



COME LET US REASON TOGETHER

FINDING OUR WAY BEYOND THE CULTURE WARS

“Come now, let us reason together,
says the LORD” (Is. 1:18)

**A Guide for
Busy Pastors**

Dear Fellow Pastor,

We are writing to invite you to come together with a growing group of pastors who are leading their congregations to embrace a new approach to some of the most difficult issues in our nation's life.

For too long, forces in our country have fueled a polarizing conflict over hot-button issues like abortion, issues related to gay and lesbian people, and the role of religion in public life. But as pastors, we realized that these so-called "culture wars" have been waged along political battle lines that don't fit the body of Christ we serve very well—few congregations (or pastors) fit comfortably into one category all the time. This is especially true for the younger generation, who are looking for new leadership beyond the rancor of past debates.

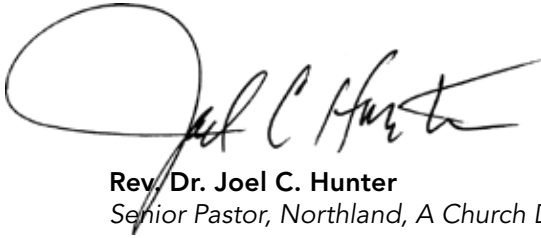
More and more of us have been realizing that there are overlooked ways to make progress on these issues together even amidst disagreement. And we can do it without compromising our core values and beliefs. This new *Come Let Us Reason Together* path represents an exciting, practical approach to the most divisive cultural issues of our day.

This pastor guide, *Come Let Us Reason Together: A Guide for Busy Pastors*, details this valuable approach and describes how you can add your voice to a growing chorus. It is the result of two years of conversation among pastors and other Christian leaders. These Christian leaders were joined by an unlikely group of progressives led by Third Way,

a progressive think tank in Washington, DC, who shared our reconciling spirit and were also committed to finding a path beyond the culture wars to common ground. We hope this pastor guide will facilitate conversations in churches, on college campuses, and at kitchen tables in Christian households across the country.

We invite you to join the rising group of pastors who are looking for ways to be faithful agents of reconciliation on these issues.

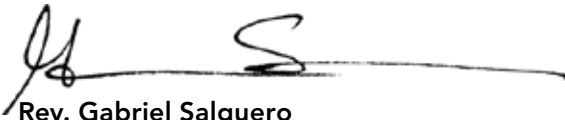
With blessings to you and your ministry,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joel C. Hunter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, prominent loop at the beginning.

Rev. Dr. Joel C. Hunter
Senior Pastor, Northland, A Church Distributed (Longwood, FL)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Roberts, Jr.". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Rev. Bob Roberts, Jr.
Senior Pastor, NorthWood Church (Keller, TX)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gabriel Salguero". The signature is cursive and includes a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Rev. Gabriel Salguero
Senior Pastor, The Lamb's Church (New York, NY)
Executive, The Latino Leadership Circle

COME LET US REASON TOGETHER

FIVE QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

FOR BUSY PASTORS

What are the culture wars?

The term “culture wars” describes the entrenched public conflict between “liberals” (or progressives) and “conservatives,” especially when it comes to hot-button issues like abortion, issues related to gay and lesbian people, and the role of religion in our nation’s public life.

These conflicts have more often than not produced polarization, hostility, and stalemates. They have not only hindered progress for either side, but they have also made advancements for the greater good nearly impossible.

How do the culture wars affect congregations if they don’t fit neatly into the categories of liberal or conservative, Republican or Democrat?

The problem with the culture wars is that they seek to artificially divide all of us. Few people or congregations or pastors fit simply into one category all the time. In fact, these labels are political terms that are not the best way to describe churches or Christians.

So, what are the options for those who think that faithfulness requires thinking independently and evaluating issues individually? More and more of us have been realizing that we can find ways to make progress on some things together, even if we differ on other issues. And we can do it without compromising our core values and beliefs.

How do I help my congregation deal with controversial issues without anger and accusation?

One of the toughest things to do as a pastor is deal with hard issues in a way that builds up rather than divides. The *Come Let*

Us Reason Together approach charts a new way to calmly address some very divisive issues while being obedient to the scriptures we preach. We can teach our congregations to be agents of reconciliation while advancing the heart of the Gospel.

**Why should I raise these controversial issues?
Isn't it safer to avoid them?**

Our country and the next generation desperately need courageous leadership on these issues that works to stake out faithful common ground. Young people especially have been turned off by the divisive rhetoric and are looking to the church for a fresh word that finds common ground without compromising principles. This new approach to old issues represents an effective way to live out the biblical mandate to help bring healing to a divided world.

What is the *Come Let Us Reason Together* path?

The *Come Let Us Reason Together* approach balances a passion for standing for what is right with a calling to be peacemakers in the world. It charts a new, practical way of approaching the most divisive cultural issues of our day: the role of religion in public life, abortion, gay and lesbian issues, torture, and immigration.

COME LET US REASON TOGETHER

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

The Bible teaches us to seek the well-being and peace of the city in which we dwell (Jer. 29:7). However, the culture wars of the last few decades have torn our country apart and damaged our sense of a shared national life.

God models reconciliation for us in the Bible with an approach that begins with the call, “Come let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18). God’s call to “reason together” can function as a powerful symbol of people coming together to reconcile their differences through respectful engagement.

Four biblical themes serve as the foundation to this new approach:

Jesus Christ modeled peacemaking, healing, and reconciliation in his ministry.

Jesus said that the arrival of the kingdom of God would be characterized by reconciliation, the healing of wounds, peace, justice, and forgiveness for all (Matt. 4:17; Matt. 6:10; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 17:20-21; II Cor. 5:11-21). The Bible describes Jesus as Prince of Peace, the great physician, a mediator, and a reconciler (Is. 9:6; John 14:27; Mark 2:17; Luke 2:14-15; 7:18-23).

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6)

God values a well-functioning society.

Creating a just, well-functioning society is part of our calling in creation (Gen. 1:27-28). In a democracy—where government is of, by, and for the people—a key part of this biblical calling is to help our government live up to this God-given responsibility to render justice and provide for peace and general well-being (Rom. 13:1-7; I Pet. 2:13-17).

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.” (I Pet. 2:13-17)

Finding a common path forward with our fellow citizens is a way to live out the Christian virtues of love, justice, and hospitality.

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) has eloquently summarized this calling: “We bless our neighbors by making good laws...that contribute to the common good and help alleviate the ills of society” (NAE, “For the Health of the Nation”). Christ calls Christians to civic engagement as part of service to God and neighbor (Matt. 22:36-40; Phil 2:4-8).

“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” (Phil. 2:4-8)

How we live out our calling to civic engagement is part of our public witness to society.

As a large and influential part of American society, we have a special responsibility not only to support the right policies but also to engage our fellow citizens in a way that is worthy of the gospel, using Christ-honoring methods that are beyond reproach. If our actions as individual believers or a faith community fuel divisions rather than heal them, they can harm our nation and the cause of Christ. In both our private lives and in our public engagement, we are ambassadors for Christ (Lev. 11:45; Col. 1:22; II Cor 5:16-20; Titus 2:7-8).

“And God has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”
(II Cor. 5:16-20)

COME LET US REASON TOGETHER

A WAY BEYOND THE CULTURE WARS

Come Let Us Reason Together represents a hopeful, new approach to faithful Christian political engagement. Our nation is showing signs of emerging from a long period of particularly divisive politics. This era has torn our country apart over issues such as abortion, homosexuality, torture, and immigration. These battles have caused deep wounds and generated mistrust on all sides.

But there is a great opportunity to move forward in “such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). God is raising up a group of pastors who desire to heal our divided nation. We are finding common ground that achieves real progress on these tough issues without compromising core beliefs.

The *Come Let Us Reason Together* path includes the following five common ground goals on the most divisive cultural issues of our time:

Affirming an appropriate role for religion in the public square.

We can agree that religious beliefs and religious diversity are vital for a healthy democratic society. Religion plays an important public, and not just private, role in American life. A vibrant public role for religion need not conflict with the American tradition of non-establishment of religion.

Reducing abortions through common ground policies.

We can agree on a goal of reducing abortions in America through policies that address the circumstances that lead to abortion: preventing unintended pregnancies, supporting pregnant women and new families, and increasing support for adoption.

Protecting the rights of gay and lesbian people to earn a living.

We can agree that all people have God-given human dignity and should be able to earn a living, whatever our beliefs are about homosexuality. Protecting the basic rights of all—even those with whom one disagrees—is a proud American tradition and a high moral and religious calling. Based on a common commitment to love of neighbor and the Golden Rule, we can support a policy that makes it illegal to fire, refuse to hire, or refuse to promote employees based on their sexual orientation. We also believe that there must be a clear exemption for religious organizations.

Renouncing Torture.

We can agree that the use of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment against prisoners is immoral, unwise, and un-American. The sanctity and dignity of every human life is non-negotiable. The threats evident in the events of 9/11 are real, but they must be met with a courageous moral and legal framework that reflects our deepest values. We are also guided on this issue by the simple and clear principle of the Golden Rule: we will not authorize or use any methods of interrogation that we would not find acceptable if used against Americans, be they civilians or soldiers.

Supporting Secure and Compassionate Immigration Reform.

We can agree that we need comprehensive immigration reform that creates an earned path to citizenship and protects families, while still securing our borders and treating American citizens fairly. Our immigration policies have too often been driven by fear instead of the biblical values of compassion and hospitality. We agree that it is possible and complementary to protect our borders, protect all families, and protect these American values.

COME LET US REASON TOGETHER

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why should Christians care about ending the culture wars?

1. Because the rancor of the culture wars have damaged our nation and the cause of Christ, especially among increasingly disillusioned youth. For example, the Barna Group recently found that American young people have highly negative perceptions of contemporary Christianity (Kinnaman 2007). The *Come Let Us Reason Together* path holds out the promise of connecting to younger Americans who have in part rejected Christianity because they reject the divisive style of politics that they associate with Christianity.
2. Because Christians are called to mirror Jesus' model of peace, love, and reconciliation. God commands us, from the moment of Creation, to govern harmoniously and care about the well-being of society.
3. Because God's love and Jesus' example compel us to be servant leaders—to act in ways that look out not just for our own interests but for the interests of all.

What is the *Come Let Us Reason Together* path?

Come Let Us Reason Together represents a practical, hopeful approach to finding solutions for divisive cultural issues based on our shared, deeply held values. We take seriously the call to “reason together” in covenant with God and one another, and we are calling for a truce in the culture wars.

This new path is guided by three principles:

1. We are committed to moving forward together on concrete issues through creative thinking and a principled dialogue, without compromising our core convictions.

2. We are committed to listening with new ears and learning from one another.
3. We mutually call for renewed civility on these difficult issues.

What about taking a stand on biblical values?

Taking a biblical stand on issues where the Bible is clear is critical. *Come Let Us Reason Together* is not about compromising core convictions but about finding a creative, new path forward based on shared values. We can be faithful to biblical values while following Christ's example of reconciliation and working together where we can.

What have Christian leaders said about *Come Let Us Reason Together*?

More than twenty prominent Christian leaders signed our *Come Let Us Reason Together* Governing Agenda at its launch in early 2009, and the list is steadily growing. The following is a sample of the endorsements.

I wholeheartedly endorse the Come Let Us Reason Together Governing Agenda. This common ground initiative holds out an unprecedented opportunity for Evangelicals and progressives—two communities that have held deep distrust for one another in the past—to come together as ambassadors of reconciliation on some of the toughest cultural issues of our time. This concrete policy agenda does not entail compromise from either group. Rather, it charts for the President and Congress a fresh course that can move our country beyond polarization, hostility and stagnation to a place that we can all agree is good.

Rev. Dr. Joel C. Hunter

Senior Pastor, Northland, A Church Distributed (Longwood, FL);
author of *A New Kind of Conservative*

The goal of Come Let Us Reason Together is a thoroughly biblical one: healing a bitter cultural polarization in the United States. This is an ambitious but thoroughly appropriate goal for Christians whose eyes are fixed on Christ and the reign of God. The policy solutions share a common grounding in respect for human dignity, which ought to be a core principle for Christians—and all people of good will. I support this project because it fits with who I seek to be as a Christian.

David P. Gushee, Ph.D.

Distinguished Professor of Christian Ethics, McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University; author of *The Future of Faith in American Politics: The Public Witness of the Evangelical Center*

As a conservative Christian, I strongly support the Come Let Us Reason Together Governing Agenda—an effort to end the culture wars that have produced a destructive and unchristian partisanship in American public life. I count myself a member of a rising generation of evangelicals calling for a rapid infusion of civility and grace into a political culture where faith has often produced divisiveness. Our unwavering commitments to the sanctity of life and the protection of marriage should not preclude working for the common good alongside people with whom we must sometimes lovingly disagree.

Jonathan Merritt

Founder, Southern Baptist Environment and Climate Initiative

We have had too much shouting and fist waving in recent years in our debates about key issues of public policy. It is time to lower the rhetoric and see if we can find practical solutions, ones that allow all of us to preserve the integrity of our deepest convictions as we look for appropriate ways of living together as citizens of a pluralistic society. It is time to “come, let us reason together.”

Richard J. Mouw, Ph.D.

President, Fuller Theological Seminary

In my early days of ministry I focused on what I believed, who agreed with me, and how we would network. The only problem was that it led to living an isolated, if not monastic, and cocooned faith in a globalized and connected world. As my ministry has matured, I have learned to interact with those who take opposite positions and hear them out. That can be scary, because in the process of wanting to change others we sometimes wind up changing! There has never been a time when cultures and people are more divided, while at the same time being more connected than today. The Come Let Us Reason Together approach is not only timely and practical, it is a much needed solution to the unproductive stalemates we have experienced on important, yet difficult cultural issues. This new path is promising for pastors who want to be faithful agents of reconciliation in our polarized but interdependent culture.

Rev. Bob Roberts, Jr.

Senior Pastor, NorthWood Church (Keller, TX); author of *Glocalization: How Followers of Christ Engage the New Flat Earth*

For too long our country has been divided between left and right, blue and red on critical social issues. As Christians we are called to the ministry of reconciliation without compromising our integrity. The Come Let us Reason Together Governing Agenda is a giant step forward toward healing divides and finding the ties that lead to the common good. The Latino Leadership Circle is committed to being part of this new mosaic. Our commitment to Christ and humanity demands no less.

Rev. Gabriel Salguero

Senior Pastor, The Lamb's Church (New York, NY)
Executive, The Latino Leadership Circle

I strongly support the Come Let Us Reason Together Governing Agenda—a landmark effort that holds out the promise of locating common ground between two communities who have in recent times mistrusted and been too ignorant of each other. This new way represents a biblically faithful path for evangelicals and a real opportunity to bring a divided nation together at this critical time in our history.

Ronald J. Sider, Ph.D.

President, Evangelicals for Social Action; author of *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience* and 28 other books

The Governing Agenda also received endorsements from a number of other prominent leaders including David Black, Tony Campolo, Gabe Lyons, Brian McLaren, Steve Monsma, Samuel Rodriguez, Glen Stassen, Paul de Vries, Jim Wallis, Tyler Wigg-Stevenson, and others.

To see the full list of endorsers, visit our website at:
<http://comeletusreason.org>

COME LET US REASON TOGETHER

STEPS PASTORS AND CHURCHES CAN TAKE

There are a number of steps that local pastors and churches can take to help bring about healing in our local communities and in our nation. The resources referenced below can be found at <http://comeletusreason.org/>.

Let your voice be heard.

- Join a growing network of other religious leaders who are endorsing the *Come Let Us Reason Together* movement.
- Join the *Come Let Us Reason Together* movement on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/comeletusreasontogether

Organize a *Come Let Us Reason Together* adult Sunday school series.

- Study the background paper, *Come Let Us Reason Together: A Fresh Look at Shared Cultural Values Between Evangelicals and Progressives*.
- Study the biblical foundations of the policies. You can check out our suggested four-week discussion guide.
- Both of these resources are available on [our website](#).

Plan a *Come Let Us Reason Together* worship service that focuses on Christ-honoring public engagement, even on tough issues.

- Give a sermon based on one of the common ground solutions above, such as reducing abortions through common good solutions.
- You can check out sermon resources online on [our website](#).

Convene a *Come Let Us Reason Together* discussion at your local clergy council or associational meeting.

Add your name in support of the “Evangelical Declaration Against Torture.”

- Go to: <http://tinyurl.com/EHRtorture>

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FURTHER STUDY MATERIALS

Books:

David Gushee, *The Future of Faith in American Politics: The Public Witness of the Evangelical Center* (Baylor University Press, 2008).

Joel Hunter, *A New Kind of Conservative* (Regal, 2008).

David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...And Why it Matters* (Baker, 2007).

Ronald J. Sider and Dianne Knippers, *Toward an Evangelical Public Policy: Political Strategies for the Health of the Nation* (Baker, 2005).

Find it on the Web:

- More information about this exciting project, the broad coalition of supporters, and details about the policies can be found at our website: <http://comeletusreason.org>
- See also the National Association of Evangelical's historic document on evangelical civic engagement: http://www.nae.net/images/civic_responsibility2.pdf
- Join us on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/comeletusreasontogether

