

Forming a More Perfect Union

A post-election message from Bishop Burkat



November 12, 2016

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America. – U.S. Constitution, Preamble

It's time to dust off our Constitutions and remind each other about the principles and values of our American Democracy.

Understanding that our nation never has been a “perfect” union, how do we -- right here, right now -- go about forming a more perfect union for such a time as this?

This week Americans were able to freely cast our votes for new elected leaders. We are now witnessing once again our cherished tradition of peaceful transition of power unfolding in Washington. This principle alone makes us one of the greatest nations in the world.

As Lutherans, we know that God rules the whole world, and through secular government also provides for the good of all our neighbors. ([For more on this see this post by the Rev. Dr. David Lose.](#))

We offer our prayers for God to guide and protect President-elect Donald Trump as he prepares to lead our government. And we thank God for the leadership of President Barack Obama, as he leaves office.

At the same time, this election and the campaign that preceded it revealed just how divided our nation, our local communities, and even our families are. While many welcome the election results as a necessary change, we have sisters and brothers who genuinely fear what this change will mean for themselves, their communities, and their safety and well-being. Maybe you are one. Such fears are not unfounded.

News reports from around the country and here in the Greater Philadelphia area describe the hateful, racist, and frightening escalation of threats and hate speech targeted at African Americans, Muslims, Mexicans, Jews, immigrants, and the LGBTQ community to name a few of the groups that are now clearly and directly at risk.

Amid such abuse and intimidation, the church of Jesus Christ is called to rise up to protect and defend the vulnerable and endangered among us and simultaneously to also foster healing and reconciliation. In our neighborhoods and in our own congregations there are frightened people seeking assurance of safety from their government and from their church. Our churches must be places of welcome and safety for all. If some of us are also being intimidated or threatened we need to find allies to protect and defend us. We must not be

silent in the face of hate in any of its insidious forms. Speaking out publically while also lending a hand, an ear, or a prayer maybe be harder for some than others. But now is the time to practice what we believe.

As citizens and as Christians, we are called to form a more perfect union through our duly-elected government. We are encouraged, in the Constitution and in our theology, to hold leaders and government accountable to its responsibility to seek the welfare of all – and to speak out boldly, or even protest when they ignore that duty.

Let me be clear: Hateful speech, attempts at intimidation and assault are *never* acceptable. We must reject any such words or behavior. Let us stop it now, so it will not be further normalized as it was during the campaign. I call on all Lutheran leaders to model the courageous and prophetic action needed now. And I call upon our President–elect Donald Trump to repudiate further divisions among the people of America by denouncing despicable speech and declaring zero tolerance for the behavior of some among us spreading hostility and enmity.

We need the President-elect to strongly appeal for civility, calm and justice for all as he moves into his enormous presidential responsibility

Believers of any political persuasion do well to remember our true allegiance is not to a leader or a party, but to the God revealed in Christ who is blessing, healing and reconciling the whole world. We are partners in His Holy work.

So what does forming a more perfect union look like?

At our Bishop's Convocation last month, "*Building Bridges - Interfaith Relationships in a Pluralistic World*", we invited as our guests and speakers Imam Anwar Muhamin and Rabbi David Straus, who are co-conveners with me at the Religious Leaders Council of Greater Philadelphia. I told our Lutheran leaders then, that the time would be coming when our Muslim and Jewish neighbors, and those of other faiths, would count on us to stand with and protect them. *That time is here.*

The day after the election I called both Imam Muhamim and Rabbi Straus, to assure them of my support and commitment to work with them to fight against intolerance and discrimination. We are starting to work together to find ways for our congregations and leaders to be allies. Stay tuned.

Here are three things you can do now:

- Now is the time for church leaders to call and visit with your interfaith colleagues. Start crossing bridges while trust can still be built. Put your presence where your heart and faith is.
- If you are committed to being an ally to those who are endangered, consider the simple act of wearing a visible safety pin. The symbol of a safety pin reminds us and others that something important is torn, and must be temporarily; pinned together before repairing and mending can begin. Wearing a safety pin is growing as a witness to the general public, and to anyone seeking refuge, that you are an ally, that you are a safe person, and will provide a secure space, or help if needed. It is an outward signal of an inward conviction.
- Of course, it is paramount that we pray *and* work *and* advocate, and yes even

protest, using our right for peaceful assembly to secure respect and dignity for all in order to insure domestic tranquility for our beloved country. God has placed each one of us in such a time as this to be part of the solution to redesign our country to be forming a more perfect union together.

The president and the president-elect met Thursday to find a way forward. They urged Americans to come together for the sake of the republic, and for the good of Mr. Trump's presidency.

"We are all now rooting for his success," said President Obama. "The peaceful transfer of power is one of the hallmarks of our democracy. And over the next few months, we are going to show that to the world."

How will we speak and act to create a more perfect union?

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

Please consider sharing this prayer during your worship services:

God of all people everywhere, we pray for our nation at this time of significant division and distrust. We ask for the courage and stamina to be instruments of your healing and reconciliation at a time when our country is deeply wounded. We trust that you will give us the will, the words and the actions to be witnesses of love, hope, justice and mercy for one another during times of fear, persecution and distress. Give our newly-elected leaders that wisdom as well as humility to direct our government in ways that protect and seek the well-being of all inhabitants of this land. If it is we who are frightened or outraged, help us to find allies to provide safety and encouragement. Empower us to stand up for any who are threatened, oppressed or marginalized.

We ask this in the Holy name of the one who endured persecution and insults, and even death on a cross, in order to extend the mercy of God to heal, bless and reconcile the world.

In Christ,

+ Claire S. Burkat

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