

Get Souls to the Polls

A Message for the Twelfth Week after Pentecost

I write this message as the Democratic National Convention has drawn to a close and the Republican National Convention is about to begin. I watched much of the first and will watch much of the second. This commitment of time, prayer and discerning thought is part of my preparation to exercise a profound responsibility of all American Christians.

As American citizens, it is our privilege and duty to vote. As Christians, it is our privilege and duty to ensure that all citizens may exercise their right to vote. In the words of our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, "It is a Christian obligation to vote, and more than that, it is the church's responsibility to help get souls to the polls."

Why? Jesus taught by word and example that the most important commandment of all is to love our neighbor as ourselves. He taught who our neighbor is in the scandalous story of the Good Samaritan in which a despised and rejected one proved to be a true neighbor to the man who was attacked and left for dead (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus reminds us in one of the last parables of his ministry that whenever we give food to someone who is hungry or visit someone who is in prison or give clothing to someone who is naked or cold, we do it for him (Matthew 25: 31-46). Literally. Because when we see someone in need, as Mother Teresa said, we see "Jesus in distressing disguise."

Because of the example of Jesus and the faith we have in him, we Christians have much to say to our elected officials whose decisions and actions significantly impact the lives of the people of this nation. We care deeply in Jesus' name about healthy food and safe water, education for everyone, care of God's beautiful earth, safety in our neighborhoods, access to health care and so much more. Voting for the candidates who reflect our Christian values gives us a powerful voice in the public square.

A resolution adopted by the 2004 General Convention of The Episcopal Church put it this way: "the Church recognizes that a faithful commitment to voting is an extension of our baptismal covenant to 'strive for justice and peace and respect the dignity of every human being.'" The resolution went on to "ask all Episcopalians to actively engage in advocating for voter rights, encouraging voter registration, getting out the vote, and volunteering to assist voters at the polls."

Of course, churches as nonprofit organizations must follow certain IRS rules when participating in elections. Churches may not campaign, openly or otherwise, for or against candidates for public office. Churches, however,

may and should involve their members in the political process by helping them to understand the issues, registering and encouraging them to vote, inviting candidates to address them and talking about how our faith shapes our votes.

So vote this fall. Examine your faith and choose the candidates whom you conclude best represent the values of the Church and the teachings of our Lord.

What else can you do?

- If you are not registered to vote, register now!
- Encourage friends and neighbors to register and to vote.
- Help those in your community and in other nearby communities to vote.
- On election day, if you feel safe doing so, help others to get to the polls.
- Advocate for the rights of every citizen to vote. In a democracy, voting rights are fundamental. We as Christians recognize those rights as part of what gives dignity to every citizen.
- In this season of global pandemic, be vigilant about safety - your own and that of others. Vote absentee if you don't feel safe going to the polls. Encourage vulnerable people to vote absentee. Offer to witness and/or mail completed ballots. Wear a mask and keep appropriate physical distancing when talking with others about faith and the vote, and while at the polls. Honoring the dignity of others always includes honoring their health and safety.

Vote. Get souls to the polls. Two concrete ways to love our neighbor as ourselves, in Jesus name.

Faithfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Susan" with a small cross above the "S".