

Sojourners and Call to Renewal • *January 31, 2006*

# THE STATE OF OUR VALUES

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## ORGANIZERS' TOOLKIT

Organize a State of the Union  
Watch for people of faith  
near you!

[www.sojo.net](http://www.sojo.net) • [www.calltorenewal.org](http://www.calltorenewal.org)

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## THE VISION

*“Over the next several months, on issue after issue, let us do what Americans have always done, and build a better world for our children and grandchildren.”*

*– President George W. Bush, State of the Union address, February 2, 2005*

*January 2006*

Dear Organizer,

On Tuesday, January 31, 2006, at 9 p.m. EST, President Bush will once again address Congress and the nation, reflecting on the past year and articulating his broad vision, legislative and budget priorities, and policy agenda for the coming year.

We do not yet know what the President will say in his address this year. Will the President proclaim his vision for reducing or ending poverty in our time? Will he advance moral budget priorities? What about a plan for peace abroad and in our neighborhoods? What about restoring honest government?

This speech will also likely come just a day before the House of Representatives votes on whether or not to pass a budget that harms low-income families and children by cutting vital services like child support, Medicaid, and assistance for disabled persons. We believe this is the *real* moral scandal in Washington, yet it is receiving little attention.

As people of faith who believe in justice and compassion, we must ensure that our moral values are represented and our prophetic voices are heard.

To that end, we intend to gather in communities across America, as people of faith, to listen to the President’s speech, and reflect with each other and for the local media on his words and the actions behind those words. **This toolkit will assist you in organizing a State of the Union Watch in your community.**

We are thrilled that you are part of this campaign, and look forward to working together in the coming days and weeks.

Peace,

*The Organizing Team at Sojourners and Call to Renewal*

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## 5 STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL EVENT

*Organizing a successful State of the Union Watch will be a rewarding and movement-building experience with some good planning.*

**1. FIND A LOCATION.** First things first: You'll need a place that can accommodate a group of people to watch the State of the Union. We recommend a church hall or other public community center. As far as time, the State of the Union will be delivered at 9 p.m. EST, so be sure to note the time change if you're not in the Eastern time zone. The State of the Union usually lasts about 45 minutes, give or take, so make sure to build in time for discussion at the beginning and the end. Also make sure to get approval from the powers that be at your desired location, and make sure it will satisfy all the necessary...

**2. DETAILS, DETAILS!** The key here is to keep a checklist, but keep it simple. Essentials: A TV, chairs, a couple of tables, sign-in sheets, pens, clipboards, refreshments, coffee (yes, this IS essential for some), cups, plates, napkins, nametags, and discussion questions (see page 6). Now all you need is to...

**3. INVITE THE MASSES.** Think about the usual suspects in your network, fellow churchgoers, peace and justice groups, etc. Also think about some not-so-usual suspects, like other neighborhood congregations, faith communities with diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, etc.—this is a great opportunity for community building. If it's at a church, make sure there's an announcement in the church bulletin. Last but not least, make sure you post your event at [www.sojo.net](http://www.sojo.net) so others in your area can find it! Now, to avoid committing the classic blunder of “if a group of prophetic voices speaks, but no one's around to hear it,” make sure you...

**4. INVITE THE MEDIA.** Have you ever watched a major news event that is followed by a commercial that goes something like, “Local reactions to blah-bee-blah: News at 11.” That's what we're looking for here. We want local media to report on what prophetic voices are saying in your community (that's you!). For more information on how to generate media, see page 4. All that's left now is to...

**5. KEEP THE MASSES ENGAGED.** We hope this won't be the last time you meet with this group of folks. Use our sign-in form at the end of this toolkit to gather names and information for attendees. This way, when your next project rolls along, you'll have a good group to go back to. For more information on keeping people engaged, see page 7. Oh, and don't forget your thank-you notes!

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## PUBLICIZING YOUR EVENT IN THE MEDIA

Call to Renewal/Sojourners press contact:

**Jack Pannell, press secretary 202.745.4614; [jpannell@sojo.net](mailto:jpannell@sojo.net)**

**B**elow we have put together a few approaches to working with the media. As you organize your event, we urge you to find creative ways to engage the media and share your values. Our goal for this event is to generate media coverage reflective of the values and priorities held by people of faith. Our desire as a faith community is to hold the government accountable on its promises. We want to inform the press about the event and that members of the faith community will be available immediately after the State of the Union for reaction. This is the type of event the media looks to cover on the 11 o'clock news following the speech.

### OVERVIEW

■ There will be extensive coverage and analysis surrounding the State of the Union. What is said shapes the nation and its priorities for the coming year. It is important when these visions and goals for our country are projected by the president that the faith community has a prophetic response portraying our religious priorities and moral values. We want your voices and values to be heard and shared directly following the president's speech. As you plan your event it is important to have support from your church or faith-based community. Drafting a media plan and creating a media list are essential tools to help you communicate with media professionals in your city. The following steps below will help you organize a plan, build a list, and use it effectively.

### CONDUCT MEDIA RESEARCH

■ You will want to find out what local media outlets cover national, political, and religious events. You can conduct this research on three fronts: print (daily and weekly newspapers, local magazines, and newsletters), radio (your local public radio station and any other stations with talk radio programs), and television (local news stations, including ABC, CBS, NBC, and PBS affiliates). A quick and easy way to find lists of media in your city is to go to [Congress.org](http://Congress.org) and type in your zip code under "Browse Media Guide."

### ASSEMBLE A LIST

■ The next step is to identify specific reporters, producers, and columnists who have covered the State of the Union in your local news outlets. There are several ways to do this. First, go to their Web site and see which reporters or columnists have written stories, columns, or op-eds on the issue. Some news Web sites will even list reporters by department. You can also call the newspaper's main switchboard and ask the operator for information about who will be covering the State of the Union. He or she will be able to transfer you to the appropriate department. Often, reporters from different departments will cover the same issue from different

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angles. So you will need names of reporters at the economics, politics, and domestic issues desks.

Once you have names and contact information, use a spreadsheet tool like Microsoft Excel to compile a list. Be sure to include the reporter's name, media outlet, e-mail address, and telephone number.

## USING THE LIST

■ Once you have a list compiled, you can use the mail merge feature to send press releases, media advisories, or other information via e-mail. Prepare your document to send, send it, and then follow up with phone calls and/or personal e-mails to a few key reporters.

## WRITING A PRESS ADVISORY

■ Press advisories should be succinct—about half a page—and marked clearly with the words “Press Advisory.”

The first paragraph should include the who, what, where, why, and when of the event. For example: “A State of the Union Watch will be held at St. Michael’s Church at 8 p.m. Members of the faith community will be available to share their reactions to the speech as well as express their own visions for where our country should be heading according to their values.”

The second paragraph of a press advisory should include a deeper description of the purpose of the event and how it was organized. Do not assume the reader will understand the need for an event.

You might want to include a quote from a spokesperson of the organization in charge regarding the purpose of the event. Make it clear and to the point.

At the end of the advisory, type “#” or “-30-.” Then include two contact names with phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Print it on the letterhead of hosting organizations.

## FOLLOW-UP CALLS

■ A few days after you send the advisory, call the reporter to follow up. Ask for the reporter by name, and then tell them who you are and why you’re calling. Example: “Hi, I’m Jane Lopez, calling from Fellowship Church to make sure you received the press advisory we sent about the State of the Union Watch.” After the reporter answers, ask if he or she has a few minutes to discuss it. Don’t assume a reporter has time to talk—they may be on deadline and will appreciate you asking whether they can talk at the moment. Offer to call back.

*For more information on working with the media, including samples and writing a longer press release on the day of your event to encourage further coverage, check out [http://www.actionforchange.org/launch\\_guide/reaching\\_out.html](http://www.actionforchange.org/launch_guide/reaching_out.html).*

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## PLANNING YOUR EVENT

When January 31 finally rolls around, you'll want to be prepared for a smooth program. Organizing a successful event is not rocket science, but will require some detail work.

### MANAGING LOGISTICS

Securing a location and time should be your first priority. If you are a member of a church, talk to your pastor or facilities manager about securing a location. A community center or other public place also offers a safe space for visitors. It will be advantageous to make sure you've visited the space in advance and think about what you want the room to look like during the event. You'll also need TV, chairs, a couple of tables, sign-in sheets, pens, clipboards, refreshments, coffee, cups, plates, napkins, and nametags.

### BUILDING A PROGRAM

Make sure you build time in your program to arrive well before the speech starts, and time for discussion and fellowship afterward. Also make sure you coordinate with the facilities manager to have enough time for setup and cleanup. Here's what a sample program could look like for someone living in the Central time zone:

- 7:30 Gathering and fellowship (15 minutes)
- 7:45 Opening discussion and introductions (15-30 minutes)
- 8:00 State of the Union Watch (45 minutes, plus or minus)
- 8:45 Post-speech discussion (roughly 30 minutes)
- 9:15 A "pitch" to stay involved (5 minutes)
- 9:20 Fellowship time and cleanup (15-30 minutes)

### THE DISCUSSION

Someone (not necessarily you, but it can be) should moderate the discussion. If possible, forming a circle with chairs may be helpful. If there aren't too many people present, it might be helpful to go around and do introductions. Bear in mind that there will likely be people with diverse opinions in the room, so it's important not to make assumptions about people's political views if you want to have an open, honest discussion. The moderator should say this from the outset, and encourage those that haven't spoken much to chime in. If members of the media are present, make sure you let folks know that they are making statements "on the record."

### Sample discussion questions for before and after the State of the Union

- If you were the president and giving the State of the Union tonight, what would you say is the most important moral priority for our nation? (before)
- What is one of your moral priorities that you think the president will address tonight? (before)
- What is one of your moral priorities that you think the president will not address tonight? (before)
- What was one specific proposal you heard tonight that you liked? (after)
- What was one specific proposal you heard that you disliked? (after)
- What didn't President Bush talk about that you would have liked to hear? (after)
- Did what he say resonate with your values on budget priorities? Tax priorities? Iraq and other foreign policy issues? (after)

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## STAYING INVOLVED

**J**ust as important as getting everyone there is making sure you are able to contact and engage participants for events like these in the future. At the end of the discussion, remind everyone to sign in on the provided sheet, and give participants the opportunity to give quick recruiting pitches for organizations that they are affiliated with that might interest other participants. If the event is sponsored by a group such as a church “peace and justice” committee, you may want to bring event calendars with you as handouts. Please keep the info sheets for your own use and fax copies to us if participants decide to sign up for SojoMail.

Another great way to stay involved is to give participants something tangible to do directly after the discussion. The House of Representatives may vote on a budget proposal to cut vital social services to low-income families on Wednesday, February 1—**stay tuned for information about a call-in day sponsored by Sojourners and Call to Renewal to oppose immoral budget priorities.**

*For more ideas on other creative ways in which people of faith can inform social policy, see [www.calltorenewal.org/public\\_policy/index.cfm/action/influence\\_policy.html](http://www.calltorenewal.org/public_policy/index.cfm/action/influence_policy.html)*

# GET CONNECTED

To receive updates about local and national issues of faith and justice, please fill out the form below:

Check box for free TRIAL issue of Sojourners magazine\* (See below for cancellation details.)

Clergy? <small>Circle one</small>	Name	Address	City/State/Zip	E-mail	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rev. Sr. Br. Fr.	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rabbi Imam Other	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rev. Sr. Br. Fr.	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rabbi Imam Other	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rev. Sr. Br. Fr.	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rabbi Imam Other	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rev. Sr. Br. Fr.	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rabbi Imam Other	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Rev. Sr. Br. Fr.	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rabbi Imam Other	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

\* Will include invoice for a year's subscription at SPECIAL \$29.95 rate. If dissatisfied for any reason, just write "cancel" on invoice.

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