



Diocese of Newark

The Episcopal Church in Northern New Jersey

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“Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” – Matthew 28:20b

Dear Companions on the Journey,

What a week it has been. Worship and service projects commemorated the prophetic witness and impactful ministry of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47th president of the United States was celebrated at multiple festive occasions, including at a prayer service where Bishop Mariann Budde, Diocese of Washington, ended her sermon with a plea for mercy for those who fear what will come. All this took place by Tuesday of this week, as Executive Orders ushered in all sorts of changes, some impacting our churches. On Thursday, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents detained people at a Newark business.

There is much demanding our attention. In this letter I want to focus on who we are as faith communities and how we treat each other in church. I will send a letter next week with specific guidelines and recommendations for Christian responses to Executive Orders that may affect our congregations.

The people, lay and ordained, of our diocese are diverse in many ways including political party affiliation. This week, much like just after the election when we gathered at Convention, there are a variety of responses to all that I named above. On Sunday morning when we gather for worship, some will be delighted and excited by the changes this week brought. Some will be shocked and sad, while others will have had their worst fears confirmed. All those reactions will shape what we need and experience at church this Sunday.

It is important for us to embrace our baptismal promises in our interactions with each other, especially these two:

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

A discouraging fact about our political discourse is the intolerance created by speaking of others in harmful, dismissive, and dehumanizing language and tone. The harshness of political polemic used in community has broken apart a variety of congregations, families, and friends. None of us want that as we gather to worship, but we also don't want to make church a place where we do not talk about the things most important to us.

I encourage every one of us to release our partisan political viewpoint while at church and instead to step fully into the role of follower of Jesus Christ. On Sunday we have a chance to care for each other as a treasured gift given to us to support our faith journey. We should ask each other if we are okay and then listen to the response. We need to ask each other for prayer, and we need to pray right then and there. Let coffee hour be a place where we talk about how God guided us through the week. We need to leave church having given and received the support of each other. In other words, Sunday is an opportunity for us to care for each other as God cares for us.

Our practice of seeing each other as Christ sees us and loving each other will help us treat each other with respect. When you love somebody, you cannot help but want justice and peace for them too. The more we do this with each other, the more we will do it in our homes, schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces. Our faith can and will change the dynamic of all that is around us, if with God's help, we choose to lead our lives guided by Jesus' teaching.

We are not alone. God does not forget or overlook us. We are always in God's sight.

Grace and peace,
Bishop Hughes