THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN A DIVIDED SOCIETY

Moderator and Convener Guide

2019
What should the church do to help congregants navigate the current state of political discourse in America?

Convening for a meaningful and inclusive deliberative forum

Convening a group of people to participate in a deliberative forum calls for an awareness of a community’s make up, its demographics, leaders, thinkers, advocates, and majority and minority populations. Diplomacy is required as conveners endeavor to bring people who hold diverse perspectives together to listen and talk across differences. Like-minded forum groups are at a disadvantage as they cannot hear people who think differently. Clergy and church leaders are well-suited for this role as they interact with many people and have the ability to identify and personally invite people they know have strong feelings about a particular subject.

Inviting people through conventional and social media or a congregation’s newsletter and announcements is a common practice, but planning for a forum requires that enough moderators and scribes are recruited to work with groups of 10-16 people. Some host organizations determine a limit to the number of participants. The personal invitation is very important.

Citizens of all backgrounds can certainly weigh in on divisiveness in American society, but give some thought to people who have jobs that care for people and institutions affected by divisiveness. Therapists, teachers, law enforcement personnel, elected officials, home owners’ association leaders and members, civic organizations, clergy, medical professionals, among others. And give some consideration to inviting people who span multiple generations. Veteran citizens are interested in their younger friends’ perspectives.

Why are we here? What are we going to do and not do?

Deliberation can be considered a good first step in bringing people together to talk about an important issue or community problem of common concern. Small groups offer everyone a chance to weigh in and listen carefully to others, some of whom will have very different, even opposing ideas. Forums deepen understanding by helping people consider a problem’s nuances and gray areas. Moderators cultivate a civil, respectful atmosphere and encourage participants to identify some areas of agreement or common ground that could be used to move forward. Sometimes people suggest next steps to pursue an issue. The cumulative results of multiple forum groups often provide what the public values and therefore can be helpful for elected officials and community leaders.
It is important to caution participants about what not to expect from a single forum. Deliberation does not significantly change peoples’ minds nor reach consensus. Forums are not designed to produce outcomes that include action plans. While some people might be interested in moving forward, others value the forum for deepening their understanding.

How do we do that?

We do that by engaging in a deliberative dialogue in which we:

- Prayerfully understand the PROS and CONS of each option—its benefits, drawbacks, and trade-offs.
- Know the STRATEGIC FACTS and how they affect the way the group thinks about each option.
- Move beyond the initial positions people hold to their deeper motivations the things they consider to be the most valuable in everyday life.
- Weigh carefully the views of others and appreciate the impact various options would have on what others consider valuable.
- WORK THROUGH the conflicting emotions that arise when various options pull and tug on what people consider valuable.
- Rely on our faith and the Holy Spirit to guide our time together.

About the Issue Guide

The purpose of the issue guide is to help us talk productively about a difficult issue that concerns us all.

Deliberation & Discernment

It’s not a debate. It’s not a contest. It’s not even about reaching agreement or seeing eye-to-eye. It’s about looking for a shared direction, guided by our faith in God and what we, as God’s children, most value. It’s about examining the costs and consequences of possible solutions to daunting problems and finding out what we, as a society - faithful followers and citizens - would or would not accept as a solution.

Stages of a Forum

Welcome
The convener or moderator introduces the NIF program and offers an opening prayer.

Ground rules
Participants and the moderator review desired outcomes and agree on ground rules.

Getting started
One good way to start is for participants to take a few minutes to talk about why the issue concerns them.

Deliberation
Participants examine all the options. An approximately equal amount of time should be spent on each option. Dialogue often reveals some commonly held values and identifies some possible next steps for addressing the issue.

Ending the forum & Questionnaire
Participants reflect on what has been achieved and complete a questionnaire.
If This Is Your First Experience as a Moderator

You don’t have to be an expert on the issue.
Read the issue guide thoroughly. Give some thought to your own experience with family members or friends who encountered divisiveness in society and in the church. What role did the church play? Consider questions that get to the heart of the issue and think through the essence of each option. This is a critical part of preparation.

Stay focused on what the forum is about—deliberation.
Ask questions that probe the underlying motivations of each option, the trade-offs it might require, and the willingness of the participants to recognize them. (Sample “Faith-based Questions” are listed below)

Keep the discussion moving and focused on the issue.
Sometimes it’s hard to move on to another action when there is so much more that could be said. But in order to make progress, participants need time to weigh several of the actions within each option fairly. Ideally, 20 minutes is devoted to exploring each option.

Reserve ample time for reflections on the forum.
In many ways, this is the most important work the group will do. The moderator will provide reminders that time is passing, but it is up to all the participants to help preserve the time to reflect on what they have said and what they might want to do about it.

Encourage people to speak from their faith and/or moral perspectives.
Faith-based forums offer people an opportunity to connect their “walk of faith” to their “citizenship practices.” Yet, some forum participants might not affiliate with a religious community but yearn to be included in the dialogue. Make room for people with a wide range of perspectives.

Forum Guidelines
- Be in prayer and seek the Spirit’s guidance.
- All options should be considered fairly.
- Speak honestly for yourself.
- Listen to understand. Keep an open mind and heart.
- Disagree respectfully with others’ ideas.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate.
The Church’s Role in a Divided Society

Note to Participants

This deliberative guide outlines three potential approaches for faith communities to consider in approaching a divided society. In offering these approaches for deliberation, we acknowledge that all individuals, congregations, and communities have not always had a choice in how they have responded. Some voices have historically been marginalized more than others, within the church and within society, and some have had more freedom and power to speak and to be heard than others. Throughout this guide, there are additional prompts that invite participants to reflect on their experiences within the church and offer the opportunity to share them with the group.

These questions may be used for self-reflection or within the deliberation itself. We encourage participants not to skip over these prompts but to take time to intentionally consider the privilege and power and perspective we each bring to the conversation.

Introduction

Churches are wrestling with how to live out their faith in an increasingly divided American culture. Research indicates that partisan politics is affecting congregations in how we interact, worship, and fellowship with each other; how clergy preach their sermons; and how (or if) we engage in the public square. In American society where the institutions of church and state remain separate, the reality that political discourse impacts religious communities cannot be denied. People bring their whole lives - good, bad, and troubled - to their church. This issue guide raises the question: “What should the church do to help congregants navigate the current state of political discourse in America?”

Tensions between the church and society are nothing new; Christians in America have always needed to determine how to best relate to the society in which they live, work, play, and raise their families. From the founding of our nation during which churches debated whether to support the English King or the colonial rebels; to the myriad social issues ranging from civil rights, to abortion and reproductive rights; to the fairness of our economic system - churches and their members have always been touched by the political sphere in some way.

Even if we want to abstain from the political fray, the fact is that politics often finds us in our churches whether we desire it or not, sometimes in devastating ways. From houses of worship vandalized with swastikas, to arsonists torching churches, to gunmen murdering worshipers in their very sanctuaries - the attacks on people of faith anywhere have ramifications for fellow worshipers everywhere. These extreme examples point to how dangerous divisiveness is to our communities, the larger society, and within churches themselves.
Yet divisiveness can also manifest in churches in less violent but still significant ways. Take, for example, the story of a minister serving a large evangelical church in the Midwest who decided to preach a sermon series proclaiming that “the church should steer clear of politics, give up moralizing on sexual issues, stop claiming the United States as a ‘Christian nation’ and stop glorifying American military campaigns.” Some church members thanked him for articulating concerns that they were afraid to raise, yet 20% of the members left the church in opposition to his stance. (“Disowning Conservative Politics, Evangelical Pastor Rattles Flock,” New York Times, July 9, 2006.)

Or consider a recent news story in which “faith leaders describe the ‘inner conflict and turmoil they’ve experienced since [the 2016 presidential election],’” according to reporter Kelly Dallas in describing how mainline Protestant clergy deal with political polarization. One pastor was quoted as saying, "It’s not our best faith practice to endorse candidates or propositions, but we will stand and proclaim, especially in these days, what our faith-based values are.”

At the same time, however, Dallas noted that “as partisan tensions rise between liberals and conservatives here and around the country, just mentioning values like welcoming the stranger can lead to frustration or hurt feelings, according to faith leaders. Since the election of President Donald Trump, it’s become harder to unite politically diverse congregations.” (Deseret News, Salt Lake City, November 9, 2018.)

Yet the church itself can become the subject of political discourse, rather than just a moral commentator from the outside. Child abuse scandals in churches and denominations; the fracturing of the United Methodist Church around questions of human sexuality; racial tensions sometimes exacerbated within the church; and politicians themselves choosing religion to frame or bolster their policy decisions are just a few examples of how the lines between the secular world and religion have become blurred. They also illustrate that the fractured nature of our discourse in and out of church is a social problem for which the church bears some responsibility.

This state of divisiveness did not happen overnight but is the result of long-standing cracks in the foundation of our democracy and communities that have been worsened by increasingly reactive and incendiary rhetoric. Thus, the process for bridging these gaps will not magically appear but will be the result of an intentional and deliberate effort on the part of people of good will to find common ground and rebuild our foundations. What is the church’s role in this process?

These are the kinds of issues that demand our full moral selves. The question is: how do we bring our faith and morality to bear without further widening the gap between people who hold different political views? How can we keep people in the conversation and in relationship with each other while balancing the need to live out our values?
Churches and related institutions have histories that illustrate how church leaders have responded to political issues. Some believe that it is prudent for leaders to refrain from engaging in political issues. Another approach is offering the church as a public space for navigating political issue without taking an institutional stand. And in both conservative and progressive-leaning churches, some leaders claim it as a moral and ethical imperative to speak for God and God’s people in the public square.

What would it take to invite into dialogue our fellow church members who hold not just a variety of political perspectives, but different ideas on how to engage with these perspectives? With love for God and God’s love for all people as a common understanding, how might people listen carefully to one another, not for the purpose of changing one another’s minds but of respecting what people value? Through deliberation, is it possible to experience a more respectful way of being both citizens and members of a faith community?

NOTE: As you consider the three approaches below, know that this guide is not intended for the church to choose one option over another. We recommend the following uses for the guide:

- As an assessment tool for congregational life. The church can use the guide to explore where different members of a congregation - including the pastoral leader - find themselves among the options.
- As a tool to navigate a shifting and changing landscape on different social issues and to discern what choices are available along a continuum of different options.
- As a way to help lead church discussions about what role the church takes regarding a particular issue that may be coming up for the congregation in its community.

Our issue guide will help us consider how divisiveness is affecting people who gather for worship, learning, and fellowship. Do we perceive tension among our members? How might the church help people live in a time where toxic talk and tragedies befall communities? Does the church have a role to play in society relative to the root causes of divisiveness?

We begin by going around the room to simply share some “from the heart” concerns. In one or two sentences - perhaps using an “I statement” - share your concerns about this issue.

**Personal Stake**

1. What makes this issue real for you?
2. What concerns you about the state of discourse in American society?
3. Is there a Bible text or general understanding of God’s will that helps describe how you feel?
Option One: The Church as Refuge

This approach asserts that the primary focus of the church should be on our religion and not on the political fray, tensions, and bitter partisanship that divide us. The church should work to avoid the culture wars and create a sanctuary where people come together to worship Christ regardless of political lines, across race, gender, socio-economic statuses.

This position holds that the fundamental ministries of the church primarily include worship, faith formation, congregational care, and being Christ’s presence in the world through service. As such, the church should refrain from taking political stances on issues that may cause unnecessary division among the congregation and distract from these core missions. To the greatest extent possible, the church should leave room for diverse perspectives.

The drawback is the church might be perceived as removed from civic life and uncaring about critical community issues.

A gathering place for family, worship, and faith

Churches are one of the few cultural places where people still gather across lines of difference. In other areas of our lives - our neighborhoods, our social media feeds, our circle of friends - we often surround ourselves with people who think like us, look like us, and are at the same stage of life. In church, we gather around Jesus, and we voluntarily choose to be family with people who in other ways may be very different from us. The church is multi-generational, multi-ability, multicultural, and beautiful in the array of diversity it portrays. In Him, we worship one God, and one Lord with one faith. We should focus on what we have in common instead of focusing on the ways we are different. Just like our biological families, this requires grace, loving others as they are, and allowing for differences of perspective among us. As such, we should acknowledge our diversity, create space for difference among us, and refrain from provoking controversy.

A refuge from the political fray

In the midst of the hyper-partisanship and political fray prevalent throughout our society, the church offers a place where our primary identity is Christian, not a political party or ideology. The church is a place where we shouldn’t have to defend who we voted for or talk about political candidates. We come not to talk politics but to practice our faith: not to debate current affairs but to grow in Christ and to worship Him. The church offers a place to focus on matters of faith, to separate and re-center ourselves from the fray around us. It is one of the few places where we can silence the noise around us and check our politics at the door to hold hands, sing, and worship with those who may
differ from us politically. Bringing politics into that space risks hindering fellowship and promoting unnecessary division in the church. Becoming dogmatic about non-essential issues can also drive congregants away from the church if they fail to align with those beliefs.

**The risk of being misguided or hijacked**

Taking direct political stances also puts the church at risk at being on the wrong side of the issue historically. Instead of adopting doctrinal stances on contemporary issues, the church should assume a posture of humility that admits the limits of our human perspective and our specific cultural context. History is full of examples of the dangers and temptations for the church to be misguided. The church is certainly not immune to political pressures, and it has often been hijacked by kings, rulers, politicians, and other government leaders for political exploitation. The church should be vigilant to guard against the political tides of the day to stand on the eternal truths of God’s word. Except in rare and extraordinary cases, the church should allow for political difference and avoid politicizing the church.

**Possible Actions**

- While members of the church may engage in their own political activity outside of the church, church funds and resources should not be used to host political discussions, candidate forums, or other political activity.
- Churches should develop social media policies to limit political commentary, opinions, and statements from clergy, staff, and lay leaders.
- Any direct political statement by the church should be vetted by denominational authority or church leadership and taken with respect to disagreement of sincere Christians on the issue.
- Pastors should refrain from directly taking political stands in sermons and aligning with either political party or politicians.
- What are other ideas?

**Drawbacks**

- Defining what is political activity may be confusing, hard to regulate, and may unnecessarily limit the programming and ministries of the church including worship, education, and care.
- Social media is a primary way to engage people inside and outside of the church. Limiting expression through social media may limit the ability to communicate a congregation’s or denomination’s interpretation of the Gospel.
- Pastors may feel restricted or limited in addressing scripture passages or applying faith to practice, and may feel there is a watering down of the gospel.
- In the absence of a political statement by the church, members may disagree among themselves, causing more division and limit the opportunity for the church to walk alongside members in that journey of dialogue.
- What are other drawbacks?

**Faith-based Questions to Consider**

1. How would you describe the church as a sanctuary for your life?
2. How might the adage, “Politics and religion don’t mix” inform your opinion about the church’s role in a divided society?
Option Two: The Church as Mediator

This approach asserts that the primary focus of the church should be on helping people of faith navigate the political fray, tensions, and bitter partisanship that divide us. The church should build bridges of cooperation and actively promote healing, understanding, and transformation across the divisions.

People who hold this position believe that the fundamental ministries of the church should primarily include pastoring, teaching, faith formation, and congregational care. As such, the church should actively teach congregants skills to engage with different perspectives, listen to marginalized or unheard voices, and be agents of reconciliation for individuals, communities, and society.

The drawback for this option could be that while individual church members are better equipped to engage in political dialogue, the church as a corporate citizen would not have a voice.

Engaging Difference with Hospitality

The church has the opportunity and obligation to walk alongside congregants who are wrestling with questions about the political implications of their faith and how to live out that faith in relationship to others who may disagree. The Christian faith has valuable tools and frameworks for acknowledging sin, caring for others, extending grace, practicing hospitality, and promoting reconciliation. These concepts and practices should be taught and lived within faith communities to promote dialogue and relationship with others. In a hyper-partisan environment, instead of ignoring our differences or taking partisan stances, the change starts with us, as we walk in humility toward others, and engage with each other from a place of hospitality, care, and love. We should acknowledge our political differences, highlight our shared humanity and brokenness, and find ways forward together in love both as the body of Christ and a community of faith.

Listening to Others

The church has a pivotal role to play in facilitating conversation across difference within and beyond the church. The church also has the opportunity to facilitate conversation within the church over diverse political perspectives and to enter into collective discernment as a faith community about how a church may best respond to care for its members, promote the welfare of the community, and to be a transformative presence in the world.

The wall of noise surrounding the many important issues of our day can make it difficult to hear what our neighbors, friends, and community are saying. The tempo and heightened pitch of disagreement often end up drowning out places of shared interest and potentially bury the kind of unity we hope to obtain. It can seem as...
though we live in a world where many are trying desperately to be heard, while many are failing to listen meaningfully to others.

As Stephen Covey notes, “Most people do not listen with the intent of understanding, but rather with the intent to reply.” In a difficult conversation where divisiveness is accentuated, one way we facilitate restoration is to practice active listening. Learning to hear and understand is not only a good spiritual practice, it can also hold spaces that allow healing and unity to arise in our communities.

The church needs to be intentional about listening to the experiences of others, both within and beyond their congregations, especially those which are traditionally not heard in our communities. Some voices simply do not have a place at the table and are especially hard to hear if those in positions of power are unwilling to stop talking. Divisiveness is fueled when those conversations become one-sided, often leading those outside the dialogue to feel they must speak even louder to be heard. The escalation that follows keeps families, communities, and congregations divided. When we facilitate that listening in and among our communities of faith, we promote understanding and grow our capacity to love each other across difference.

**A Ministry of Reconciliation**

Ultimately, the church has a ministry of reconciliation. It is our role to teach forgiveness, promote healing, and pursue reconciliation, first with Christ and then with each other. History is full of examples of those who have been abused, betrayed, or neglected by the church or by society. There are too many who have experienced a lack of belonging, acceptance, or care. The church has a responsibility to listen and to care, to build bridges of new understanding, trust, and relationship with those individuals and communities. The church should be a voice and a beacon of peace. We recognize we both have something to offer others through our lived experience and much to learn from others through theirs. In this approach, the resources of the church should be directed toward building our skills and capacity to engage in love with each other, and actively work toward peace, healing, and collective wholeness.

This approach asserts that the primary focus of the church should be on helping people of faith navigate the political fray, tensions, and bitter partisanship that divide us. The church should build bridges of cooperation and actively promote healing, understanding, and transformation across the divisions.
Possible Actions

- Churches should foster exploration of diverse perspectives on political issues and allow open discussion around political commentary, opinions, and statements from clergy, staff, and lay leaders.
- Clergy, staff, and lay leaders should be trained in dialogue and deliberation practices to enhance their ability to facilitate divisive conversations and mediate conflict within their congregations.
- Create listening and collective discernment sessions to explore issues and experiences of individuals or communities within the church.
- Encourage one another in sharing and valuing our respective “spiritual biographies,” experiences when we felt God’s presence or absence.
- What are other ideas?

Drawbacks

- Exploring diverse perspectives may increase divisiveness in the church.
- Listening to other voices, particularly those outside the church, could compromise our unity or sense of identity as a community of Christ.
- Not all points of view are reconcilable to Christian faith. When and how does the church decide when reconciliation is appropriate or not?
- A posture of reconciliation may mitigate our ability to confront evil, to withstand cultural pressures, and to speak truth to power.
- What are other possible drawbacks?

Faith-based Questions to Consider

1. What would you like to learn within your faith community to help you engage with friends and family?
2. How might the church provide opportunities for you to practice articulating your values relative to societal issues?
Option Three: The Church as a Prophetic Voice

This approach asserts that a primary focus of the church should be to engage in the public square in order to live fully into its mission. The church should be a prophetic voice in the midst of the political fray, tensions, and bitter partisanship that divide us.

People who hold this position believe that the fundamental responsibilities of the church should include speaking to the cultural and political issues of the day, pursuing justice, and advocating for righteousness. As such, the church should actively speak, engage, and lead in addressing issues of the day.

The church should consider how it can wield its power and influence for good and actively work to be Christ’s presence in the world. This prophetic voice will manifest in different ways depending on a church’s denomination, its leadership, and the moral and ethical commitments of its members.

*The drawback in this instance is the risk of alienating members of the congregation who do not agree with the church’s public opinion.*

Expressing Our Faith through Action

The church should consider how it can wield its power and influence for good and actively work to be Christ’s presence in the world. This prophetic voice will manifest in different ways depending on a church’s denomination, its leadership, and the moral and ethical commitments of its members.

For example, one church may decide to place crosses on their lawn as a public witness against abortion. Meanwhile, the pastor and members of the church across the street may take part in marches to defend the rights of women and their reproductive health. Still another church across town may organize a day of advocacy at their local legislative offices asking elected leaders to regulate pollution to protect the health of children. All three churches share common values of life, health, safety, families, and protecting the vulnerable. But while they each enact these values in different ways, all three have decided that engaging these issues in a public way is an important aspect of living out their faith.

Being Agents of Change

The church should not shy away from taking a strong stance on important issues. Nor should it constrain itself to be neutral in the midst of political fray. We are called to engage our neighbors, our local communities, and national or
even global concerns as agents of change. The hope is that the common good may actually improve by the church’s and/or church members active participation in public issues and working for positive change.

Sometimes in working for that change, agreement is not always possible. We cannot always be conciliatory or willing to compromise in the face of injustice or unrighteousness. Sometimes, divisiveness is unavoidable when our core convictions are at stake. For example, white supremacists called the civil rights movement divisive, and those who opposed women having the right to vote encouraged them to be more patient and to focus on more attainable goals that were less disruptive. But those committed to the cause believed it was important to speak up and act for what is right. This option holds that it is possible to do justice and love kindness as the church humbly follows God’s call.

**Acting with Moral Courage**

The church should speak out on issues about which scripture conveys timeless truths - even if there is disagreement about the interpretation of those truths. This approach does raise an important question, however: in what ways should Christians advocate for what is “right” in the public square when values conflict and our theologies may be at odds with each other? For example, the tenet of protecting life can mean being an activist for unborn children for some Christians, and/or being an activist against the death penalty for others. Our faith gives us practical wisdom, guiding principles, and core values that can illuminate the way forward on many issues and give us a platform to lead with integrity and moral courage. Remaining silent is abdicating our voice and responsibility.

Given the power and influence of the church in the role of individuals, communities, and society, the church has a responsibility to use that influence for good and to engage in those issues in positive ways. Engaging in controversial public issues and even taking controversial stands is sometimes necessary. Ultimately, the church has an active role and responsibility to do so, in order to improve the quality of life for God’s people within the larger community.

This approach asserts that a primary focus of the church should be to engage in the public square in order to live fully into its mission. The church should be a prophetic voice in the midst of the political fray, tensions, and bitter partisanship that divide us. People who hold this position believe that the fundamental responsibilities of the church should include speaking to the cultural and political issues of the day, pursuing justice, and advocating for righteousness. As such, the church should actively speak, engage, and lead in addressing issues of the day. The church should consider how it can wield its power and influence for good and actively work to be Christ’s presence in the world. This prophetic voice will manifest in different ways depending on a church’s denomination, its
Faith-based Questions to Consider

1. On what issues would you like your denomination or local church to take a stand?
2. If your congregation were to advocate on behalf of a particular community concern, what might it be? And what might that advocacy look like?

**Possible Actions**

- Churches should address issues of public concern in sermons, teaching, and ministries of the church.
- Clergy, staff, and lay leaders should be trained in advocacy and activism to enhance their ability to lead congregants in public witness and action.
- Hold forums on church or denominational social statements on issues of public concern and encouraging action in their local community.
- Create partnerships with other congregations or secular organizations in order to improve the community. Lead in local community efforts to address systemic injustices and promote justice.
- What are other ideas?

**Drawbacks**

- Churches may alienate those who disagree with their public stances. Members or potential members may get angry, or withdraw from the church.
- Churches may be seen as more as political actors than faith actors, compromising their witness in the public square. It could damage its witness and credibility in the world.
- Churches may also draw criticism, protests, and even retaliatory measures for publicly enacting their values.
- Churches may be asked to partner with agencies that do not align with the Christian faith or to work within community constraints that limit the church’s prophetic witness.
- What are other possible drawbacks?

*The drawback in this instance is the risk of alienating members of the congregation who do not agree with the church’s public opinion.*


**Ending a Forum**

Before ending a forum, take a few minutes to reflect, both individually and as a group, on what was achieved. Consider the following questions:

**I. Individual reflections**

How has your thinking about the issue changed?

How has your perspective changed as a result of what you heard in this forum?

**II. Group reflections**

Were there particular areas of agreement, shared values or common ground that resulted from the dialogue?

What voices were missing?

Can we identify any shared sense of purpose or direction?

Which trade-offs are we willing to make to move in a shared direction? Which are we unwilling to make?

**III. Next-step reflections**

What do we still need to talk about?

How can we use what we learned in this forum about ourselves? Do we want to meet again?
The Church’s Role in a Divided Society

This discussion material was written by a group of clergy and scholars from a wide range of Christian denominations who have participated in research exchanges with the Kettering Foundation. It is intended to encourage public deliberation in congregations on an issue of deep public concern.

Kettering Foundation

Founded in 1927, the Kettering Foundation of Dayton Ohio (with an office in Washington, DC), is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute that studies the public’s role in democracy. It provides issue guides and other research for the National Issues Forums. For information about the Kettering Foundation, please, visit www.kettering.org or contact the foundation at 200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459.

Baylor University Public Deliberation Initiative

Baylor University’s Public Deliberation Initiative (PDI) collaborates with the Kettering Foundation by participating in regular research exchanges focused on developing faith-based materials for public deliberation. PDI also contributes to this work by hosting the Faith & Deliberation Initiative on its website. PDI participated in the creation and development of this issue guide for use within congregations and other faith communities. For more information about Baylor University’s PDI visit https://sites.baylor.edu/baylorpdi/

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Moderator's Report
The Church's Role in a Divided Society

After the forum, please complete this brief response sheet and return it to your forum convener.

Moderator’s Name ________________________________E-mail address ________________________________

Date __________ City/town and state where forum was held ________________________________

Briefly describe the audience of your forum, including city and state, diversity, and age and number of participants.

What elements of this issue seemed most difficult for participants?

What common concerns were most apparent?

How did the participants incorporate faith into the dialogue?

What things did participants appear to hold most valuable as they wrestled with trade-offs? Describe.

Which trade-offs were participants most comfortable with? Describe.

Which trade-offs did the participants struggle with most? Describe.

Did the group identify shared directions for action that might influence the congregation’s ministry?

How would you assess your experience as a moderator? Please describe