

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

~*Ephesians 4:32*

Dear People of the Northern Great Lakes Synod,

I'm on Facebook. I do not comment often, unless it is to wish someone a “Happy Birthday”. I see recipes and gardening tips, anniversary announcements and pictures of baptisms. I also see people I know and love posting polarizing memes that demonize those with whom they disagree. And I suspect the post that was shared can trace its origin to those countries most interested in sowing seeds of discord and division in our country.

It is concerning, especially as we journey towards our November elections and all that is at stake in our votes.

I do not write to tell you how to vote. That is not the way of the ELCA Lutheran Christian. I *do* write to encourage you to be mindful of how you engage in conversation and discernment leading up to this year's election. There are people in your congregation who love you and who disagree with you. Will you demonize them? Will you lump them in with those you deem to be unworthy? Or will you extend grace, be kind, and forgive them for not agreeing with you?

Abraham Lincoln, who shepherded the United States through the Civil War, stated “America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves.”

I hope and pray that as tensions rise, as political lines are drawn, as alliances are declared, that our communities of faith will remain places of civil discourse, open conversation, and unified in our commitment to proclaim Christ and work for his mission.

We are first and foremost citizens of the kingdom of God – not Republicans, not Democrats, not independents. The lens we apply to politics is that of the open tomb, to weigh and assess the policies and positions of candidates based on how well they align with the priorities and example of Jesus. This, of course, is not so easily done. But the task becomes easier if we consider what is important with others, in our community of faith, employing conversation, prayer, and debate that allows for mutual respect in the midst of varying perspectives.

I encourage you to be careful of what you post and find out first:

1. Is it true? Check the news source.
2. Who generated the post? Do not be an unwitting accomplice to outside influencers.
3. Does it further the conversation? Or simply drop an emotional zinger meant to inflame and increase anxiety.

Keep in mind that conversation around such important and complicated subjects is best held in person. Social media provides a distance that reduces meaningful discussion to soundbites and allows people to be their worst selves. Do not be your worst self. It is at times such as this that the Church and your church can be a place of not just civility, but of safety and hope. Whatever the election results, whatever the reaction to those

results, we, the body of Christ, will continue to be united in ministry for the sake of the one who died and rose to save.... even those who nailed him to the cross. By the grace of God, our forgiveness will be just as inclusive and will bear witness to the power of Christ to heal, to reconcile, and to find a way forward...together.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Katherine Finegan