

The Candidates' Religions
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Tuesday is Florida's turn to participate in the Presidential primary season. Six candidates remain in the running. In political elections, we consider men and women based on their party, their record, and their platform. We seek someone with high ideals, a vision of the future, a sense of what could be — a candidate who articulates our dreams and longings for a far better world. And, in making our decision about whom to support, some of us look at religious beliefs. This is one factor, one among many, that informs our decision.

The governor of Ohio, **John Kasich** grew up in Pittsburgh. His ethnic heritage includes Croatian and Czech backgrounds. As a child he attended a Roman Catholic Church named Mother of Sorrows where he served as an altar boy. His childhood dream was to be a priest. His friends nicknamed John Kasich "Pope." "I was determined to be the best altar boy Mother of Sorrows had ever seen, by a mile," he wrote in his memoir.

Kasich greatly admired the assistant pastor, who oversaw youth programs. One day this Priest announced to the congregation that he had fallen in love with a young woman in the congregation. He told the people that he was leaving the priesthood and they were going to get married. It was a great scandal in the church. People were very angry with the young woman and the assistant priest. This all happened around 1970 just as John Kasich graduated from high school.

About this time Kasich said that he realized if he liked women, he could not be a priest. He drifted away from his religion as an adult, but came to embrace an Anglican faith after a drunk driver killed both his parents in a car crash in 1987. *Every Other Monday; Twenty Years of Life, Lunch, Faith, and Friendship* is a 2010 book by Kasich about a Bible study he attends every other Monday with a group of friends over lunch at an Italian restaurant in Columbus.

Today Kasich is a member of St. Augustine in Westerville, Ohio, part of the conservative Anglican Church in North America. The denomination broke away from the Episcopal Church after the liberal church consecrated an openly gay bishop. The church does not permit female bishops or ordain non celibate LGBT priests. Kasich publicly states that he bases his policies on his religious beliefs. He said, "When you die and get to the meeting with St. Peter, he is probably not gonna ask you much about what you did about keeping government small, but he is going to ask you what you did for the poor. Better have a good answer."

Florida Senator **Marco Rubio** has the most unusual personal religious story of anyone on the campaign trail. He was born a Catholic and he is now a practicing Catholic — after exploring the Mormon and Southern Baptist faiths. The exposure to the Mormon Church came when Rubio was eight years old and his family moved from South Florida to Las Vegas. In Las Vegas his

mother attributed the wholesomeness of the neighborhood to the influence of the Mormon Church. Young Rubio was baptized again, this time in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. He spent three years as a Mormon, upheld its teachings more enthusiastically than his parents and chided his father for working as a bartender. Mormons abstain from alcohol.

As an adult back in Florida, Rubio was married, in 1998, in a Catholic church. In 2000 he started attending Miami's Christ Fellowship, a Southern Baptist congregation. He will go with his family to the Southern Baptist service Saturday nights, and Mass Sundays at St. Louis Catholic Church in Miami. Rubio says his ideal church would be a Roman Catholic mass that included the screens and rock band of a contemporary mega church worship. However, he is not a completely loyal Catholic. He disagrees with Pope Francis on climate change and income inequality.

According to the Religious News Service, <http://www.religionnews.com/2016/02/04/ted-cruzs-campaign-fueled-dominionist-vision-america-commentary/> **Ted Cruz's** father, Rafael Cruz, was a Catholic Cuban refugee working in the energy industry when Ted was born in 1970 but in 1975 became a born-again Christian. By the time Ted was a teen, Rafael was a traveling preacher. Now, Rafael pastors a church in Dallas and directs the Purifying Fire Ministries, ministering in the United States, Mexico and Central America.

According to an article in the Religious News Service, Ted Cruz believes he is engaged in a fight with the devil for the soul of the nation. When Cruz says he wants to "reclaim" or "restore" America, he wants to "restore" the United States to what he believes is our country's original identity: a Christian nation. One of Cruz's most trusted advisers is David Barton. For several decades Barton has been an activist with a political mission to make the United States a Christian nation again. He runs "Keep the Promise," a multimillion-dollar Cruz super-PAC. Historians have discredited David Barton's work on the history of the American founding, but Ted Cruz believes him.

Rafael Cruz describes his son's political campaign as a direct fulfillment of biblical prophecies. According to his father, God has anointed Ted Cruz to help Christians in their effort to "occupy the land ... and take dominion" over it. This "end-time transfer of wealth" will relieve Christians of all financial woes. This will allow true believers to ascend to a position of political and cultural power in which they can build a Christian civilization. When this Christian nation is in place (or back in place), Jesus will return.

Cruz's home church is Houston's First Baptist, a Southern Baptist congregation. Feb 1 after winning the Iowa Republican primary, he started his speech by saying "Let me first of all say, to God be the glory." According to the religious news service, Senator Ted Cruz's goal is to lead a Christian takeover of America in anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ.

Donald Trump told Christian Broadcasting Network in 2012: “First Presbyterian Church in Jamaica Queens is where I went to church.” This is the church Donald Trump's parents attended and in which he was baptized. The Jamaica Queens church is a member of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) This is one of the most liberal Christian denominations in the country. They have looked into excommunicating Mr. Trump, but they can find no record of his membership. Mr. Trump said, “I’m a Protestant; I’m a Presbyterian. And you know I’ve had a good relationship with the church over the years. I think religion is a wonderful thing. I think my religion is a wonderful religion. . . . [I go to church] as much as I can. Always on Christmas. Always on Easter.”

When he attends church in New York City, he often goes, not to a Presbyterian Church but to Marble Collegiate Church, a “Dutch Reformed Church.” The Church was once the pulpit of Norman Vincent Peale, author of the mega-best-seller “The Power of Positive Thinking.” Trump mentions Peale frequently in his campaign. However, Marble Collegiate Church also has no record of Trump’s membership.

In Iowa he attended the Sunday morning service at a First Presbyterian Church one week before the Iowa caucus. He dropped \$50 bills in the offering plate. The Presbyterian minister preached a sermon that morning on how Christianity requires the welcoming of the stranger.

Trump said people often send him Bibles and he keeps every one of them “in a very nice place.” “There’s no way I would ever throw anything, to do anything negative to a Bible,” Trump said.

Trump sometimes takes a Bible along to wave at campaign events, but he has said: “I would have a fear of doing something other than very positive, so actually I store them and keep them and sometimes give them away to other people but I do get sent a lot of Bibles and I like that. I think that’s great.” He spoke at Liberty University and said his book *The Art of the Deal* is the second-best book in the world, after the Bible.

All her life **Hillary Rodham Clinton** has been a moderate, evolving, social-justice-focused Methodist. The story of her religious belief goes back to the fall of 1961, when she was thirteen. That year Rev. Donald Jones arrived to serve as the youth minister at First Methodist Church in Park Ridge, Illinois where Hillary attended with her parents. Rev. Jones’ message was that a Christian life should embody “faith in action,” which included trying to help people who were less fortunate. Jones took the group to hear Martin Luther King speak, “The old order is passing away and a new one is coming in,” King said that night. “We should all accept this order and learn to live together as brothers in a world society, or we will all perish together.”

Rev. Jones and Hillary remained friends. In her memoir, Hillary singles out Rev. Jones for his help in getting her through the crisis in her marriage in 1998. Rev. Jones believed that social change should come about slowly and without radical action. He was Clinton’s spiritual mentor until his death in 2009.

When they came to Washington in 1993, Hillary and Bill Clinton joined Foundry United Methodist Church. Foundry is a progressive Methodist Church. In 1996, both presidential candidates, Bill Clinton and Robert Dole, were members of Foundry United Methodist Church. Last September Hillary and Chelsea Clinton spoke at Foundry as part of the church's bicentennial celebration.

In April 2015, Hillary Clinton told the annual United Methodist Women Assembly that her faith has guided her to be “an advocate for children and families, for women and men around the world who are oppressed and persecuted, denied their human rights and human dignity.”

Brooklyn-raised **Bernie Sanders** was born to a Polish Jewish immigrant father whose family the Nazis mostly wiped out during the Holocaust. Sanders' mother was also the daughter of Polish Jewish immigrants. After he graduated from the University of Chicago in 1964, Sanders spent several months in Israel. He lived on a kibbutz, an agricultural collective and one of the Jewish state's experiments with socialism. By Jewish law Sanders is Jewish. Today he identifies as culturally Jewish but he has freely acknowledged that he is not a religious person.

Sanders received applause from the conservative Christian audience at Liberty University when he said that Americans should stand with the poor. He quoted from both the Old and New Testament and told students, “I am motivated by a vision which exists in all of the great religions — in Christianity, in Judaism, in Islam, Buddhism and other religions — and which is so beautifully and clearly stated in Matthew 7:12. And it states: ‘So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets.’ That is the golden rule. Do to others what you would have them do to you. It is not very complicated,” Bernie Sanders concluded.

Asked whether he believed in God, Sanders said: “What I believe in and what my spirituality is about, is that we're all in this together. . . . as human beings we can [not] turn our backs on the suffering of other people.” He said, “we cannot worship just billionaires and the making of more and more money. Life is more than that.”

So these are the candidates.

- John Kasich, a member of an Anglican Church in Ohio.
- Marco Rubio, a member of a Roman Catholic Church in Miami.
- Ted Cruz, a member of Houston's First Baptist, a southern Baptist congregation.
- Donald Trump, who identifies as a Presbyterian.
- Hillary Clinton, a member of Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington.
- And Bernie Sanders, culturally Jewish, but not a member of a Jewish Temple or synagogue.

In making your decision about whom to vote for Tuesday, I think it is appropriate for you to consider each candidate's religious beliefs. This should be one factor, but only among many that

will inform your decision.

Finally, whom, you may ask, do I recommend?

I strongly, strongly urge you to vote for the best candidate.