First, on the day after the election last week, I posted on Facebook a message that I now share with this Synod E-News community as well:

And we move on, trusting in the power of the Gospel, with prayers for those who rejoice this day and for those who mourn this day, that both would have the grace of a conciliatory spirit that lifts up the good of the country over individual opinion and partisan agenda. I had already been praying this prayer in my mind for the past several days, regardless of who might win the presidency and congress. I now add President-Elect Donald Trump to my daily prayers, as his leadership will affect so many on a global level.

Second, like most of you I’ve heard endless reflection on the election and how it affects our culture and our church. I’ve seen countless comments by bishops, lay persons, and politicians. The one that resonates thus far the most with me and that I’d like to share with you comes from Pastor Nathan Hilker at Messiah Lutheran Church in Decatur, Georgia. Pastor Hilker served his internship at Grace Lutheran Church in Boone several years ago while I was a pastor there:

Three pastoral thoughts I’ve been mulling over today [November 10]. I offer them to my friends, parishioners, and neighbors:

1) Christians are commanded to pray for our leaders. Even—and especially—if they are enemies of us or our neighbors. Now, there are tepid and disingenuous ways to pray for our leaders. And there are manipulative or unfaithful ways to pray for our leaders (a theologian some friends have studied with once said he’d pray an opponent went to hell; he repented and apologized). Now is the time to pray that God would fulfill his promise to bring down the mighty from their thrones and fill the hungry with good things, and to bring it about through (or despite) our leaders.

2) A Catholic Bishop said of ecumenism that it’s not about converting our partner in dialogue to our theological position, but about becoming more fully converted to Jesus Christ, together, through our dialogue. My sense is that we are living, more than ever, in a time of what Alasdair MacIntyre calls “incommensurable discourses.” We’re not speaking the same language; we’re not living in the same reality. My job as a pastor, our job as Christians, is not to make people more “liberal” or more “conservative” but to help make people more Christian (which looks ridiculously liberal in some respects and deeply conservative in others, and on all fronts more committed to truth and beauty and goodness). But to become more fully Christian will require repentant hearts of all of us. And it will require us to recover—and in some instances forge—a shared moral language.

3) All the summons to action, the calls to fight (whether that means resistance or participation in the new regime) may or may not be worthy calls. But wherever you fight, as a Christian, remember this: you must fight for the good of all. St. Augustine said of war, that Christians fight not just for the innocent; rather, we wage war that we might bring the benefits of a rightly ordered peace to our enemies. Radical stuff, I know, but it seems of a piece with the Lord who prayed “Father, forgive them...” . Fight for the good without growing weary. I may very well join you in your fight, if you’re fighting for the good not just of our friends, but for our enemies, too.

I will leave you with this prayer from the ELW Prayer Book for the Armed Services:

Almighty God, you have given us this good land as our heritage. Make us always remember your generosity and constantly do your will. Bless our land with honesty in the
workplace, truth in education, and honor in daily life. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance; and from every evil course of action. When times are prosperous, let our hearts be thankful; and, in troubled times, do not let our trust in you fail. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Walking with you,

Bishop Timothy Smith

North Carolina Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God’s work. Our hands.