

Dear Friends,

Now is the time to start talking with your friends and family about how democracy is one of your values and about what goes into your decisions to vote for candidates who also value democracy. In thinking about why democracy is one of my core values, I ended up looking up “value” in the Oxford English Dictionary. One meaning of value is “a person's principles or standards of behavior; one's judgment of what is important in life.”

Civil Liberties

I value the interconnected existence of humans within nature, so I vote for candidates who are willing to enact or uphold legislation that will promote renewable energy sources and phase out fossil fuels. And when I say “candidates,” I mean elected officials in our legislative, judicial, and executive branches from local elections to national elections. I value bodily autonomy, so I vote for candidates who are willing to enact or uphold legislation that grants abortion care to pregnant individuals. I value a society of people who think critically, so I vote for candidates who are willing to allow age appropriate banned books in school and public libraries. I value being part of a democratic society, so I vote for candidates who are willing to guard my civil liberties.



I had the great honor of four of my nieces and nephews agreeing to walk with me in the Chicago Pride Parade on June 30th. We walked with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) contingent (see photo), which gave me the opportunity to talk with the youth and young adults of my family (ages 14, 16, 18, and 22) at dinner the night before the Parade about the importance of our civil liberties, which for me are the ideals of our democracy:

- Freedom of speech (not to be confused with hate speech, which incites violence against an individual or group of people).
- Freedom of assembly (not to be confused with violently breaking into a public or private building).
- Freedom of religion (not be confused with a coach requiring students to pray in the faith tradition of the coach before a public school event).

I am encouraging you to figure out how you might have conversations about your values with your family and neighbors in a way that does not alienate, does not disparage, does not judge where the other person is, but rather invites them into a thoughtful (however short) conversation of a vision of our country in which everyone will be able to continue participating. I’m not suggesting you spend energy trying to convince your neighbor with a yard sign or a bumper sticker for a definitive candidate that does not reflect your values into all the sudden supporting the same values as you. I’m suggesting you talk with your neighbor who seems indifferent to the political world about the values they want reflected in our country. This moment in time calls those of us who value a participatory democracy to take on the added responsibility of talking with others about the importance of voting.

Presidential Immunity

This month the US Supreme Court issued a deeply troubling ruling in *Trump v. United States*, which gives the US President immunity from prosecution for actions relating to the core powers of the office, and includes at least a presumption of immunity for official acts more broadly. Now is the time to be talking with friends and family about what does it mean to have a President that cannot be held accountable for their actions, whether that is about being complicit in human rights violations or pressuring another governmental official to take illegal actions in connection with an election. Our legislative branch has the authority to pass legislation that will check the unparalleled authority the US Supreme Court has granted to the executive branch. But, we the people must be motivated to get engaged, starting with voting for candidates that will be willing to pass legislation to restore key components of a democratic society.

The civil liberties and the common law upon which our country is built were founded upon the tenant that no person is above the law, including the President, because we do not value an authoritative government, be that a monarchy, oligarchy, or dictatorship. We value democracy in which each citizen has civil liberties and also has the opportunity, and I would say the responsibility, to vote. Figuring out what a candidate supports during an election year can be time intensive, but if we want to continue to live in a society that reflects our values, then voting and advocating are our responsibility.

This summer and fall, I encourage you to get engaged with UtheVote or other initiatives that support engagement with our electoral process; and then after November, we must be prepared to continue to advocate for legislation that will restore some foundational principles of democracy and hold the members of our US Supreme Court to clear ethical standards.

In talking with my nieces and nephews, I did not go into the complicated culture the US has created with capitalism so interwoven with democracy, but it is important to learn about how they are in fact separate systems if we are to find a way forward that houses immigrants, provides health care for veterans, teaches critical thinking, honors bodily autonomy, holds our elected and appointed officials accountable for violating conflicts of interest, and creates accountability for the richest of us with regard to how they made their fortune and how their business endeavors compensate their employees and care for the earth.

Hope and Joy

Those of us with black and brown skin who live in the United States already live within a system that does not consistently honor basic civil liberties. This moment in US history is a moment when many of us with white skin are realizing the seriousness of what perpetuating this inconsistent system means for our society's future. I invite you to learn more about the Civil Rights Movement, the Poor People's Campaign, and also about Black Joy. [The National Museum of African American History and Culture](#) defines Black Joy as "finding the positive nourishment within self and others that is a safe and healing place. It is a way of resting the body, mind, and spirit in response to the traumatic, devastating and life-altering racialized experiences that Black people continue to encounter." It is a form of resistance to civil rights violations and inhumane treatment.

Just as we work to ensure each person's civil liberties are honored, so too we must work to continue to seek hope and find joy. My vacation last week included showing Mickey around Carbondale, IL, which is where I attended law school. One afternoon we stopped by the Gaia House Interfaith Center to walk their labyrinth. For me, the walk to the center of the labyrinth is a time of letting go of whatever I need to in that moment, my time in the center grounds me (see photo), and the walk back out of the labyrinth fills me with positive energy to take with me. I encourage to make time to engage in something that brings you joy.

Go Vote and Tell 5 Friends

The day before I left for vacation, I signed the contract with the Cook County Board of Elections that will make UCE one of the polling places on November 5, 2024. If you would like to be an Election Judge or Polling Place Technician for Cook County on November 5th, you can find [more information here](#). If you email me that you have applied for either of these election day roles, I will submit a request to the Board of Elections that you be assigned to one of the three precincts that will vote at UCE.

There are other ways to get involved the day of the election. A poll watcher is a representative of a civic organization who is legally in the polling place to observe the conduct of the election. If you are interested in being a poll watcher, look at [Election Protection's website](#) for opportunities. I volunteered with them through the [Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights](#) in 2016. If you are interested in being a poll watcher at the Cook County Department of Corrections, you will need additional training and security clearance, which you can learn about [here](#).

Prior to the election, stop by the UUtheVote Program Table any Sunday after the worship service between now and the end of October to find out more about these ways of getting involved in our get-out-the-vote initiative:

- If you want to send postcards to disenfranchised voters to encourage them to vote, contact Greg Grabowski.
- If you want to go to Wisconsin to register voters at the Milwaukee DMVs, contact Carolyn Laughlin.
- If you want to talk with folks on the phone, contact me and I'll get you connected with the national [UUtheVote Weekly Phonebanking](#). If you aren't sure about this opportunity and would like to talk with someone who has experience phone banking, contact Lee or Jane Bannor.

If you don't know how to contact Greg, Carolyn, Lee, or Jane through our Realm membership directory, please email me at sfrances@ucevanston.org and I will connect you with them.

This Is A Lot

I know it is a lot. I also know that I have you and you have me and each other, so we are not alone in having to deal with what is a lot. Reach out to each other, to me, to Rev. Eileen or Rev. Elizabeth so we can celebrate with you when you are joyful and hopeful and we can support you when you are exhausted or despairing. We are experiencing these moments in this grand journey of life together, as a community. And I am grateful to be on this journey with you.

Yours in supporting civil liberties,
Rev. Susan