



An Interfaith Call to Civility and Civic Participation

Elections are among the most significant public events in the United States of America. Most importantly, they allow eligible citizens to exercise the most basic element of democracy: the right and responsibility to vote.

At their best, elections provide us with an opportunity to have meaningful discussions about key issues and make informed decisions about who we want to serve in public office. Unfortunately, elections can also be incredibly damaging, as dirty campaigning and scare tactics generate feelings of animosity, bitterness, and fear that linger long after the votes have been tallied. Evidence of the best and the worst is already present in this 2010 midterm election.

In these circumstances, it is easy to do one of two things: either we set our ethical values aside and join in the win-at-all costs competition, or we reject the whole business and participate minimally if at all. This decision is made by individuals, of course, but it is also made by congregations: some choose to get involved without much regard to ethical or legal guidelines, and some—perhaps most—opt out of the process altogether.

We, the undersigned leaders from the Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Unitarian Universalist religious communities, offer another option: **respectful and responsible engagement**. Our traditions share a common belief that persons of faith, as well as faith organizations, can and should be constructively involved in civic life. The religious freedom that has allowed the United States to become the most religiously diverse nation on earth is inseparable from the political freedom which guarantees our rights of individual conscience and expression. Democracy is a gift to be celebrated—and used well.

Our diverse faiths share a common belief that it matters how we treat one another. In all of our activities, however public or private, our Scriptures, Prophets, and convictions call us to act according to our highest moral values. To this end, our organizations have joined *Faithful Democracy*, a national interfaith coalition dedicated to promoting appropriate civic participation by people of faith and religious organizations. Among other things, *Faithful Democracy* provides clear guidance to religious organizations about which electoral activities are appropriate, and offers helpful resources and opportunities for coordinated action.

We invite you to join us!

First, we hope you will make a commitment to **practice civility**. Challenge yourself to be civil, no matter how hostile or offensive others may be. Kindly challenge those who insult or demonize, reminding them that we can disagree without tearing each other down. Your unflappable commitment to respecting others provides a powerful incentive for others to respect you.

www.faithfuldemocracy.org

Disciples Justice Action Network • The Episcopal Church USA • Friends Committee on National Legislation • The Interfaith Alliance • Islamic Society of North American • Jewish Council for Public Affairs • National Council of Church of Christ • Presbyterian Church USA • Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
• United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries • United Methodist General Board of Church and Society

Second, we hope you will **encourage civic participation** in your congregation and community. Start with making personal commitment to voting. Then join with others to make sure that as many people as possible in your congregation and community register and vote.

The *Faithful Democracy* website, www.faithfuldemocracy.org, has tips on practicing civility and how to conduct a voter registration drive. Many states have a registration deadline that falls 25-30 days before the election, so we have named September 24-26 as a Voter Registration and Education Weekend. Visit the website for flyers, sample announcements, and more.

In addition to the general importance of encouraging civic participation, we believe that it is a particularly important time for people of different faith traditions to be working together on shared goals. In a world where religious tensions are often high, we can be a visible example of unity and diversity. Our collaboration is a tangible reminder that religious pluralism is one of the United States defining features—and greatest strengths. May it remind us that we are all part of one human family.

In Faith,

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