

How do I help young people navigate election season?

TENx10

Jayden, a thoughtful and compassionate 16-year-old, is overwhelmed by the conversations happening around her as election day approaches, and she is drawn to the weight of the world's pain pressing on her heart. Her peers talk about the candidates, the issues, and their opinions. Still, she feels disillusioned by the anger and division, which do not seem to touch the reality of suffering people. She notices how adults, including those she looks up to at church, either avoid all of the contentious, important issues or are pulled into heated debates. They seem to miss what she has been taught: the love and justice of Jesus Christ. One day, Jayden asks her youth pastor, "Why does it feel like we can't address political issues with respect and kindness? And why does it feel like those who engage with politics are tearing each other apart? What would Jesus say about all this?"

Focus on God's Kingdom

It's natural for young people to feel the tension between the values of love, mercy, righteousness, justice, and humility they read in Scripture and the anger they see in political discussions. Talk to them about how Jesus offers a different path. In saying, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), Jesus was reminding us that our first allegiance is to God's Kingdom, which comes through the Church's actions "on earth as it is in Heaven." Invite them to think about how they can imitate Jesus—to serve others in love, build bridges across divisions, and be present with the lowly and the least (Luke 9:48).

Be curious about their questions

There's a lot of opinions on what Jesus thinks about the election, about the division, and everyone has an opinion on what Jesus thinks. But, in Scripture, when Jesus is confronted with complex issues, including political ones, he often asks a question. As our students come with questions, opinions, Tik Toks, all the things, what if you asked questions first? Including, "What do you think Jesus thinks about that?" And a great follow-up, "Tell me more."

Respect your role and its boundaries

One of the challenges of mentoring young people is that you're engaging with not only what your students believe, but often what their caregivers believe as well. While we may be tempted to share our own thoughts and opinions on politics, we have to realize that young people are just that - young. They are still developing and need the guidance of their families as they grow into adults. As youth leaders we need to remember that our role is to be an example of faithful discipleship as support to caregivers, not take their place.

Use this opportunity to show young people that the Gospel goes beyond partisan politics and that God calls us to love our neighbors where we are. Take the weeks after the election to get connected with your local community. Think about a place where there are people working to impact your community or engage with people from different backgrounds and opinions. Relationships and proximity help all of us appreciate the people who hold different perspectives than us. How can your youth engage in these spaces, to build relationships and work toward the common good?

Check Out
This Resource



[A Conversation about Engaging in
Politics Online as Bridge Builders](#)



Jason Villegas follows the leading of the Holy Spirit as a pastor and bridge-builder, standing in a cultural liminal space with a growing church and world. He serves as the Director of Youth Ministry for The North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church.