



# Sacred Conversation on Race

## The journey **continues**

**O God, we pray for your presence and wisdom, as we begin to look carefully at the realities of RACE and Voting Rights. Amen.**

**Voter suppression threats remain real and present**



National Archives, 1963

Police in riot gear, fire hoses and police dogs. These are some compelling images of what advocates faced when marching for the right to vote and an end to racial discrimination, in the streets of the 1950-60s Civil Rights Era.

Today, the threats of voter suppression impacting communities of color remain real and present.

### History of Suppression

In fact, history traces a path of suppression from the Jim Crow laws in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 21<sup>st</sup> century attempts to suppress voters.

With the beginning of the Jim Crow era, there were 400 subsequent state and local laws that instituted racial segregation in all areas of public life. Twenty nine of these laws limited the right to vote, up until the Civil Rights Era.

**Restrictive voter laws affect communities of color**

### Restrictive Voter Laws

A similarly disturbing picture of voter suppression has emerged by 2012, according to a study on voting law changes by the Brennan Center for Justice.

There were 180 voter suppression bills passed in 41 states, including: restrictive voter ID requirements, proof of citizenship, restrictions on voter registration, and reduction in early and absentee voting opportunities.

## ELECTION PROTECTION

Question about where or how to vote? Want to report a problem voting? Call 1-866-OUR-VOTE [www.866ourvote.org](http://www.866ourvote.org)



Restrictive voter laws disproportionately affect communities of color, and other vulnerable communities.

For example, although 11% of all Americans lack a government-issued photo ID, the rate is 25% among African-Americans, 16% among Latinos, and 18% among the elderly.

Asian, Pacific Islander, and Latino voters across

the country are often subjected to inappropriate request for their citizenship papers, and denial of provisional ballots, because of “foreign-sounding names [or] appearances.”

Restriction on voter registration process impacts communities of color, because their voters rely heavily on community-based registration drives. So are restrictions on early voting.

### Structural barriers

Although Native nations relate to the federal U.S. government as one sovereign entity to another, Native Americans have to contend with the structural barriers to their voting rights, because Secretaries of States oversee the federal elections.

For example, the Navajo Nation extends over the 3 states of Arizona, Utah, or New Mexico, and has 3 different sets of rules for state and federal elections.

There are long-established centers of local government called chapter houses, which are important Navajo civic

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centers tied to tradition and meaning. They serve as voting precincts for tribal election, which the Navajo Nation aligns with state and federal elections.

However, the state counties use their own data to set precincts and polling places, some of which can be

as far as 50 miles away from the chapter house!

“It is a matter of [counties] not respecting the political boundaries of the Navajo Nation,” according to the Lenoard Gorman, who directs the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission.

### Our Common Life

Our vote is our voice in our democracy. It is one of the fundamental ways we can participate in our common life. For people with little power or money, it is one of the very few ways to enter into the public dialogue about our collective future as a democracy.

### Prayerful reflection

*You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people.*

*You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.*

*Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.*

- Deuteronomy 16:18-20

In this passage from the Scriptures, we hear the call to carefully tend to the ways we order our collective life.

A right relationship with God means the practice of right relationship in human community.

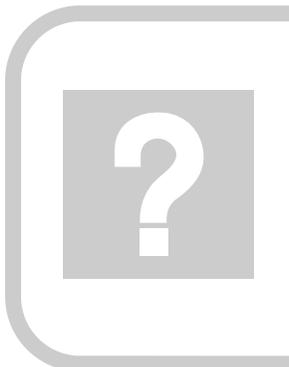
We are all entrusted, particularly those with power, to make decisions that impact our life together as society.

The call is to act equitably, with impartiality and integrity, and with justice as a guiding value for the common good.

The standard of justice, found over and over in the Scriptures, is the well-being of the most vulnerable members of our community.

It is the standard by which we discern whether the laws and measures for the order of our society are just and fair.

In our public life together today, where would you say that we are according to such a standard? What are the challenges before us? What might we need to change?



### Questions for discussion

- From your experience and according to your context, what similarities and/or differences do you see in the struggle for voting rights in the 1950s and 1960s, and the current debate about voter laws?
- What does democracy mean to you? What is at stake when we consider legislation and court rulings that have the power to influence the democratic process?
- How do you observe issues of race and racism playing out in the current electoral process?

