

Faithful Democracy: Restoring the Voters Covenant

Living into our call to the prophetic pursuit of justice, equality, and the common good, the Faithful Democracy coalition calls for bold leadership to safeguard our nation's founding principles. The faith community affirms that every human being is a person of dignity and worth. In a secular democracy, fair and just democratic systems are central to asserting that dignity and worth.

The faith community holds firm to our trust in the spirit of self-governance and the strength of the nation's aspirational founding principles. Yet we have dire concerns about the wellbeing of our body politic, concerns that are amplified by recent civil unrest, economic disruption and COVID-19.

Our nation is segmented into those who are "worthy" of a voice in our political system and those who are not. Democratic systems are used to perpetuate systemic racism and silence the voices of the marginalized, particularly poor people and people of color. Our democratic processes are corrupted at every level: through outsized financial contributions from anonymous and special interest donors; partisan gerrymandering; manipulation of the public discourse in bad faith; and voter suppression and intimidation, most recently in the context of a pandemic.

The faith community has a unique role in the public debate as the moral conscience of the state. As such, we call our elected leaders to reflect on the current state of our democracy.

It is immoral when...

... corporations are given the rights of people and allowed to finance campaigns as a form of free expression. *Unlimited secret, special interest money influences elections and drowns out the voices of actual voters. The temptation to buy unjust favors is a moral matter for the religious community, and moneyed interests have undue influence on our elected leaders.*

... there are no protections against voting rules and administrative protocols that create barriers to voting. *Currently, state and local laws cannot be challenged until after votes are cast and the election is called. The Voting Rights Act must be fully restored to protect voters' rights before elections take place, especially the rights of voters of color whose voices have historically been suppressed. Voters should not be forced to choose between their right to vote and their health during a pandemic.*

...voter disenfranchisement is clearly rooted in racist policies and history. *Formerly incarcerated citizens are disenfranchised even after serving their time. Residents of the District of Columbia are relegated to second-class citizenship without voting representation in Congress. These populations deserve equal voting rights and representation, like all other citizens of the United States.*

...trust in our democratic systems is dwindling. *Evidence that outside parties covertly interfered in our nation's elections sows discord among the populace and deepens political divisions. When our elected leaders fail to secure future elections from predicted hacking or interference they invite confusion and mistrust into our democracy. Dubious electoral outcomes sow further discord and may undermine an orderly and peaceful transition of power.*

...leaders in power manipulate representation in order to retain power. *Racial and partisan gerrymandering is an abuse of political authority that undermines the principle of equal representation. Voters select their representatives, not vice versa.*

Our Constitution is a covenant with the People: that "no state shall...abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States" (14th Amendment). More specifically, "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude" (15th Amendment). A democratic system that suppresses the vote of any U.S. citizens is unconstitutional.

Voting is a core means of political expression on the part of citizens and demands fair and reliable democratic processes. Each election, we call on people of faith to cast their votes according to their conscience. We are now calling on the federal government to make democratic reforms that restore the voice and vote of all citizens in the United States.

We urge Congress to take the first urgent steps to restore the well-being of our democracy by:

- ✓ *Ensuring the accessibility and safety of polling locations,*
- ✓ *Expanding voters' options to cast their ballot,*
- ✓ *Making registration a seamless process,*
- ✓ *Implementing policies that incentivize electoral participation.*

A Faithful Democracy requires free and honest elections to determine the will of the people.