

POVERTY & VOTING RIGHTS IN THE MIDTERMS

UPDATED: OCTOBER 9, 2018



Black Faith and Voting Our Values in the Midterms

Poverty is not a crime. And poverty is not a moral failing. Rather, Jesus Christ proclaimed good news to the poor and freedom to the oppressed. We experience moral failings when we neglect to help build God's kingdom where justice and righteousness reign.

Jesus teaches in Matthew 24 and 25 that the growth of God's kingdom uses faithful servants who are alert to the community's needs, who are committed and courageous to address those needs, and who use their respective resources to help build communities that reflect God's values.

Yet, we know that African-American voters repeatedly fail to exert the minimum energy necessary to vote during critical midterm elections. Compounding matters, the nationwide voter turnout in the 2014 midterm election was the lowest it has been in decades. People's attitudes toward their essential participation in the midterms strike eerily similar to that of faithless servants. Jesus warns us about faithless servants in the Parable of the Talents (see our five-day devotional series).

The Black Church Center is committed to helping justice-seeking Christians utilize the resources they need to show up as faithful servants during the midterm. Indeed, the 2018 election is an historic moment. Critical issues affecting the African-American community are at stake. Only those who vote early or show up to their local polling sites on Tuesday, Nov. 6 will determine the outcome of these:

- 36 governor's races.
- 35 U.S. Senate races.
- 435 U.S. House races.
- 579 state senate races.
- 2753 state house races.
- 114 other statewide races.
- 40 key ballot initiatives.

So what's the big deal about these initiatives or candidates? The answer: The fate of crucial issues that impact the well-being of millions of African-Americans. Among other current issues at stake, November's election will help determine:

- How swiftly will the U.S. president and Congress be able to fill judgeship vacancies at federal and district levels?
- Will Obamacare face more repeal and replace tactics?
- What will happen to proposed policy changes to SNAP that are included in a pending U.S. Farm Bill?
- What's the likelihood that Congress will enact budget cuts to Medicaid and Medicare?
- Which party will guide redistricting efforts that affect access to the polls and fair representation?
- What's the likelihood that the ongoing Flint water crisis will gain attention in Congress?
- Which party will control congressional investigative and intelligence committees?

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THE BLACK
CHURCH CENTER
FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

TALKING POINTS: VOTING OUR VALUES IN THE MIDTERMS

The prophetic voice of black novelist James Baldwin called out poverty in America as a form of ethnic cleansing. Overcoming the challenges we face requires faithful Christians who will vote, *especially* during midterm elections. Your voice will help determine our future.

25.8 percent of African-Americans currently are living in poverty.

The timing couldn't be more urgent for African Americans

- African Americans on average have the lowest household income among all racial or ethnic groups, except Native Americans. **We vote to help liberate the poor.**
- The poverty rate among African Americans is almost two times greater than that of the general U.S. population. **We vote to bring justice to the poor.**
- Fighting poverty is about righteousness. And the Righteous don't skip the midterms.
- Fighting poverty is about justice. And justice-seekers don't skip the midterms.
- **Black faith, black values, black votes belong in the midterms.**
- Faithful Christians don't just show up for presidential elections. **Black faith votes its values—every election.**
- God honors faithfulness. **Black faith honors faithfulness.**

THE BLACK



African-Americans are at higher risks for food insecurity than other groups.

In 2016, 23 percent of African-American households lacked access to adequate food at some point of the year.

- About 1 in 5 African Americans (22 percent) live below the poverty line, compared with 1 in 8 (13 percent) in the general population. **We vote to help liberate the poor.**
- About 1 in 3 (30 percent) African-American children live below the poverty line, compared with 1 in 6 (18 percent) U.S. children. **We vote to bring justice to the poor.**
- About 1 in 5 (19 percent) African Americans aged 18-59 years live below the poverty line, compared with 1 in 9 (12 percent) among all such adults. **We vote to help liberate the poor.**
- About 1 in 5 (19 percent) African Americans aged 60 years and older live below the poverty line, compared with 1 in 10 (10 percent) among all such older adults. **We vote to bring justice to the poor.**
- African-American households are more likely to experience food insecurity, compared with all U.S. households. The U.S. Agriculture Department classifies households that lack consistent access to nutritious food at some point during the year because of limited resources as food insecure. **We vote so everybody can eat.**
- In a typical month of 2016, SNAP helped about 13 million African Americans have access to sufficient food resources. **We vote to save SNAP.**
- In 2015, SNAP benefits lifted about 2.1 million African Americans, including 1 million children, above the poverty line. **We vote to protect SNAP.**
- In 2015, SNAP benefits kept 1.2 million African Americans out of deep poverty (above half of the poverty line) that year.

Food Justice is critical to our communities.

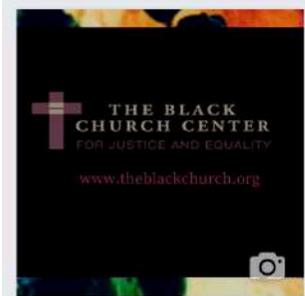
The House Farm Bill would increase hunger and hardship by taking away—or cutting—food assistance from many struggling Americans, including children in working families. This bill would lead to benefit cuts or benefit loss for over one million low-income households with more than two million people.

- The 2018 Farm Bill currently is in conference committee. We support a bill that supports food justice.
- The Farm Bill has a moral imperative to help make sure everyone can eat. It's a justice thing.
- In the 2018 Farm Bill, the U.S. House's version would strip at least 2 million people of SNAP assistance, commonly known as food stamps. No food justice. No Farm Bill.
- The U.S. Senate has passed a responsible, bipartisan version that protects food justice for those most at-risk. We support food justice.



SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE

It's important you couple your actions with a digital strategy, such as posts on social media, to maximize your impact. We have a collective message we want to amplify and social media is a great way to do that quickly and widely. This social media guide is designed to offer suggestions on messages and hashtags that can be used across **all social media platforms**. Where possible ensure that your posts are public. Be sure to tag BCC and your own organization. This will allow us to repost and share. These efforts will help us and other organizations track your posts, support each other and hopefully get our campaign trending on social media. Also, make sure you tailor the language to target your audience. It is important to have fun and be creative. Let's get to trending on social media!



The Black Church Center for Justice and Equality
@blackchurchcenter



Like us on Facebook! [The Black Church Center for Justice and Equality](#)

Hash tags: #MidtermsMatter, #ItsMyRight, #FreedomToVote, #BlackChurchAgenda, #WeVote

Facebook: Hashtags are not case sensitive. It is best to ensure that the post is public (i.e. see image of globe) so that it can be shared with ease and broaden the messages' reach. You have the option of creating a photo gallery, a live video or posting a pre-recorded video and there's always a post. The live video is an opportunity to engage others in the moment. However, the posted video can still receive comments, too.

Sample Facebook Posts

(You may also incorporate images included in this toolkit or your own)

These posts may also be used on Twitter/Instagram, simply copy and paste

- We have come a long way since the 1960s, but we still have a long way to go since bigotry still raises its ugly head when we turn on the news. We need to be vigilant to prevent returning to those days when an individual was judged by the color of their skin rather than by their character. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote
- We can look to our sacred texts and beliefs about the human condition, the need to help the poor, forgiveness, grace, and mercy to assess and improve how systems and policies are operating in every community. If we believe that all human beings are created in the image of God, and as a result, have inherent dignity, we are called to stand against poverty and injustice. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote
- If we are to create a more humane, just system of rehabilitation and redirect resources to provide necessary services to the poor, we must support policy reforms at the federal, state, and local levels. While each state and community is different and has unique challenges, in reality, every city and state struggles with the same problems: too many arrests, prosecutions, and prison sentences, without enough services, assistance, or healing. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

Follow us on Twitter!

@BlackChurchCtr

Hash tags: #MidtermsMatter, #ItsMyRight,
#FreedomToVote, #BlackChurchAgenda,
#WeVote



Black Church Center

@BlackChurchCtr

Twitter: The hashtag is case sensitive. If you use periscope, you can go live and link it to your Twitter account.

Sample Tweets

(These posts may also be used on Facebook/Instagram. Images may be added)

• Our ancestors died for the right to vote. We should not take it for granted...#MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

• Our nation has changed dramatically, and for the better. But the present bears many parallels to that historical moment 54 years ago. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

• 54 years ago, #FreedomSummer organizers risked their lives for civil rights. Today, we need the courage to ensure their efforts were not in vain. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

• 54 years after the Civil Rights Act, there are now modern efforts to keep people from voting. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

• You have the freedom to vote! Protect it. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

• 54 years since #FreedomSummer African Americans and other minority groups STILL face oppression and discrimination #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

• It is time we are all treated EQUALLY. Discrimination belongs in HISTORY. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

• "Voting is the language of American democracy: if you don't vote, you don't count." Let's make everyone count. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

• Let's protect the lives of our Youth – vote for the security of our children. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

• Our Vote determines our Communities' future! #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

• No one should serve a second sentence by permanently losing their right to vote! #RestoreExfelonVotingRights #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

• Resources that can go to salaries and well-being are going towards prisons. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

• 5.85 million Americans are denied the right to vote because of laws that prohibit voting by people w/ felony convictions. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

• Over-incarceration of women has devastating effects on their families, creating more barriers to employment, housing, and food. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

• Our communities need compassionate policies & investment, ones that treat mental health & addiction as health problems. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

• African Americans are incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of whites. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

Follow us on Instagram: [@BlackChurchCenter](https://www.instagram.com/BlackChurchCenter)

Hash tags: #MidtermsMatter, #ItsMyRight, #FreedomToVote, #BlackChurchAgenda, #WeVote

Instagram: You can add up to 30 hashtags, not case sensitive. You can post a pre-recorded video or record a video in the moment to post. The video must be 59 seconds or less. You can stream live, but it will not be saved.



Sample Instagram Posts

(You may also use any of the above mentioned in the Facebook/Twitter section with your own images)



One of the GREATEST POWERS we have is the right to vote.

#MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote
#BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote



Our ancestors died for the right to vote. We should not take it for granted...#MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote

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54 years since #FreedomSummer African Americans and other minority groups STILL face oppression and discrimination.

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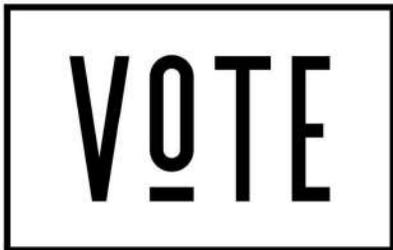


Our nation has changed dramatically, and for the better. But the present bears many parallels to that historical moment 54 years ago. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

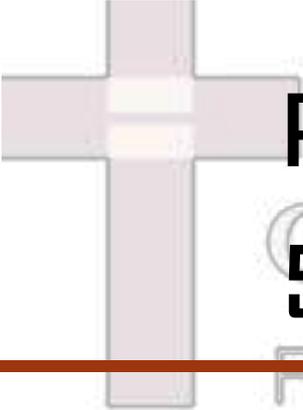


It is time we are all treated EQUALLY. Discrimination belongs in HISTORY. #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote

THE BLACK CHURCH CENTER JUSTICE AND EQUALITY



Any of the above written captions/posts can be used with this image. We also encourage you to expression your passions and reasons for voting. Make it personal and make it count! Why do you vote? #MidtermsMatter #ItsMyRight #FreedomToVote #BlackChurchAgenda #WeVote



POVERTY & VOTING RIGHTS

5-DAY DEVOTIONAL SERIES

A Constant Presence

Read: Matthew 24:36-44

Key Verse: Matthew 24:42

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.” (New International Version)

God is good all the time. And all the time, God is good. Oh, how we love this saying!

Although this phrase often is reduced to a mindless church greeting, there’s an eternal principle worth unearthing. The saying actually can remind us that there’s no moment when God isn’t being God. There’s no moment when God’s nature isn’t in motion for our good and well-being.

The constancy of who God is and what God does has ramifications for our response. Among the implications is our responsibility to maintain our own constancy on behalf of truth and justice. Sometimes, we respond to crucial issues only at certain moments. And it often takes crises or special events to gain our attention.

Take voting, for example. Most of us know the importance of our electoral participation to help effect justice and well-beingness for the African-American community. In 2008, we turned out in record numbers to participate in the presidential election. However, 2010’s midterm election turnout plummeted. During the 2012 presidential, the black vote rebounded. Then it plummeted again in the 2014 midterm election.

God is good all the time, yet we can be fickle. Indeed, we might not fully know everything that God is doing nor when God will put certain events in motion for justice and righteousness’ sake. But we can show up consistently anyhow to participate. At minimum, we can vote our values as justice-seekers, not only during presidential elections, but especially during the midterms.

Prayer for Today: Lord, how we praise You. You are consistently dependable. We confess, though, that we sometimes waver in joining Your work on behalf of truth and justice. Forgive our arrogance when we behave as if we know how or when things will unfold. And help us to just show up for goodness’ sake anyhow. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAY 2

The Watchful Servant

Read: Matthew 24:45-51

Key Verses: Matthew 24:45-46

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.” (New International Version)

Have you ever attended an African-American church tradition of annual days? It could be Women’s Day or Ushers’ Day or maybe your church’s annual Choir’s Day. The flow of these services might have changed over the decades, but certain elements often remain in many churches today.

Back in the day, though, a program chairwoman often was given flowers at the service’s end for her hard work. Committee members were asked to stand up so they could receive the congregation’s applause for their contributions. And regardless of the occasion, someone might refer to the need for church workers and functions such as these to continue, especially since no one knows when Christ’s return will be. Yes, these were moments when the black church often would say to itself, “Well done.”

For sure, the work of the church is well served when Christians organize around important events that pull people further into congregational life. However, we sometimes slip into focusing on programs as the church’s central mission. When that happens, we can miss crucial warnings from God about our community’s future—warnings that often call us to extend our presence beyond church programs and walls.

It’s often said that it’s important to keep the main thing, the main thing. Indeed, Jesus’ parable about the Son of Man’s return teaches us to be on alert for God’s response to injustice. And to make sure we’re doing the work of justice ourselves. There’s no better time for African-American justice-seekers to pay attention to issues that effect our community than during midterm elections. And to do the work of full participation.

Prayer for Today: Lord, we confess that we sometimes get distracted by the everyday course of affairs. And sometimes we overly focus on church programs and events, and we fail to move beyond church buildings. Help us to pay attention to spaces and places where justice needs our presence. And help us to show up there. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

The Faithful Servant

Read: Matthew 25:14-23

Key Verse: Matthew 25:22

“The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’” (New International Version)

Excuses often sound good when we’re making them. That’s probably because good excuses come from foundations of truth. We indeed might be inexperienced to accomplish something new. Or unprepared to complete a task with the full excellence we desire. Or just overwhelmed by the demands of daily life that we miss hitting certain marks. Excuses can find something truthful and tempt us to say, “See! That’s why I can’t.”

Another reality about excuses, though, is that they tell only partial truths. Excuses leave out crucial information that can limit our vision or distort our understanding about our full capacity. At critical junctures, excuses omit supportive facts and sway our decisions in ways that aren’t for our good.

Jesus’ parable about the faithful servant reminds us how much the advancement of God’s kingdom is entrusted to those who push past excuses. The parable is a timely reminder during midterm election season when excuses about voter participation escalates. Without faithful voters, there is much less advancement of God’s kingdom on earth.

Prayer for Today: Lord, we are grateful for the ways You care about our lives. We confess that we sometimes fall prey to thoughts and emotions that hinder our participation in Your good work in and among us. Help us to reject excuses. Help us to believe in our own capacity to do good in the same ways You believe in us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAY 4

The Costs of Fear

Read: Matthew 25:24-25

Key Verse: Matthew 25:25

“So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.” (New International Version)

There’s a cruel irony when it comes to voters’ excuses, especially in the African-American community, during midterm elections. Many of our churches dutifully emphasize voter registration drives. We’ve learned how to canvass our neighborhoods for voting. We’re a lure for hopeful candidates who show up at the right time on Sunday mornings. We long have had watchful social justice organizations that consistently fight for our voting rights.

Indeed, we have ample tools that help us to participate in the electoral process. So, the historical fact that our turnout plummets precisely when the greatest impact on state and local elections happens sets up a poetic justice, of sorts. We end up with federal, state, and local officials who are not poised to act justly on our behalf. Policies are enacted that exacerbate poverty levels. Education and justice system policies compound issues that impact poverty.

This is not the kind of justice God wants for our lives.

In Jesus’ parable that includes the fearful servant, he doesn’t specify what scared the man. But we do know that the man was fully equipped to be productive. He was given everything he needed. Similarly, we can only generalize the costs of the man’s fear. But we do have good insights about how our inaction in November might affect the black community. The BCC overview highlights several issues at stake during 2018’s midterms.

The question facing us, then, is: What type of justice do we want?

Prayer for Today: Lord, we are grateful that You gives us everything we need to be faithful servants to help advance Your kingdom. But we confess that we sometimes run scared. Help us to trust Your presence and provisions. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

The Rewards of Faithfulness

Read: Matthew 25:26-30

Key Verse: Matthew 25:29

“For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.” (New International Version)

Many longtime church-goers are quite familiar with this well-known parable. Earlier in the story, Jesus talks of a land owner’s response to one of his faithful servants. “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’” (Matthew 23:23, NIV) The parable is a source of one the church’s most enduring principles about service—being faithful over a few things.

The story ends with a hope-filled emphasis on abundance. Not only are faithful servants rewarded with more opportunities and provisions to advance God’s kingdom, but that experience will happen in abundance. What good news for those who often show up to God’s work against many odds!

Certainly, this is encouragement for justice-seekers who repeatedly face daunting challenges in advancing God’s kingdom within our communities. Voter turnouts during elections alone can be discouraging for advocates of voting rights and issues. Election cycles repeatedly highlight the inconsistencies of the voting public. And on the surface, it might appear there’s no reason to push to polls as an everyday resident when little change seems apparent in our neighborhoods.

But these are the same moments when we’re challenged to look deeper. Faithfulness does create change! For example, a historic election produced the first black U.S. president. A historic health-care act brought protection for millions of citizens who previously lacked access. Challenges to voter disenfranchisement are succeeding in some areas across the country.

Indeed, faithfulness has its rewards. This November, let’s keep up the good and faithful work. This the moment for us vote our values as justice-seekers who are proud of our culture and hopeful for our future. And then trust the God of Abundance to honor our faithfulness.

Prayer for Today: Lord, we are grateful that You reward faithfulness. So help us to be faithful with the opportunities You give us to do Your work. Especially this November during the elections. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

WE VOTE OUR VALUES

2018 MIDTERM ELECTIONS COMMITMENT CARD

Name _____
Phone (h) _____ (m) _____
Email _____

AS A FAITHFUL, JUSTICE-SEEKING CHRISTIAN, I COMMITMENT TO:

- Monetary donation to support justice-seeking candidates in my area.
- Vote early for candidates and ballot initiatives for the November 2018 elections.
- Participate in Get Out the Vote social media action led by my church.
- Join my church's or a local organization's voter canvassing efforts.
- Join my church's or a local organization's Get Out the Vote phone bank effort.

CHECK YOUR STATUS!

To check your voter registration status, visit [Vote.org](https://www.vote.org)
<https://www.vote.org/am-i-registered-to-vote/>

WE VOTE OUR VALUES

2018 MIDTERM ELECTIONS COMMITMENT CARD

Pastors and Ministry Leaders

Name _____
Phone (h) _____ (m) _____
Email _____

AS A FAITHFUL, JUSTICE-SEEKING CHRISTIAN PASTOR OR LEADER, I COMMITMENT TO:

- Authorize or direct a voter canvassing effort at my church.
- Authorize or direct Get Out the Vote social media action led by my church.
- Authorize or direct a Get Out the Vote phone bank effort at my church.
- Incorporate during worship and/or disseminate a 5-day devotional about African-Americans and Voting in the Midterms.

CHECK YOUR STATUS!

To check your voter registration status, visit [Vote.org](https://www.vote.org)
<https://www.vote.org/am-i-registered-to-vote/>

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The Center for Community Change



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