Call for a Season of Civility in Wisconsin
From our State’s Religious Leaders

We, the undersigned leaders in Wisconsin’s faith communities, know that democracy thrives on open and vigorous debate about public policies. However, as Wisconsin struggles through another year of divisive campaigning and elections, we are concerned that hostile political rhetoric is overstepping the bounds of civility and even decency in our congregations and society at large.

By nature, religious congregations include people from all walks of life who hold differing views on political and social issues. The teachings of our religious traditions compel us to be concerned about the common good and the well-being of our neighbors. But we do not all agree on the means to achieve these ends.

Virtually every religious tradition includes some version of “the Golden Rule” – to treat others as we would like to be treated. Likewise, the idea of democracy is based on regard for the value of each and every individual.

Yet, as a result of the extreme political polarization in Wisconsin, many in our congregations and communities feel marginalized or demonized by their neighbors on account of their economic status, occupation or political beliefs. Politics in a democracy is not a zero-sum game or a winner-take-all contest. Rather, it is a joint effort to reach a workable consensus on how to advance the common good. But our ability to cooperate to solve common problems and achieve shared goals is now undermined by rampant disrespect, disinformation, distrust, and disregard for the interests and ideas of others.

Because we believe that this situation is unacceptable in our public life, we commit ourselves to a Season of Civility:

- We will seek to model and support respectful and honest conversations on public issues within our congregations, assemblies, and other forums.
- We will make a genuine effort to understand the reasons for the views of those with whom we disagree and try to explain the grounds for our own positions clearly and without arrogance. Our goal will be to identify shared values and concerns, rather than to “win” arguments.
- We will be mindful of our own fallibility and keep our views open to correction and reconsideration without betraying our deepest convictions.

We encourage all of our fellow citizens, to likewise commit themselves to a Season of Civility:

- Our congregations should be places where civility is taught and practiced as together we seek to learn what our faith calls us to do and be in the world.
- Candidates should strive to adhere to high standards of civility, integrity and truthfulness and insist that the advertisements produced by their own campaigns, and those of third parties, do the same.
- In their campaign reporting and commentary, media should subject all claims and counterclaims to rigorous but fair scrutiny, checking facts, critiquing logic, evaluating sources, and providing context.
- As citizens we should all be critical consumers of media and advertising, questioning claims and resisting attempts to manipulate our emotions.

We offer this statement in the confidence that, if we embrace our faith traditions’ highest values of compassion and mutual respect, we will find ways to work with our differences and cooperate to fashion a healthier, livelier and more enduring democracy.
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La Crosse Area Synod,  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Greater Milwaukee Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Presiding Elder, Milwaukee District,  
African Methodist Episcopal Church

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Director of Education  
Interfaith Relations, and Community Outreach  
The Hindu Temple of Wisconsin, Pewaukee

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South Central Synod of Wisconsin,  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
in Illinois and Wisconsin

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Interfaith Representative  
Southeast Wisconsin  
Unitarian Universalist Congregations

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Sikh Religious Society of Wisconsin

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Lutheran Office for Public Policy-Wisconsin

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Jewish Community Relations Council of Milwaukee

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Milwaukee Zen Center

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Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of Milwaukee

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Wisconsin Classis Leader  
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Diocese of Fond du Lac

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First Congregational United Church of Christ
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Fairchild, WI

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Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice of
South Central Wisconsin

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United Church of Christ  
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United Church of Christ
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Evangelical Church in America
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Brooklyn, WI

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Kiel, WI

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Northwest Synod of WI, Evangelical Church in America
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Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee

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Spiritual Guidance and Consulting
Madison, WI

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Director for Evangelical Mission/Assistant to the Bishop
South-Central Synod of Wisconsin ELCA
Madison, WI

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Faith United Methodist Church
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Church of the Resurrection
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Episcopal Diocese of Eau Claire

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Edgar, WI

Petra Streiff, Lay Pastor
Davies Memorial UCC
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The Archdiocese of Milwaukee, RC
Milwaukee, WI

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First Congregational United Church of Christ
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St. Paul’s Episcopal Church
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First English Lutheran Church
Appleton, WI

The Rev. Marcia Thomas, Pastor
Presbyterian Church of Abbotsford
Abbotsford, WI

The Rev. Jim Trainor, Retired
Episcopal Diocese of Fond du Lac
Waupaca, WI

The Rev. Mary S. Trainor, Vicar
St. John’s Episcopal Church
Shawano, WI

The Rev. Debra Trakel, Rector
St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church
River Hills, WI

The Rev. Dr. Frederick R. Trost
United Church of Christ
Elkhart Lake, WI

The Rev. Robert Ullman, Pastor
Redeemer United Church of Christ
Sussex, WI

The Rev. Dr. Kent J. Ulery
Interim Associate Conference Minister
Wisconsin Conference United Church of Christ

The Rev. William G. Utke, Pastor
Emanuel United Church of Christ
Hales Corners, WI

The Rev. Nicholas G. Utphall, Pastor
St Stephen’s Evangelical Church
Monona, WI

The Rev. Brad Van Fossen, Pastor
First United Methodist Church
Racine, WI

The Rev. Matthew J. van Maastricht, Pastor
Iglesia Trinidad
Milwaukee, WI

The Rev. Wanda Veldman, Pastor
Veedum Moravian Church
Pittsville United Church of Christ
Pittsville, WI

Ms Jess Wakefield, CRE
Covenant Community Presbyterian Church
Schofield, WI
The Rev. Scott Walters, Pastor  
Peace United Methodist Church  
Brookfield, WI

The Rev. Dr. Julia Weaver, Chaplain  
Madison Area Lutheran Council  
Madison, WI

The Rev. David Whelan, Pastor  
Peace Lutheran Church  
Menomonie, WI

The Rev. Wesley White, Retired  
United Methodist Church  
Onalaska, WI

Linda J. Whitelock, Lay Speaker  
Cargill United Methodist Church  
Janesville, WI

The Rev. Carol Wickersham  
Presbyterian Church, U.S.A  
Clinton, WI

The Rev. Heather T. Wigdahl, Pastor  
Trinity Lutheran Church  
Eau Claire WI

The Rev. Tom Willadsen, Pastor  
First Presbyterian Church  
Oshkosh, WI

The Rev. Arthur H. Wille  
Associate Conference Minister  
Wisconsin Conference United Church of Christ

The Rev. Darryl R. Williams, Pastor  
St Mark African Methodist Episcopal Church  
Milwaukee WI

The Rev. Denita R. Williams, Pastor  
S. S. Morris Community, African Methodist Episcopal Church  
Madison, WI

The Rev. Jim Wilson, Retired  
United Methodist Church  
Washington Island, WI

The Rev. Brenda Wingfield,  
Christian Education & Outreach Facilitator  
Bashford United Methodist Church  
Madison, WI

The Rev. Kathleen Wohlers, Pastor  
St Paul's Lutheran Church  
Wilton, WI

The Rev. Annette K. Wolf, Pastor  
Emmanual United Church of Christ  
Oshkosh, WI

The Rev. Dr. Janet E. Wolfe, Retired  
Presbytery of Winnebago  
Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.

Rev. Craig Wolfgram, Pastor  
Bethany Lutheran Church – ELCA  
Wisconsin Dells, WI

The Rev. Georgette Wonders, Minister  
Bradford Community Church Unitarian Universalist  
Kenosha, WI

The Rev. Mark E. Yurs, Pastor  
Salem United Church of Christ  
Verona, WI

The Rev. Steve Zekoff, Benefits Officer  
Wisconsin Conference United Methodist Church

Fr. Tom Zelinski, OFM Cap.  
St. Anthony Spirituality Center  
Marathon, WI

The Rev. Susan Gilbert Zencka, Pastor  
Frame Memorial Presbyterian Church  
Stevens Point, WI

The Rev. Patrick Ziem, Pastor  
Zion Lutheran Church  
Superior, WI

The Rev. Andrew D. Zoerb, Pastor  
Our Savior's Lutheran Church  
Denmark, WI

The Rev. Nancy Zorn Micke, Pastor  
Ely Memorial Church, United Church of Christ, Land O Lakes, WI  
 Phelps Congregational United Church of Christ, Phelps, WI