

Like many of the activities denied and delayed by COVID-19, the annual Thanksgiving Diversity Breakfast of the American Jewish Community in Westchester and Fairfield counties went on a three year hiatus. Its return was inspiring! Over 350 people attended from a myriad of religious traditions, community organizations, political backgrounds, and social groups. Jews, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus, and nones (the non-practicing) were all well represented. The goodness of being together and *celebrating the diverse roots and shared values* (the theme of the gathering) of those who participated was a profound contrast to the myopic and xenophobic actions that we have seen by so many recently in public and political life. The breakfast that began as an inclusive and courageous faith response to the horrors of 9/11. We would not be divided by that tragedy. The breakfast this fall became a beacon, yet again, of the better angels of our nature and the true richness and strength of our country.

Among the activities of the morning, an opportunity to commit to the *Community of Conscience Statement* was a major piece. I include it in full in this reflection because it typifies the way that we seek to live out our faith and life at St. Francis. It declares that, while others act in opposition, these commitments are the bedrock *and majority* sentiments of our fellow citizens. In this season of Advent, a time of waiting for things to be made whole and a time for hoping for restoration and reconciliation, the *Community of Conscience Statement* is a light unto our path.

The Statement reads:

*Together, we represent a plurality of faiths, ethnicities, countries of origin, genders, gender identities, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Amid rising incidents of racism, extremism, and antisemitism, we stand united, and adopt these Community of Conscience principles.*

*We invite all who share our concern for the future of this great country, our appreciation of its fundamental strengths, our conviction that it must overcome its challenges, and our resolve to honor the American spirit, to join us in the Community of Conscience.*

*JOIN US, in the spirit of the American motto, E Pluribus Unum, as we unite across difference, celebrate our diversity, contribute to a shared society, and resolve to advance the welfare of all.*

*JOIN US, in the spirit of patriotism, as we strive proudly and boldly to uphold American ideals of equality, of dignity, of opportunity for all.*

*JOIN US, in the spirit of civility, as we reject antisemitism and all forms of bigotry, incendiary partisanship whatever its sources, dehumanizing and demonizing rhetoric, and threats of violence.*

*JOIN US, in the spirit of democracy, as we reaffirm and reinforce our constitutional system, seek equal justice for all, and safeguard our fundamental freedoms.*

*JOIN US, in the spirit of American pluralism, as we promote mutual respect--not mere tolerance--as the standard for enlightened coexistence.*

*JOIN US, in the spirit of inclusiveness, as we reach out to and uplift the poorest among us, as we welcome the stranger in our midst, and as we fully enfranchise the disabled.*

*JOIN US, in the spirit of love, as we counter those who purvey hate, intolerance, and incivility, especially those who legitimize their inappropriate practices based on "holy writ."*

*JOIN US, in seeking to fulfill the biblical teaching that we are all "b'Tzelem Elokim" all created in the divine image, the very foundation of human equality.*

*AND JOIN US, in pursuing the Prophet Isaiah's age-old vision that one day "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore"--that peace, love, and unity will reign. For those who believe, as we do, that our liberty and aspirations depend on the noble principles articulated by President Lincoln and defended by generations of brave Americans since the founding of this Republic, our call could not be more urgent.*