

*“May the God of
steadfastness and encouragement
grant you to live in harmony
with one another,
in accordance with Christ Jesus,
so that together you may with one voice
glorify the God and Father
of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

~Romans 15:5-6, Advent 2



Dear Northern Great Lakes Synod,

As I write this, today is election day. I hear from some people that they are very anxious about this; anxious about outcomes, anxious about potential violence, anxious

about accusations of voter fraud or refusals to accept results. And from others, it is business as usual as I believe, in many of our communities, people know who their election officials are. Neighbors are behind the desk at polling locations. Familiar faces are overseeing the voting booths. I'd like to think that we have a deeper sense of trust in voting procedures and processes where we live than perhaps in more urban areas.

Whether you trust the process in your community or not, I think we all know that we are at a place in the history of our country where the political seams are showing, and the fabric of society is even ripping apart in some places, leaving holes and frayed edges. We, as a country, are not “living in harmony with one another.”

Truthfully, I'm not sure that's possible. I still hope for civility, but I do not expect harmony. However, I do hope for harmony in our communities of faith, so that with one voice we can glorify God, and with joined effort, we can partner together in ministry.

I've heard from a few of our congregations that “people leave their politics at the door.” Certainly, our congregations are not the place for campaigning, but can they be a place of civil discourse? Not so that one person can badger

another person into agreement, but so that as people of faith we can wrestle together with issues that are complex and multi-layered. Where else can people of faith struggle together with what it means to be people of faith, when opinions vary about what a faithful response is?

It seems to me that the polar opposite extremes of any given issue are the only voices at the microphone or on the news. I have no idea what the results of the midterm election will be, nor what that result will mean moving into the future. Since we are both citizens of the world and children of the kingdom of God, the way forward is far from clear. I hope that it is possible to discuss, discern, and consider together what it means to live in harmony given differing opinions about politics. And I offer a word of caution, that the extreme voice seeks to demonize the opposition, and no one is as bad, or as good, as any advertisement or media spot or Facebook post seeks to make them out to be.

It seems to me that the last decades have seen an eroding sense of trust in government, authority, and institutions, including the Church, including your church. I don't know how to build up trust in government, but your witness can help to rebuild trust in people of faith and what it means to be Christian.

I therefore ask you, encourage you, exhort you, to give witness in your community to your faith in Christ Jesus, not just in how you vote, but in how you treat each other, how you speak about those with whom you disagree, and how you live your faith in every day. While much of what Jesus said is not so clear, his actions and his call to follow could not be more explicit. Jesus gives us the mandate to love, to serve, to feed his sheep. We are to advocate for the forgotten, lift up the lowly, see the overlooked, welcome the excluded, love God by loving our neighbor. It is as easy and as difficult as that.

As congregations once again gather around tables for coffee fellowship and conversation, I hope we

can renew friendships and deepen relationships, old and new, so that at least in our communities of faith we can find common ground and listen better to each other than the rest of the society seems to be able to manage. As siblings in Christ, as people bound together as Christ's own body, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13, Advent 2)

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Katherine Finegan