



**From Mudslinging To Mutual Respect:  
The Faithful Call For Civility In Politics**

*Resources for Clergy, Churches & Small Groups*

**Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.**

*Ephesians 4:29*



*Seeking common ground, working for the common good*

July 15, 2016

Dear Friends,

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Scorched-earth rhetorical tactics. Personal attacks. Recklessly false and misleading statements. Vulgarly. These are the characteristics of uncivil discourse and, sadly, they have become the hallmarks of our current political climate. Four out of five Americans think such incivility is a serious problem according to a recent poll by the Public Religion Research Institute and Religion News Service. The Maine Council of Churches agrees.

For nearly 80 years, we have been a voice for people of faith and goodwill, consistently speaking out to advocate for civility, respect, justice, compassion and peace.

Like you, we believe the obligation to show *respect* for others is rooted in the theological truth that all are created in the image of God and we take seriously the scriptural mandate to be “quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19). That’s why we have redoubled our efforts this election year to promote civil discourse.

As a part of these efforts, we are offering this resource packet to clergy, local congregations, and small groups across the state in the hope that you can work with us—through your worship services, sermons, adult education study groups, church school classrooms, youth group meetings, and personal reflection—to help stop the mudslinging so that mutual respect and civility can prevail even when—especially when—disagreements are significant.

We encourage churches to use these resources September 11 through October 16 as a way of promoting participation in our **civil discourse symposium with Senator George Mitchell on October 20, 7:30am, at the Best Western hotel in Waterville. We hope that you and members of your congregation will attend.** The event, which includes a continental breakfast, is free and open to the public, but advance registration is strongly recommended since seating is limited. Just go to our website ([mainecouncilofchurches.org](http://mainecouncilofchurches.org)) and click on the photo of Senator Mitchell to submit your online RSVP.

Thank you for joining with us in our mission to promote civil discourse. Please let us know the ways you used this resource packet—we’d love to hear from you! And we look forward to seeing you on October 20 in Waterville.

Faithfully,

Bonny Rodden  
President

Jane Field  
Executive Director

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## CIVIL DISCOURSE AND THE BIBLE: Relevant Scripture Passages

### **Genesis 1:26**

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness."

### **Leviticus 19:18**

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (also: Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31 and James 2:8)

### **Ecclesiastes 9:17**

The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools.

### **Micah 6:8**

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God?

### **Matthew 5:43-44**

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (also: Luke 6:27)

### **Matthew 7:12**

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (also: Luke 6:31)

### **Mark 3:24-25**

If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.

### **Luke 6:37; 41-42**

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven... Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

### **John 15:12**

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

### **Romans 14:19**

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

### **Ephesians 4:1-2**

Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.

### **Ephesians 4:29**

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

## Relevant Scripture Passages, cont'd.

### **1 Thessalonians 5:11**

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up.

### **2 Thessalonians 3:15**

Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

### **James 1:19**

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

### **James 3**

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

### **1 Peter 3:8-11**

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. For those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it.

### **1 John 4:18**

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.

## LECTIONARY GUIDE FOR RELEVANT SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Using the guide below, preachers and worship leaders can access materials and resources related to the scripture passages. (Not all texts from the previous section appear in the three-year lectionary cycle, but all those that do are listed below.) The excellent online lectionary resource “textweek.com” includes a scripture index and a Sunday by Sunday index, both of which can be used to access online commentaries, sermons, prayers, liturgies and more for each passage.

**Genesis 1:26** - Easter Vigil ABC, Trinity A (also Baptism B in RCL, Lutheran and Methodist)

**Leviticus 19:18** - Epiphany 7A (also Proper 25/Ordinary 30A in RCL and Lutheran; also Easter 5C in Episcopal)

**Micah 6:8** – Epiphany 4A (for all but Roman)

**Matthew 5:43-44** – Epiphany 7A

**Mark 3:24-25** – Proper 5B/Ordinary 10B

**Luke 6:37; 41-42** – Epiphany 8C

**John 15:12** – Easter 6B

**Ephesians 4:1-2** – Proper 13/Ordinary 18B in RCL, Lutheran and Methodist; Proper 12/Ordinary 17B in Roman and Episcopal

**Ephesians 4:29** – Proper 14/Ordinary 19B

**1 Thessalonians 5:11** – Proper 28/Ordinary 33A

**James 1:19** – Proper 17/Ordinary 22B (Proper 18/Ordinary 23B and Thanksgiving ABC in Episcopal)

**James 3** – Proper 19/Ordinary 24B and Proper 20/Ordinary 25B

**1 Peter 3:8-11** – Easter 6A and Lent 1B

**1 John 4:18** – Easter 5B in RCL, Lutheran and Methodist; Easter 6B and 7B in Roman; Easter 6B in Episcopal

## PRAYERS

1. Lord, make me an instrument of thy 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;  
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;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life.

*(Anonymous, first printed in "La Clochette," 1912, by La Ligue de la Sainte-Messe)*

2. Opening Prayer – Maine House of Representatives – January 6, 2016:

Gracious God, guide and bless these women and men, sent here by the people of Maine to govern this great state. We give thanks for their dedication and commitment to public service, and for the sacrifices they make on our behalf. Grant them the wisdom, courage and patience to carry out this calling with compassion, conviction, integrity and civility. Protect us all from the sins of despair and cynicism, and remind us that politics is a noble calling to serve the common good.

Loving God, source of all truth and wisdom, watch over our state and those who govern here, that truth may prevail over distortion and wisdom triumph over recklessness. In the midst of a world rent asunder by divisions, conflicts, polarization and seemingly irreconcilable differences, help these legislators and help us, their constituents, to find a better way along a higher road, where we have the humility to remember that we have much to learn from people who see things differently than we do.

Lord, watch over these, our elected representatives. Help them...and help us...to remember that it is better to invite than to ignore, more effective to talk together than to yell at each other from a distance, more productive to open a door than to shut one.

God of justice and compassion, God of Republicans, and Democrats, and Independents, God of the poor, and the 1%, and the middle class, Help us to break down the walls that divide us. Heal those here who have been hurt by adversarial rhetoric or uncivil conversation, who have heard others belittle their deepest beliefs. Forgive those here who have hurt others by using adversarial rhetoric and uncivil remarks, who have belittled the beliefs of others. Gracious God, heal what needs healing and forgive what needs to be forgiven, so we can start anew on the path to civility.

As these representatives begin a new legislative session, may we recall the words President Abraham Lincoln spoke to a nation deeply divided, threatened by schism, and seemingly unable to maintain unity: "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have

*Prepared by the Maine Council of Churches*

strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory will swell again when touched by the better angels of our nature.”

It has been 155 years since those words were first spoken. But in this hour, O God, we ask that you might help us seek and find the better angels of our nature, angels who remind us we are not enemies, angels who call us to practice civility even when disagreements are most heated and differences most stark—because the work that must be carried out in these hallowed halls is too important to do otherwise. With humility and gratitude we pray, Amen.

*(Rev. Jane Field, Executive Director, Maine Council of Churches)*

### 3. Invocation, Maine Democratic Convention, June 4, 2016:

Gracious God, guide the work of those assembled here tonight as they bring the institutions of our democracy to life. Grant them wisdom. Grant them courage. Grant them a moral imagination that creates a capacity for civility and the grace to disagree without disrespect as they work vigorously for the well-being of our country, the land that we love.

Even as we ask for these gifts from you, Lord, we pause to acknowledge our human tendencies toward fear, hatred, blame and division... and we ask for your forgiveness. Help us to challenge those who incite fear and hatred. Transform us into people who are informed, respectful, and known for our principles and ideals, so that our children can be proud of the way we speak and lead and govern this great nation.

Bless the candidates of this party, O God, and bless the candidates of our opponents’ party, that all who seek to lead our government will have an unwavering commitment to care for the weak and vulnerable, those who are sick, hungry or homeless; to advocate for the poor and the powerless, those who are imprisoned, those who are neglected or forgotten; We pray that the candidates—and that we—will have a wideness of heart to care for all victims of racism-and-discrimination, to welcome immigrants, to speak for the voiceless. Grant all of us the moral stamina of spirit and integrity of purpose to prevail over cynicism and selfishness, so that, with courage and compassion, we can affirm and uphold the common good, and love our neighbors as we love our selves.

If any among us here tonight have come to this convention world-weary or beset by doubts and fears about the future, nourish within them the hope they need to believe that our work does matter in the struggle to realize our society’s highest ideals, as together we seek justice, love mercy and walk with humility.

God of gentleness and justice, as we enter into this election process, we pray in the spirit of St. Francis, that you would make us instruments of your peace, sowing seeds of merciful love and fierce hope. May we be servants of your holy, creative will, always and ever mindful that you bless *us*, in order that we might be a blessing to the world. May it be so. Let all the people say “Amen.”

*(Rev. Jane Field, Executive Director, Maine Council of Churches)*

#### 4. Prayer of Intercession: Make Us One Again

O Eternal One, whose message to us has always been that our relationship to you is inextricably related to how we treat our sisters and brothers, bend low your spirit this day and touch us with your power.

- Wean us from our tendency to nurture perceived slights and to put hot coals to our anger.
- Wean us from all tendencies to take advantage of others for personal gain.
- Wean us from negativity and from becoming bitter whether or not we think we are justified in our feelings.
- Wean us from the all too human and common tendency to gossip about others and to slander them in any way.
- Wean us from carrying malice in our hearts and from giving in to anything that would poison relationships with others.

#### **Make us over again, O gracious God.**

Give us a consistent kindness and compassion for others. Keep us always tender hearted even when the world delivers difficult blows and setbacks to us. Teach us once again about your redeeming grace in order that we may learn, however slowly and however tentatively, how to forgive others. Teach us how to live abundantly into the future as victorious and expectant people, greeting each new day with eagerness and excitement. And indelibly remind us that we are among your forgiven and beloved community.

We present to you all who have special need of your grace today. Keep them in your gracious care and insofar as we are able use us to make their burdens lighter. Be with those who war and who are victims of war and grant to us a peaceful world. Amen

*(Richard J. Einerson)*

#### 5. Prayer of Intercession

Eternal God, in these moments of quiet we thank you for your presence in our lives. We thank you for all of the testimonies of your profound love for your children. We especially thank you this day for the holy one Jesus. We thank you for his humility. We thank you that rather than elevating himself above us he instead would lift us up and as with his disciples call us “friends.” We thank you for his many reminders that we are to love one another. But we confess that we have great difficulty following his command to love.

We become upset with others and find it easier to reject them than to seek to understand and to love them. We struggle with the almost impossible command to love our enemies. We become driven to meet our own needs and become blind to the needs of others. We are driven to succeed which becomes all consuming and trumps our command to love.

Forgive us our foolish ways. Help us to keep in our awareness this command to love which Jesus repeated so many times. Help us especially to hear it in those hard times when it is most difficult to love. Help us to love others when they are power hungry. Help us to love others when they are inconsiderate. Help us to love others when they are angry and lash out blindly. Help us to love others when they are selfish and insensitive. Help us, O God, to love others so that we may abide in your love and act like the friends of Jesus. Amen.

*(Richard J. Einerson)*

## SERMONS

- U.S. Senator, Ambassador to the United Nations, and Episcopal priest John Danforth preached a sermon at the funeral of Tom Schweich, a gubernatorial candidate in Missouri who took his own life after he was subjected to an attack campaign by his opponents. The second half of Senator Danforth's sermon is an appeal to the nation to put an end to political bullying. "Words do hurt. Words can kill," he told the congregation. For the full text of his sermon, go to: [http://www.stltoday.com/news/opinion/danforth-s-eulogy-for-tom-schweich-words-do-hurt-words/article\\_cf861616-67b6-5fa6-ae29-97ca3a243ec9.html](http://www.stltoday.com/news/opinion/danforth-s-eulogy-for-tom-schweich-words-do-hurt-words/article_cf861616-67b6-5fa6-ae29-97ca3a243ec9.html). To watch a video of Senator Danforth delivering this sermon, go to: <http://fox2now.com/2015/03/03/danforth-cites-political-bullying-in-schweich-eulogy/>
- The Wisconsin Council of Churches offers a collection of "Sermons On Civility" that can be downloaded from this website page: <http://www.wichurches.org/programs-and-ministries/season-of-civility/sermons-on-civility/>
- Using the lectionary guide in this resource packet (page 7), go to [www.textweek.com](http://www.textweek.com). Navigate to the page for the relevant scripture passage (using either their scripture index or their liturgical year index) and scroll down to the "Sermons" section where you will find a collection of sample sermons related to that text.

### SUGGESTED HYMNS

These familiar hymns have lyrics related to the theme of civility. They appear in many widely used hymnals, some of which are listed here. Be sure to check your own church's hymnal even if it does not appear, since this is not an exhaustive list.

“Help Us Accept Each Other”

Chalice #487, New Century #388, PCUSA #358, Worship (RC) #656

“Let There Be Peace On Earth”

Chalice #677, Gather #829, UMC #431

“Make Me A Channel of Your Peace”

The Faith We Sing #2171, Gather #828, Glory to God PCUSA #753

“O Day of Peace That Dimly Shines”

Chalice #711, ELCA Worship #711, Glory to God PCUSA #373, PCUSA #450,  
UMC #729, Worship (RC) #654

“O For A World”

Chalice #683, New Century #575, PCUSA #386

## ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

American Public Media distributes the weekly radio broadcast **“On Being”** hosted by **Krista Tippett**. The show often deals with issues related to faith, civility and civil discourse, and their website holds a treasure trove of resources. Go to [www.onbeing.org](http://www.onbeing.org) and type “civility” or “civil discourse” into the search engine in the top right-hand corner of the page. You will be taken to a list of episodes and other materials related to the topic.

Cokesbury Publishing House offers a five-episode curriculum entitled **“Civil Discourse: From Separation to Engagement”** for \$19.95. Session 5 focuses specifically on politics. Go to [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com) for more information and to place an order.

**Healing The Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create A Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit** by **Parker Palmer** would make a good choice for a book group or for an adult class where participants are comfortable doing “homework” by reading a chapter before each meeting.

Amazon.com sells this title in a variety of formats (hard cover, paperback, Kindle, audiobook) ranging in price from \$7 to \$12, and offers a “Look Inside” preview option:

[https://www.amazon.com/Healing-Heart-Democracy-Courage-Politics/dp/1118907507/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1467304938&sr=8-1&keywords=healing+the+heart+of+democracy](https://www.amazon.com/Healing-Heart-Democracy-Courage-Politics/dp/1118907507/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1467304938&sr=8-1&keywords=healing+the+heart+of+democracy). A six-session discussion guide is available from

The Center for Courage and Renewal, and can be downloaded for free from this web page: [http://wichurches.org/sitecontent/pdf\\_files/events/CCRHealingDemocracyActionGuide.pdf](http://wichurches.org/sitecontent/pdf_files/events/CCRHealingDemocracyActionGuide.pdf)

The Thoughtful Christian is an ecumenical website dedicated to helping Christians and seekers understand, share, practice and be challenged in their faith. They offer a three-session curriculum entitled **“Civility”** by **James Calvin Davis**. Cost to download leader guides and participant handouts is \$15. <http://www.thethoughtfulchristian.com/Products/TC0519/civility.aspx>

## **CHILDREN & YOUTH**

The following children's books would work as the basis for children's sermons and/or for church school lesson plans for children pre-kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade:

Accept and Value Each Person: Learning to Get Along by Cheri J. Meiners

Getting Along With Each Other by Sally Huss

In God's Name by Rabbi Sandy Sasso

Spike, The Not So Nice Dinosaur by Denise McCabe

We Can Get Along: A Child's Book of Choices by Lauren Murphy Payne

For youth in middle and high school, the following resources could be adapted for a youth group meeting or for a church school lesson:

Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, offers a free four-session program entitled "Civil Discourse in the Classroom." Youth group leaders or church school teachers would need to supplement the material with related bible verses and theological reflection since the program is not designed specifically for faith-based settings. Download the booklet at: <http://www.tolerance.org/publication/civil-discourse-classroom>

The Source for Youth Ministry offers a free on-line lesson plan for youth groups on the topic of respect, using Aretha Franklin's famous song R-E-S-P-E-C-T as a starting point! <http://www.thesource4ym.com/outreach/topic.aspx?id=62>

## LINKS TO DENOMINATIONAL RESOURCES

### Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

[\*Love Your Neighbor\*](#) - A message from Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, regarding the Lutheran Church's doctrinal and historical support for civil discourse.

[\*Congregational Moral Deliberation as Next Public Church\*](#) - Per Anderson uses the term 'moral deliberation' to explain Lutherans' commitment to thoughtful and respectful conversation on moral matters.

### Presbyterian Church USA

[\*Better Angels Statement\*](#) - Along with other faith leaders, many clergy of the PCUSA pledged to lift the tone of political discourse and lead their congregations in fighting polarizing rhetoric.

[\*Reformed Faith and Politics\*](#) - A call from the 195<sup>th</sup> (1983) General Assembly that calls for the church's responsible and civil participation in politics

[\*Each Other's Keepers\*](#) - Rev. Alan Brehm's sermon on speaking truth and grace to one another.

### Religious Society of Friends

[\*Why We Need Some Quaker Sensibilities Right Now\*](#) - Raymond Brimble explains how the application of Quaker values can soften our current polarized political climate.

### Roman Catholic Church

[\*Civil Discourse: Speaking Truth in Love\*](#) - Cardinal Donald Wuerl discusses the importance of truth to living out Christian community and right relationship with others.

[\*Faithful Citizenship: Homily Notes\*](#) - These notes make an argument for civil discourse as a biblical mandate and a way to practice Catholic values during the Year of Mercy.

[\*Liturgy and Prayer Suggestions for Faithful Citizenship\*](#)

### The Episcopal Church

[\*An Open Message to Maine Clergy about Political Advocacy\*](#) - Bishop Stephen Lane provides guidelines for Church participation in political activities, and practicing civil discourse.

[\*Episcopal Bishops Issue A Word to the Church\*](#) - The House of Bishops issued a Word to the church on the role of churches in encouraging civil discourse.

[\*Civil Discourse in America: Facilitator's guide\*](#) - Discussion guide for [a webcast](#) held October 22, 2014; also includes definitions, discussion questions, and prayers.

### **The United Methodist Church**

[\*The Way to Respond to Lack of Civility\*](#)- Bishop D. Max Whitfield explains the biblical mandate for responding positively to moments of incivility.

[\*United Methodists urged to model civil discourse\*](#) - Meaningful quotes from prominent Methodist leaders.

[\*Creating a Container for Conversation\*](#) - W. Craig Giliam offers advice for leading courageous and productive discourse.

[\*7 Essential Components of Conversational Leadership\*](#) - A guide to encouraging meaningful and civil conversation within your congregation.

### **Unitarian Universalist Association**

[\*Democracy in Action\*](#)- An informational page from MUUSAN explaining how civil discourse is part of the UU mission of Democracy in Action.

### **United Church of Christ**

[\*Being a Civil Voice in Uncivil Times\*](#) - A statement from the “Our Faith, Our Vote Campaign” calling for people of faith to elevate the tone of political rhetoric.

[\*Tips for Faithful and Respectful Discussion\*](#) - Practical guidelines for individuals to practice civil discourse in their daily lives.

[\*A Call for Truth-Telling and Standards of Ethics in Public Life\*](#) - A Synod Resolution condemning the deceptive rhetoric of some political leaders.

## FOR FURTHER READING

### Links to on-line articles, podcasts and videos:

[“Civility & Graciousness”](#) – A podcast with Diana Butler Bass explaining the difference between graciousness and civility.

[Civility Lesson from an Atheist and a Priest](#) - YouTube video of an MSNBC segment featuring comedian/magician Penn Jillette and Father James Martin (fast-forward to the 2 minute mark to skip over Penn’s shameless plug of his new book!).

[Conviction and Civility](#) - Jim Wallis and Chuck Colson describe the importance of dialogue based in conviction and genuine honor for those with whom we disagree.

[A Covenant for Civility](#) - An article by Jim Wallis explaining why Sojourners developed a Civility Compact and inviting clergy and laity to sign on.

[Is Public Civility Gone?](#) - YouTube video featuring a short ABC News segment offering examples of the American culture of incivility. A good conversation starter.

[National Council of Churches, USA: An Open Letter Concerning Civility in Public Discourse](#) - The National Council of Churches quotes the prophet Isaiah in its call for civil discourse in US politics.

[New Guide Offers Guidance on How to Defuse Hate](#) - Sojourners article about “Defusing Hate,” a guide produced by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum designed to help communities address hate speech. Article includes a link to download the guide for free.

### Books:

*Choosing Civility: The Twenty-Five Rules of Considerate Conduct* by P.M. Forni

*Civility: Manners, Morals and the Etiquette of Democracy* by Stephen L. Carter

*In Defense of Civility: How Religion Can Unite Americans on Seven Moral Issues That Divide Us*, by James Calvin Davis

*Reclaiming Civility in the Public Sphere: 10 Rules that Work* by Cassandra Dahnke and Thomas Spath with Donna Bowling

*Rude Democracy: Civility and Incivility in American Politics* by Susan Herbst



## A COVENANT FOR CIVIL DISCOURSE

### PREAMBLE

A flourishing democracy requires rigorous public debate that includes freedom of expression for all points of view. For such debate to serve the ends of democracy and the common good it must be rooted in an environment of mutual respect and honesty. It seems, however, that communications around political campaigns and issues have become meaner, more deceitful and more disrespectful, causing confusion, division and discord among the electorate.

Most faith traditions urge every person to treat other people as they would want to be treated, making no exceptions for behavior in public debate. The faith tradition shared by members of the Maine Council of Churches is to "speak the truth in love." To that end, we have adopted the following Covenant for Civil Discourse as a guide for participation in public life.

We encourage and invite our member denominations and other faith communities to join us in this Covenant and to encourage their own local faith communities and individual members to do so as well, particularly those individual members of their traditions and local faith communities who are also public servants or candidates for public office and those who volunteer or work for campaigns. By signing and publicly endorsing this Covenant for Civil Discourse we serve the people of Maine, our democracy and the larger goals of building a society of justice, sustainability, compassion and peace.

### COVENANT

I, \_\_\_\_\_  
 (name of individual and description of public position or name of faith community, campaign or other organization) hereby commit:

1. To act respectfully toward others, including those who oppose me/us in public debate, and to attempt to understand others' point(s) of view. I extend this attitude of respect to all those engaged in civil discourse in the United States.
2. To refrain from personal attacks, while maintaining the right to vigorously disagree.

3. To refrain from making statements which characterize my/our opponents as evil.
4. To refuse to make untrue statements in defense of my/our position.
5. To value honesty, truth, and civility while striving to find workable solutions.
6. To expect any person, party, campaign or organization working on my/our behalf, or to whom I/we contribute money, to meet these same standards for civil discourse, and to disavow statements that violate these standards.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If signing for a faith community, campaign or other organization, please tell us the office or position of person signing on its behalf:

\_\_\_\_\_

*Please print legibly:*

Name of Person Signing: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Organization (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Website: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return to:**

**Maine Council of Churches, 156 High Street, Portland, ME 04101**

By signing and returning to MCC, you give us permission to publish your name or the name of the signing faith community, campaign or other organization in any public communications about the Covenant, including our website, press releases and other public statements.