

Beloved of Christ,

As our nation draws closer to election day, I find that I am often filled with a heavy mix of dread and anxiety. As all “sides” ramp up the rhetoric, lines are drawn, and the 8th commandment¹ is regularly ignored, I find myself wondering what the response of faithful followers of Jesus should be. Of course, I remember that Jesus told us to bring everything to God in prayer and I remember the goodness of all of you, longing, like me, to be faithful in this unsettling time. I know I am not alone in wanting to stay centered in Christ and be useful in the days to come!

I invite you to spend the forty days leading up to the election praying for our nation as we prepare to vote. Along with making it a priority to cast our votes, our prayerful engagement on behalf of our country is another way to become involved, a powerful way to participate with God in creating a nation that is both just and compassionate for all people.

Along with this letter is a collection of prayer prompts for each day of the week, to be repeated each week until the election. Repetition allows us to sink more deeply into the prayer, so each week you may find new or refined insights in the readings. They are simply a starting point. Feel free to build on them as the Spirit moves you.

Sometimes it’s helpful to accompany prayer with a tangible reminder that the Spirit is praying with you and through you. That reminder might be lighting a candle, or settling in a special room where you can have a few uninterrupted minutes or it might be carrying a “worry” stone with you for the next 40 days so that as you go about your day you are reminded that God is present with you and attentive to the prayers you are offering.

Our forty days of prayer begin on Thursday, September 24th and continue until the day before the election, November 2nd. On Election Day, light your candle in the morning and keep it burning throughout the day. (Of course, don’t leave it unattended.) Let the flame from your candle call you back into prayer as Election Day unfolds.

Here are a few more suggestions to help you get started. Dedicate a small space in your home for your candle and prayer prompts. You might also add items that ground you in God—something beautiful and/or living, your Bible or hymnal, devotional materials, a simple cross or an image that speaks to you of God’s love. You may also want to set out a pen and a tablet or journal to capture prayers and insights.

When you sit down to pray, take a few minutes to breath with intention. Feel your feet on the floor and your posterior in your chair. Set aside any preoccupations, mindful that they’ll be waiting for you after you pray (if you’d like to pick them back up again!). Sing a verse of a hymn, if you like or listen to a bit of music, if you prefer. Find within yourself that quiet center, that place where God resides. Move through your time of prayer as the Spirit moves you. Close with a brief prayer of thanks for God’s faithfulness and abiding present. Make the sign of the cross as a commitment to walking with Jesus.

St. Francis’ prayer can guide us. It begins with the line “Lord, make me an instrument of your

peace.”² We live into Brother Francis’ prayer as we vote, for surely exercising this right is how we help fashion a nation grounded in compassion and justice, which are the building blocks of peace. As we pray, we also become instruments of God’s peace as we shift from being observers of current events to active participants in the ongoing work of God.

Sunday, Sept. 20th we’ll be asking the Spirit to bless us as we make ourselves useful in this world that God so deeply loves.

Blessings,
Pastor Val

¹8th Commandment: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Luther’s explanation of the 8th commandment: “We should fear and love God, so that we do not lie about, betray or slander our neighbor, but excuse him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.

²Lord, make me an instrument of your peace
Where there is hatred, let me sow love
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith
Where there is despair, hope
Where there is darkness, light
And where there is sadness, joy

O Divine Master, grant that I may
Not so much seek to be consoled as to
console
To be understood, as to understand
To be loved, as to love
For it is in giving that we receive
And it's in pardoning that we are pardoned
And it's in dying that we are born to Eternal
Life
Amen