

## **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.

## Season of Civility Statement Signatories

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