



*As people of faith, how are we called to engage in politics?
In these divided times, what is the role of faith?*

We talked with several political leaders from across the Diocese of Lexington about their views on how to be faithful in politics. We have a column by the Rev. Peter Doddema, about serving a church in the state capital and a reflection from the Rev. Izak McKenzie, who lives out his faith by staying out of the political arena. And, we have a story from St. John's, Corbin, which has started a ministry dedicated to providing time and safe space for people during these tumultuous political days.



The Faithful in Politics

By Richelle Thompson

For many people of faith, political engagement isn't a departure from their spiritual life—it's a direct expression of it. We talked with a cross-section of Episcopalians in the Diocese of Lexington, from public officials to community organizers, and asked them to share the role that faith plays in their political involvement. Regardless of party affiliation, they all shared that their political engagement was rooted in a commitment to justice, compassion, and human dignity. Rather than using religion as a political weapon, they see faith as a call to serve others and to build a more equitable society.



Our baptismal vows—particularly the promise to seek justice and respect the dignity of all people—are fundamental for these political leaders.

Isaac Dailey, Mayor of Cynthiana and member of Church of the Advent, pointed to the Episcopal Church's emphasis on social responsibility as part of his inspiration for political involvement.

The desire to stand up for the vulnerable was a consistent theme. Melissa Whalen of St. Andrew's, Fort Thomas, and a delegate to the Democratic National Convention, and Sean Farrington of Calvary, Ashland, who ran for city commission, spoke candidly about how their Christian values compel them to confront injustice, from housing inequality to LGBTQ+ rights. Even when the political process is exhausting or imperfect, they continue their work because their faith teaches them to care for the marginalized.

At the same time, many were clear about the importance of religious pluralism and democratic integrity. Faith shapes their motivation but not their policy prescriptions for others. Dave Sevigny of St. Raphael, Lexington, and a member of Lexington's City Council, and Trey Grayson, former Kentucky Secretary of State and a member of Trinity, Covington, expressed discomfort with political endorsements from the pulpit, emphasizing that religious leaders should guide on moral questions without aligning with parties. As Grayson noted, true public service is about building bridges and maintaining mutual respect across ideological divides.

These voices remind us that faith in politics is less about dogma and more about devotion—to people, to principles, and to the common good. Whether advocating for fair housing, serving in public office, or marching for justice, their engagement is not about imposing beliefs but living them. Faith, at its best, isn't a barrier in public life—it's a bridge to deeper compassion, action, and hope.

FAITHFUL IN POLITICS: IN OUR WORDS

Trey Grayson

Trinity, Covington
Former Secretary of State, Kentucky

What role has your faith played in your political life?

As Secretary of State, you're doing a lot of administrative work. But I remember a time in my second term when faith played a particular role. At the time, Kentucky's Constitution said that if you committed a felony, you lost your vote. It was a lifetime ban. Then-Governor Steve Beshear wanted to make it easier for people to move through the process and get their right to vote back after they had served their sentences. He asked if I would support the measure, and I said yes. Then he asked if I would appear at the press conference. We were both there—a Democratic governor and a Republican Secretary of State. A reporter asked a question, and I remember speaking about forgiveness and how that was an important principle of my faith. I explained that I believed we should make it easier for people, in some situations, to get their right to vote back so they can participate again in society.

Given that we're in this very tribal state of politics, where you're on one side or the other, how do you navigate that as a person of faith?

My general approach to life is the golden rule—to treat people well, to try not to be judgmental, and to have relationships even with people you don't agree with. That may have been a bit easier several years ago when the state was a little more purple: Republicans needed Democrats to win, and Democrats needed Republicans to



Trey Grayson on the campaign trail for Secretary of State.

win. The chamber was split, and you had to work with each other. I was elected the first time with a Republican governor, then re-elected with a Democratic governor. Living by the golden rule comes from my faith, and I think, specifically from the Episcopal Church. Most of the people at Trinity are not Republicans, so I've been around a lot of people who probably disagree with me. But I think that has helped give me a better perspective and helped me be more open to people with different opinions.

From a faith perspective, are you hopeful about the future of our country or are you worried?

Generally, I'm a glass-is-half-full guy. But there are times when that orientation burns you. I want to frame my answer by saying I'm generally optimistic about things, so therefore, I'm generally optimistic about the country. But I do think we need to work through some things. In the last year, I've circled back to my faith to help me navigate what's been going on. I have always wanted to read the Bible in a year, so I started that, and I'm really enjoying it. I feel stronger in my faith even after just a month into it. As a country, we have undergone some stress in the past few years. But I think our framework will be okay.

Sean Farrington

Calvary, Ashland Candidate for City Commission

How has your faith influenced your political beliefs and decision-making?

I believe in helping others. I truly view all people as children of God, and I “strive for justice and peace.” Scripture tells us to take care of others: to clothe and feed those in need. I strive to not only talk the talk but show my faith in acts of agape love. I can’t sit on the sidelines and do nothing. I can say that I empathize and send “love and prayers,” but I think the words are hollow without actions. Getting political and standing up for marginalized people are ways that I can act on my faith, not just say the right things.



Sean Farrington, right, on the campaign trail for Ashland City Commission.

Have there been moments when your faith challenged your political stance on an issue? How did you navigate that?

Oh yes, it’s really easy to see someone on the side of the street and think, “Why don’t they just get a job?” Folks get jaded. I get it. But my faith tells me not to ask questions and to take care of our neighbors. When those negative ideas pop up from time to time, I have to challenge them. I have to remind myself what I am called to do as a Christian. It’s easy to say that they just need to get a job; it’s harder to reach out to that person, link them with resources, and provide them with steps to get what they need. This is where my faith challenged my political stance. As far as other hot-button issues, my faith hasn’t swayed. For instance, on the issue of same-sex marriage, I struggled more with identifying as gay and coming back to Christ than the issue of marriage. If anything, my faith has deepened my political stances and made me want to fight harder for what I believe in.

Do you believe religious leaders should have a role in political endorsements or advocacy?

Absolutely not. That is a slippery slope on both sides of the aisle. That slope leads us to more of a theocracy, divides congregations, and quite frankly, when I am in the Nave, I am in the Lord’s house. The last thing I want is for my priest to tell me who they are voting for and why I should, too. Stick to the scripture and let us decide who we believe is the right candidate. Trust me, I’ll be voting for the person standing up for the marginalized, the poor, and the needy.

Isaac Dailey

Church of the Advent, Cynthiaana Mayor, Cynthiaana

How has your personal faith influenced your political beliefs and decision-making?

My faith calls me to lead with empathy, integrity, and service to others. As mayor, I strive to uphold these values by ensuring that my decisions promote fairness, inclusivity, and the well-being of all residents. The Episcopal tradition emphasizes social responsibility and caring for the most vulnerable, which aligns with my commitment to policies that uplift my community.

Do you believe it is possible to separate personal faith from public policy? Why or why not?

Yes and no. While my faith informs my values and ethics, I understand that I also serve people of different or no faith. My job is not to impose religious beliefs but to ensure that governance remains fair, secular, and rooted in justice. In that sense, my faith guides my approach to leadership, but I make decisions based on what is best for everyone.

Do you think faith-based organizations should play a larger role in public services, such as education, healthcare, or social welfare? Why or why not?

Faith-based organizations play a critical role in many social services in our small town, and their contributions are very valuable. I am supportive of partnerships between government and faith-based groups when they align with public service goals and maintain inclusivity, transparency, and accountability.



Isaac Dailey left, being welcomed as the new Mayor of Cynthiaana.

Dave Sevigny

St. Raphael's, Lexington Lexington City Councilmember

How has your personal faith influenced your political beliefs and decision-making?

Faith has allowed me to consider issues with a "What would Jesus do" attitude. It's never hard for me to do the right thing, and my faith guides many of those decisions.

Do you think faith-based organizations should play a larger role in public services, such as education, healthcare, or social welfare? Why or why not?

We absolutely need nonprofit entities to help manage the social services issues in our city. Nonprofits are already in the places we need to serve and have relationships with people in need. They are by far the best partners to manage intricate constituent problems.

What are ways that faith communities can be involved in politics in a responsible and respectful manner?

I think we don't hear from enough clergy in person. Every meeting has a time for public comment in local government. Organize around issues that the legislative body has under its control. Plot a well-thought-out, multi-meeting approach to offering public comment. It does work. Also, serve on commissions and boards that affect policy. Legislative bodies lean on these organizations to come up with the structure of laws and ordinances.



Dave Sevigny, left, at a ribbon cutting as part of his service as a Lexington City Councilman.

Izak McKenzie

Priest-in-charge, St. Mary's, Middlesboro *Political engagement: Preaching the gospel*

How has your personal faith influenced your political beliefs and decision-making?

My faith has led me to have a much more distant relationship with politics. After experiencing every election in my lifetime as a choice between the “lesser of two evils,” I have begun to decline to choose evil at all and focus on the place where good can be found: my relationship with Jesus.

Do you think faith-based organizations should play a larger role in public services?

I believe that Jesus expects us to be directly involved in relief to those who suffer. We seem to be witnessing human suffering on a greater scale than I can recall in my lifetime. For those who are facing death and geopolitical injustice and for those who are being denied sufficient healthcare and education, we must be willing to help however we can. But our responsibility is not political in nature. We must help because that is what followers of Christ do.

What are ways that faith communities can be involved in politics in a responsible and respectful manner?

I believe that when religious leaders preach and teach, they inevitably encourage people to adopt a particular worldview. I do not believe we should directly endorse candidates or parties under any circumstance—only ideas. If we do not endorse ideas in the Church, we stand for nothing. If we endorse candidates and parties, we also stand for nothing because these things are ever-changing, and the goalposts seem to move based on desired outcomes rather than truth and love.

As faith leaders, we need to be mindful of the fact that we lead congregations full of voters. Anything we say or do in our capacity as a leader has the potential to shift the way our parishioners use their rights and gifts. This is yet another reason why it is paramount that we only teach the truth of Jesus Christ. Teach anything else, and we risk losing everything that matters.



Izak McKenzie and his family

Melissa Whalen

St. Andrew's, Fort Thomas
Candidate for County Commissioner,
Delegate for Democratic
National Convention

What prompted you to get involved in politics?

I never, ever thought I would run for public office, and I really don't ever want to do it again. But I had gotten involved in other people's campaigns. So, when they approached me about running, I realized that we did not have enough people involved in the process. And I really believe in our democratic process, and the only way our democratic process can work is if we have elections. We need a two-party system. We need to have elections to have people show up and vote and think that they can make a difference.

Does your faith play a role in your appreciation for democracy?

I think most definitely. I have always been a Christian. I have not always been a Democrat. When I was growing up, we would read the Bible and talk about the early Christians and all they went through when they were imprisoned and killed. And I wondered, "Do I have that strength of character? Would I be able to stand up and be a Christian?" I don't think I would.

As I grew up and maybe became a little bit wiser, I thought, you know, God doesn't care about that. God doesn't care if you're standing up, shouting out that you're on Team Jesus. God cares about how you treat other people. Once I started learning about the Civil Rights Movement and the Holocaust, I started thinking, "Would I have the strength of character to stand up against those injustices?" And I think that God really does care about that. We have to stand up for people, for their basic humanity, no matter the cost to us.

I feel like we have to do the work to make this world more just, and that principle is going to inform my political decisions every time. It's like it says in the prayer book, make no peace with injustice in this world. Every day is a fight against any injustice that you see anywhere.



As somebody who's been active in politics, what advice would you give people on how to put their faith into action?

I think a lot of people don't want to get involved in politics. And it's true that our party system is not perfect, but it's what we have. We need good people to be involved in order for anything to change.

Sometimes, I hear people say, "One person can't really make a difference," but we can—especially if we start in our own neighborhoods. If you don't like what's going on, step up and make your voice heard. Look around your neighborhood and ask: What can we do? What can we do to make a better world? What can we do with the people we see every day? How can we work together for change?

Faith in the state capital

By Peter Doddema

The Church of the Ascension in Frankfort has served our state capital for 190 years. Being a capital city congregation presents unique blessings and challenges.

I feel that the Episcopal Church is uniquely built for this time and place. Though there is an immense amount of conflict in our culture and our country, Episcopalians are called to walk in the way of love. Our former Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, was tremendously prophetic in calling us to this difficult, beautiful task of welcoming all in the name of Jesus. Ascension's members vote in diverse ways, and we all certainly feel the strain of working to love (aka "agape," which means making the choice to respect the person in front of me, regardless of my feelings) each other.

By modeling this agape way of loving each other, we create a safe space in the middle of a chaotic community. Ascension weekly rededicates itself to maintaining that safe space through prayer and hard work.

Another unique blessing and challenge is praying before the state legislature.

When our legislature is in session, I, in rotation with other Frankfort clergy, open the daily sessions with prayer. The blessing, of course, is having that increased visibility for the parish. The challenge lies in finding ways to pray for all of the legislators, whether I agree with their beliefs

and actions or not. This was especially poignant for me a few years ago when my day to pray fell on Ash Wednesday. I had just finished leading the Ash Wednesday liturgy at the parish, which includes petitions such as:

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.

Have mercy on us, Lord.

With this fresh in my heart, I entered the House of Representatives. My assigned seat was in a section with legislators whose political beliefs and actions conflicted wildly with mine. My first reaction was to recoil in disgust. At that point, the Spirit replayed the Ash Wednesday litany in my mind, and I was forced to stop, chuckle at myself, and work to view the House through God's eyes rather than through my own limited vision.

Peter Doddema is the rector of Church of the Ascension, Frankfort.



Corbin congregation creates space for discussion, hope

By Lisa Garrison

In the lead-up to the November 2024 election, members of St. John's Spiritual Formation class experienced heightened anxiety and fear about the potential outcomes. One of the parishioners, Jamie Veilarae, suggested having a dedicated time and safe space for people with similar feelings to gather and share about the fears they have. Although this initiative was not organized before the election, the need for such a space became even more apparent. The fear and anxiety intensified, prompting another parishioner, Mykala Noble, to express interest in helping organize HOPE SPACE as an outreach by St. John's, Corbin.

HOPE SPACE had its first in-person meeting at the end of February at the Corbin Library. Although attendance was light, the conversation was rich and productive. Participants were able to voice their fears, have those fears validated, and brainstorm ideas for moving forward with HOPE SPACE in a manner that would provide safety and allow for broader reach. One idea that emerged was to create a Discord server. For those who may not know, a Discord server is a virtual community where users can communicate through voice, video, and text chat. The Discord app is very popular with the younger generation, as well as with people who enjoy technology, gaming, and virtual space. It offers a way for community members to gather together in a safe way and feel supported by an extended community, which fosters hope in the face of despair.

While in-person meetings will continue quarterly, the HOPE SPACE Discord server is now available to provide a safe environment for individuals who are concerned about the impact of government actions on themselves and their loved ones. HOPE SPACE aims to build community, inspire courage to take action, find or create community resources, and manifest hope.

Join members of St. John's on the HOPE SPACE Discord server as we strive to encourage hope and support each other during these tumultuous times. You can send Lisa Garrison a friend request on Discord at [lisa_garrison_67](#). Let her know you'd like to join HOPE SPACE, and she can send you an invite to the server.

Lisa Garrison is a member of St. John's, Corbin. To learn more about this initiative, contact her at lmgarrison.ragsdale.67@gmail.com.