardize the house of worship's tax-exempt status. So do yourself and the house of worship a favor, and avoid making a partisan appeal in a house of worship. Don't ask for votes, don't disparage your opponent and don't claim or seem to claim the endorsement of the congregation or its spiritual leaders. The house of worship doesn't need the IRS on its back and nobody but your opponent will benefit from the bad publicity. A better approach is to opt for an audience in a fellowship hall or other venue, and even then, avoid partisan remarks.

Please remember that the pulpit, bema and lectern are sacred territory. For the sake of the integrity of religion, don't turn them into a stump from which to deliver a campaign speech.

8. DO YOUR RESEARCH

A candidate's choices about where and when he or she speaks matters to the public. The public doesn't imagine that you agree with everything everyone in your audience believes, but who you talk to and how you talk to them sends a message to voters. If you decide to accept an invitation from a house of worship, learn something about its reputation and gear your decision to appear and your remarks accordingly.

9. DON'T ASSUME THAT AGREEMENT ON RELIGION GUARANTEES AGREEMENT ON POLITICS

When speaking at houses of worship, never assume the support of a congregation solely because you share its religious tradition. People of all traditions have varying political philosophies and no congregation is monolithic in its political beliefs. So don't risk offending members of your audience by seeming to be speaking to a rally.

10. AVOID QUESTIONNAIRES FOR PARTISAN "FAITH-BASED" VOTER GUIDES

Voter guides compiled by faith-based organizations are increasingly common. Many of them, however, are from organizations that are brazenly partisan. According to a poll conducted by The Gallup Organization and Interfaith Alliance Foundation, 70 percent of people of faith oppose the distribution of partisan political voter guides in their house of worship. Such guides put a religious imprimatur on what is basically a partisan exercise, and these partisan voter guides put at risk the tax-exempt status of the houses of worship that distribute them. Candidates who participate run the risk of offending voters and open themselves up to challenges from their opponents for participating.

Religion serves this nation and each of its citizens best when allowed to function as religion – a source of compassion, a comforting presence, a prophetic voice, a summons to our best selves, an inspiration for helping the weakest and poorest among us.

Are you prepared to consider the Constitution, rather than your faith, as the highest authority for serving the people whom you represent?

THINK ABOUT HOW YOUR FAITH WILL IMPACT YOUR DELIBERATION AND SUPPORT FOR POLICY MATTERS.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and President John F. Kennedy struck a balance between drawing upon their faith for personal inspiration and the Constitution for political inspiration.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke to Democrats and Republicans in the same way. His interest was not to curry favor but to contribute to the common good. The issue was not partisan politics but civil rights, not party loyalty but social justice. He did not go to Gallup polling to find his values or to the head of the Republican National Committee or the Democratic National Committee to find his direction. His faith, values and direction came from scripture, conscience and need.

In 1960, then-presidential candidate John F. Kennedy addressed the specific matter of his Catholicism with wisdom, stating that the issue was not what kind of church he believed in but what kind of America he believed in. He left no doubt about that belief: "I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute." Kennedy pledged to address issues of conscience out of a focus on the national interest, not out of adherence to the dictates of one religion. He pledged that if at any point a conflict arose between his responsibility to defend the Constitution and the dictates of his religion, he would resign from public office.

THE LANGUAGE OF VALUES

Should values be important in an election? Yes, by all means. But whose values? The values that should be important in an election are those that promote the common good, not those that seek to establish the sectarian morality of one particular religious or political group in the nation. These values include a commitment to: strengthening democracy, nurturing integrity regarding our pursuit of the American dream, allowing *all* citizens, not just a few, to experience the blessings of democracy and strengthening rather than threatening our national commitment to religious freedom.

Your challenge, as a candidate and ultimately as an elected official, is to expand the values discussion to include issues such as economic justice, compassion, mercy, humility, justice, peace-making and reconciliation.

Try using this “Legislative Moral Audit” when developing public policy positions. Also try using some of these references when explaining your support of or opposition to concepts, policy and/or legislation.

DOES THIS POLICY:

- Protect the constitutional guarantee of the separation of church and state?
- Deny the rights or opportunities of citizens, regardless of their religious or nonreligious beliefs?
- Challenge hatred and bigotry?
- Create a positive vision of America?
- Make itself a friend of justice?
- Treat people equitably?
- Distribute wealth or concentrate wealth?
- Enhance life for all people or only for select people?
- Protect the environment?
- Aid the creation of jobs?
- Negatively impact the most vulnerable people in our society?

The impact of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*

Recent court decisions, including *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, have changed some of the rules about what business and nonprofit corporations are allowed to say about candidates and elections, but these decisions have not changed the rules that apply to houses of worship and other 501(c)(3)s, which are still prohibited from directly or indirectly supporting or opposing any candidate for any public office.

FAITH TRADITION / Name of House of Worship	Things to know before entering / while in House of Worship
BAHA'ISM Meet in homes or community centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No requirements for clothing or head covering.
BUDDHISM Temple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Attire is usually casual. ○ Members and guests may sit on meditation cushions on the floor. ○ Chanting is optional for guests. ○ Do not talk during services.
CHRISTIANITY Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The pulpit is considered a sacred desk from which the minister proclaims the “word of God.” ○ It could be optional to kneel and sing. Ask first. ○ Who is offered communion varies among the different faith communities. Communion is regarded as an act of identification with Christianity. Try to find out beforehand.
HINDUISM Temple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clothing for men and women is casual, no head coverings required. ○ Shoes are removed before entering the main area of the temple. ○ Congregants sit on the floor. ○ Silence is expected, except during chanting.
ISLAM Mosque	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Women are required to cover their head with a scarf; clothing should cover arms and hems are below the knee. ○ Shoes are removed in the entryway and not worn inside the mosque. ○ Non-Muslim guests will be advised to sit separately from Muslims. Men and women may also be seated separately. ○ Guests also must sit on the prayer rug on the floor.

FAITH TRADITION / Name of House of Worship	Things to know before entering / while in House of Worship
JUDAISM (Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Orthodox) Temple, Synagogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For men, a yarmulke (small head covering) is required in all Orthodox and Conservative congregations and some Reconstructionist and Reform congregations. They are available just before one enters the main sanctuary. ○ For women, some Conservative synagogues require a hat or another head covering and open-toed shoes are inappropriate. In Orthodox congregations, clothing covers the arms, hems are below the knees, heads are covered and men and women are seated separately. ○ Kneeling is not a part of any Jewish service. ○ Kiddush or oneg Shabbat (reception of coffee, tea, fruit, etc) is held after each service. Wait for blessings over the bread and wine to be said before eating/drinking.
QUAKERISM (Religious Society of Friends) Meetinghouse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Attire is casual. ○ Guests are not required to speak but can feel free to offer a prayer.
ROMAN CATHOLICISM Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guests are expected to stand when others do. Prayers and kneeling are optional. ○ Communion is not required. Only Catholics are encouraged to participate.
SIKHISM (Seek-ism) Gurdwara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Men and women should remove their shoes and cover their head with a hat or scarf. Guests should sit on the floor, facing the front. ○ It is optional to sing or bow to the Siri Guru Granth Sahib (compilation of sacred writings covered in cloth at the front of room). ○ Guests are expected to accept prasad (sweet pudding), which is considered a blessing from the Siri Guru Granth Sahib. ○ Langar (sacred food) is served after the service and available to all.
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guests are expected to stand when others do. Prayers are optional. There is no kneeling. ○ Dress is often casual.

* It is always better to show respect by staying for the entirety of any worship service. Leaving before the end would seem to the congregation both disruptive and exploitative.

SOURCE: How to Be A Perfect Stranger: The Essential Religious Etiquette Handbook. Third Edition; Edited by Stuart Matlins and Arthur Magida

SUMMARY: DO'S AND DON'TS AT THE INTERSECTION OF RELIGION AND POLITICS

DO:

- Recognize the important role of religion in American society;
- Speak about your religious beliefs as part of your biography when appropriate;
- Speak inclusively when addressing issues of religion;
- Seek out values shared by the majority of people of faith and goodwill – compassion, civility and mutual respect for human dignity;
- Consider the message you will send to the public by where and with whom you choose to speak during your campaign.

DON'T:

- Make your religion a platform issue;
- Claim support from a community just because you share the same faith;
- Sound like you think your religious beliefs are the correct or preferred belief system for society;
- Announce your endorsement by God;
- Use divisive or exclusive religious language;
- Use any house of worship as a political platform;
- Contribute to partisan voter “guides” that compromise the integrity of religion;
- Disparage your opponents’ religious beliefs.

STATE OF BELIEF, A RADIO SHOW ON RELIGION AND POLITICS

HOSTED BY THE REV. DR. C. WELTON GADDY

Each week, Rev. Gaddy offers listeners critical analysis of news at the intersection of religion and politics, and seeks to provide listeners with an understanding of and appreciation for religious freedom. Rev. Gaddy tackles politics with the firm belief that the best way to secure freedom for religion in America is to secure freedom from religion. *State of Belief* illustrates how the Religious Right is wrong for America and bad for religion.

Through interviews with celebrities and newsmakers and field reports from around the country, *State of Belief* explores the intersection of religion with politics, culture, media and activism, and promotes diverse religious voices in a religiously pluralistic world.

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“I believe that religion should – and can – serve as a positive and healing force in this nation – the most religiously diverse nation in the world. But that grand possibility will be tossed on the trash heap of history unless we stop the manipulation of religion for partisan political purposes and the manipulation of politics for sectarian gain.”

— Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy



ABOUT INTERFAITH ALLIANCE

Interfaith Alliance celebrates religious freedom by championing individual rights, promoting policies that protect both religion and democracy and uniting diverse voices to challenge extremism.

Interfaith Alliance was created in 1994 to celebrate religious freedom and to challenge the bigotry and hatred arising from religious and political extremism infiltrating American politics. Today, Interfaith Alliance has 185,000 members across the country from 75 faith traditions as well as those of no faith tradition.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT
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