

WORD FROM OUR CLERGY



I started to write this reflection the day after the presidential election whose result many found surprising, if not shocking. As we anticipate Donald Trump becoming our country's next president, I ask you to return to the message I delivered on Yom Kippur when I honored the memory and the work of Elie Wiesel, who taught us profound lessons about the sin of indifference.

This campaign season revealed deep and bitter differences between Americans. We have witnessed unsettling examples of hatefulness being given free rein in our country and even in our state. Things were said and done that will require our heartfelt work of compassionate listening and repair.

One of the first tasks I felt called to very early on November 9, when the outcome of the election became clear, was to reach out to several Muslims leaders in our community with whom I have developed relationships. I felt obligated to express my concern for them and to reaffirm my commitment to the important relationships we have been nurturing between our communities. I wrote:

I wanted to reach out to you on this very troubling night. I can only imagine the pain and concern that you and your community are feeling with this election result. There is good reason to worry about the hate and racism that was tapped into in order to arrive at this result.

Please know that I treasure the bonds we have been trying to forge for our Northwest suburban communities this past year, building on the efforts our congregation started a number of years ago with the Islamic Center of MN. We will need to stand together to do the work that is necessary going forward to guarantee that this country lives up to the promise of decency and equality for which it must stand. I look forward to being your partner in that sacred work. Let's talk soon about next steps.

I awoke later that morning to the following response expressing deep appreciation for my having reached out so early. Sadia, a female leader from the Northwest Islamic Community, wrote:

More than the new presidency, I'm more afraid of the racism and hate that was brought to the surface and emboldened continually. I've lived in Plymouth for decades but just in the past few weeks the things that we have experienced shake me to the core. Someone screaming at me at Cub Foods to leave the country and a couple days ago an older gentleman spit at my friend in the parking lot of Fresh Thyme while screaming slurs at her for wearing a hijab. Still trying to wrap my head around how things changed so fast or was I naive to think it didn't exist here?

It was clear from this heartfelt response that I received from Sadia and others, that our Muslim neighbors harbor deep fears about what this election means for their community and for our country. They are not alone in that feeling. The unrestrained expressions of bigotry that have been unleashed are an affront to Jewish and American principles. They call to mind the now famous message that George Washington, first President of our country, wrote in 1790 to the members of the synagogue community in Newport, RI who were concerned about whether the new national government would finally allow them full political equality. Washington assured them, "For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection, should demean themselves as good citizens."

It is our obligation to make sure that President Washington's promise continues to be fulfilled. This will require that we all strive to understand the pain and fear that the citizens of this country are feeling and the deep divides that exist. It will also require that we be willing to honestly confront continuing racism that exists in our country. Towards this latter end, I invite you to join the JCA Summit that will be hosted by Adath on Sunday, December 4.

We must also work to ensure that no one is subjected to the kind of harassment and bigotry being directed against our Muslim neighbors. I am committed this year to building the relationships we have been developing as Northwest Suburban Congregations. In that spirit, I invite you to join us December 17 at 6:30 PM for An Evening of Interfaith Prayers for Peace and Unity at St Edwards the Confessor Episcopal Church in Wayzata. Your presence will be an affirmation of our commitment to this cause.

None of us can ignore Elie Wiesel's challenge and the Torah's caution against "standing idly by." I asked at Yom Kippur that each of us actively respond to Elie Wiesel's clarion call to "Do something, anything, start somewhere, anywhere." I hope that individually and together we will advance this most important and sacred work.

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