

A Pastoral Letter in an Election Season, 2024

Grace and Peace in these autumn days.

You may recall that I offered a letter similar to this one in the fall of 2020. It seems appropriate once again to reflect on my pastoral approach to politics and elections, **and** our life together as a Christian community in an election season.

I do not intentionally or in my official pastoral office offer any partisan endorsement. This is my longstanding policy. I respect the tradition of religious groups remaining non-partisan, and I respect that people of good conscience can come to different conclusions about which candidates they vote for.

However, church is a place where we can share our concerns about our world. This election season makes many of us anxious and worried. Let me be specific: people are concerned about voting rights and ballot counting, reproductive rights, the US role in wars abroad, racism and xenophobia. These are deep and personally felt concerns. We need compassionate and brave spaces to share our concerns and I believe church needs to be that kind of space. It is beautiful that we can lift our individual and communal prayers up on Sunday morning, be held in community, and renew our own commitments to God's creation and our neighbors.

Some have said to me, let us be careful not to assume we are all of the same opinion on the election. That is a worthwhile reminder, and I'll repeat my belief that people of good conscience can reach different conclusions in the ballot booth. We do not have to agree on how our votes will be cast in order to enter into a deep spiritual practice of empathy and compassion. I urge you: if you are wondering why someone is feeling anxious, take a moment to truly listen to what is making them fearful. Listening to one another with love and care will help us maintain community beyond election day.

Speaking of community beyond election day, I am setting aside time for reflection and prayer during the week of the November election, so watch for opportunities to gather in a group for prayer, deep compassion, and listening. I'm also available for 1-1 conversation. And if you are uneasy in

this season and seeking daily prayer resources, you may appreciate this one from [Mission Hills UCC](#).

I'm also deeply aware that as a pastor, I have a call to be both pastoral and prophetic. This includes drawing connections between our faith and the way we live in the world. Our faith *is* sometimes political - meaning that our faith is relevant to the ways we seek the common good. In the words of Peter Bollard, "what are politics but the enactment of our values?" Jesus himself had more than a few words to say about the Roman government, and his teachings offer timeless guidance.* As followers of Jesus, I believe that our engagement in the world should be informed by our faith and our sense of God's yearnings for our world.

And so, there are matters of common good that I feel require me to speak. I speak against racism, antisemitism and xenophobia. I speak against violence and against the political incitement of violence. I speak in support of the immigrant community and in support of my LGBTQIA+ siblings. My Christian faith also calls me to work against voter suppression, to ensure voting rights, and to encourage you to vote according to your conscience. Following the wisdom of our Congregational polity, I speak to the church, not for the church, and I do not claim to speak on Pilgrim Church's behalf unless it's on a matter about which the congregation has clearly discerned and spoken, such as being an ONA church and a church committed to caring for creation.

Being committed to these things means, for me, that I aspire not to neutrality but to actively working for the common good. I aspire to restore creation, not just avoid more damage. I aspire to be invitational to people of many gender identities, not just accepting. I aspire to neighborliness toward siblings in other religious traditions, not just tolerance. I aspire to be anti-racist and to work against white supremacy, not to be quiet on the topic of racism. And I believe that the Pilgrim community shares these aspirations, in every season.

Blessings and peace,

Pastor Reebee

*Recommended: Richard Horsley's *Jesus and Empire* (2002) or Obery Hendricks' *The Politics of Jesus* (2006).