THE LOCAL CHURCH

Position Paper: Faith and Politics

The Local Church Grand Rapids

A WORD TO OUR CHURCH FAMILY

We live in a moment marked by deep political division, heightened fear, and constant pressure to take sides. Many of us feel this tension in our families, friendships, workplaces, and even within the Church. This statement is offered to help shape a faithful posture—not to tell you how to vote, but to remind us who we are, whose we are, and how followers of Jesus are called to live together in public life.

The word *politics* comes from the Greek *polites*, meaning "a citizen of a city." In every age, people must learn how to live together as members of a shared community. For Christians, that calling is shaped by Scripture. We are urged to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3) and to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city" where God has placed us (Jer. 29:7). Our lives are intertwined—with fellow believers and with neighbors who do not share our faith.

We must also understand how Scripture speaks to our relationship with governing authorities, particularly passages like Romans 13. Paul's call to honor and submit to governing authority is not a blanket endorsement of everything the state does, nor a command to abandon moral discernment. Rather, it reminds us that all authority ultimately belongs to God and is intended to serve the common good. Faithful obedience includes respect for lawful authority alongside the courage to name injustice when power is used in ways that contradict God's justice, all while maintaining our allegiance to Jesus Christ, the resurrected King.

As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. warned, "We must learn to live together as brothers, or perish together as fools." What follows is offered in that spirit—a pastoral guide for our life together in a polarized time. It is a first word, not a final one.

CORE CHRISTIAN CONVICTIONS

1. **Every person bears God's image.**

   Scripture teaches that God created human beings in His image (Gen. 1:27). This means every person—regardless of beliefs, politics, race, or background—possesses inherent dignity and worth. For Christians, this truth governs how we speak, listen, and act, especially toward those with whom we disagree. We do not reduce people to labels, voting blocs, or enemies. We see them first as image-bearers loved by God.

2. **Sin touches every heart and every system.**

   The Bible is equally honest about sin. Human rebellion has disordered God's good world, distorting both individuals and institutions. No ideology, party, or leader is untouched by this

reality. “All have sinned,” Scripture reminds us (Rom. 3:23). This truth should sober our confidence, restrain our outrage, and keep us from moral superiority.

3. **Grace is God’s final word.**
   The heart of the Christian faith is grace. “By grace you have been saved, through faith… it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). God’s grace forgives, restores, and transforms. And while grace cannot be earned, it does call forth effort—lives shaped by repentance, obedience, and love. We engage the world not to prove ourselves right, but as people who have been rescued and renewed.

4. **God desires unity within His Church.**
   Jesus prayed that His followers would be one, so that the world might believe (John 17:21). This unity does not require uniformity or the absence of disagreement, but reflects a shared allegiance to Christ that is deeper than political, cultural, or ideological difference. Bound together by grace, the Church is called to bear with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).

THE POSTURE THESE CONVICTIONS REQUIRE

1. **We pursue justice rooted in reconciliation.**
   Because every person bears God’s image, Christians care deeply about justice. We respond when dignity is denied or harm is done. At the same time, God’s justice always aims toward reconciliation—the healing of relationships and the restoration of community. This includes the hard work of maintaining unity within the Church, even when faithfulness leads us into disagreement. Such work often requires truth-telling, repentance, confession, and repair.

2. **We live with integrity.**
   Sin calls for vigilance, not cynicism. Followers of Jesus seek lives of integrity—where inner convictions and outward actions align with Scripture. Character matters. This means telling the truth, refusing hypocrisy, and regularly praying with the psalmist, “Search me, O God… and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139).

3. **We walk in humility shaped by grace.**
   Grace humbles us. We remember that we stand before God not by merit, but by mercy. In political conversations, humility looks like listening well, speaking carefully, and resisting anger. Unity is preserved not by winning arguments, but by bearing with one another in love as fellow recipients of grace. As James teaches, we strive to be “quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry” (James 1:19).

A FEW PASTORAL OBSERVATIONS

1. **Be mindful of what is forming you.**

   Much of modern political media is designed to inflame fear, outrage, and tribal loyalty rather than cultivate wisdom. Over time, this formation shapes our loves and reactions. Followers of Jesus are called to let Scripture—not partisan narratives—have the loudest voice in shaping our imagination and hope.

2. **Jesus does not fit neatly into our political categories.**

   Modern politics often centers on self-expression, power, and identity. Christian discipleship calls us in a different direction—toward self-denial, service, and faithfulness. Jesus is not running for office. He is already King. Our allegiance to Him must remain deeper than any political identity.

3. **The Church must not be captured by partisan loyalty.**

   When Christianity becomes fused with a political party, both the Gospel and our public witness suffer. The Church's calling is not to baptize one platform or demonize another, but to faithfully affirm what is good and courageously confront what is harmful—wherever it appears.

4. **Truth still matters.**

   In an age of misinformation and suspicion, Christians are called to be people of truth. Speaking truthfully—with humility and love—is not divisive. Faithfulness also requires the courage to receive truth, even when it challenges our assumptions or requires us to admit we were wrong.

5. **The Church is not fragile. Fear has no place here.**

   Some believe that the future of the Church depends on the outcome of a particular election. Scripture tells a different story. Jesus promised, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). For two thousand years, the Church has endured, often thriving under pressure and persecution. Our hope rests not in political outcomes, but in the faithfulness of God.

A FINAL WORD

As followers of Jesus, we are ultimately citizens of heaven who faithfully sojourn as citizens on earth. We engage our world thoughtfully, speak with conviction and compassion, and place our ultimate trust in Christ alone. May we be known not by fear or outrage, but by grace and truth, humility and justice, love and hope—and by unity rooted in Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. **Does this mean Christians shouldn't care about politics or public life?**
   No. Christians are called to love their neighbors and seek the good of the places where God has put us. Political decisions affect real people made in God's image. This statement is not a call to withdrawal, but to faithful engagement shaped by Scripture rather than fear, outrage, or partisan loyalty.

2. **Is the church telling me how to vote?**
   No. The Church's role is not to bind consciences where Scripture allows freedom. Faithful Christians may arrive at different political conclusions. No political platform or party fully reflects the values of God's kingdom, and every vote involves a mixture of affirmations and compromises when measured against the call of scripture for the Christian. Our aim is not to prescribe specific political choices, but to shape *how* we engage—our posture, character, and loves—as people whose ultimate allegiance belongs to Jesus.

3. **Does unity mean we avoid hard conversations or disagreement?**
   Not at all. Biblical unity is not the absence of disagreement, but a shared allegiance to Jesus that is stronger than our differences. Unity often requires honest conversation, truth-telling, repentance, and forgiveness. What we reject is contempt, caricature, and division that treats fellow believers as enemies.

4. **How does Romans 13 fit with Christian resistance to injustice?**
   Romans 13 calls Christians to respect governing authorities as instruments God uses to restrain evil and promote order. It does not demand blind obedience or silence in the face of injustice. Scripture consistently shows God's people honoring authority while also prophetically confronting it when obedience to God is at stake. Faithfulness requires both respect and discernment.

5. **Why doesn't this statement name specific issues, parties, or candidates?**
   Because political contexts change, but Christian formation must endure. Naming specific platforms risks narrowing the Church's witness and binding the Gospel to a moment in time. Our goal is to provide durable theological guidance that helps believers faithfully navigate any political landscape.

6. **What if I feel strongly that the stakes are too high for restraint or humility?**
   Scripture acknowledges that political moments can feel urgent and frightening. But fear is never the engine of Christian faithfulness. Our hope rests in Christ's reign, not electoral outcomes. We are called to act with conviction *and* confidence that God is at work beyond what we can see.

7. **What does faithfulness look like going forward?**
   It looks like prayerful discernment, informed participation, truthful speech, sacrificial love, and a commitment to preserve the unity of the Church. It looks like trusting Christ enough to refuse hatred, resist fear, and practice hope—together.

8. **What about activism, justice, and defending the vulnerable—hasn't the Church always done this?**
   Yes. Throughout Scripture and history, God's people have honored governing authorities while also standing sacrificially for justice and the protection of the vulnerable. The prophets confronted kings, the early Church cared for the poor and marginalized under imperial rule, and Christian movements have often played key roles in abolition, civil rights, and the defense of human dignity. Faithful Christian engagement is not passive compliance nor reactionary activism, but courageous, costly obedience rooted in love of neighbor and allegiance to Christ.

9. **What does faithfulness look like going forward?**
   It looks like prayerful discernment shaped by love for God and neighbor, grounded in Scripture, and expressed through informed participation, truthful speech, attentive listening, sacrificial love, and a commitment to preserve the unity of the Church. It looks like trusting Christ enough to refuse hatred, resist fear, and practice hope—together.