

REFLECTIONS ALONG THE WAY

Dear friends,

This fall, many of you joined us for *We Have To Talk ... About Keeping the Peace This Election Season*, an online interfaith conversation with Nathan Stock of The Carter Center. Nathan shared the Center's sobering research that indicated Southwest Pennsylvania was at elevated risk for politically motivated violence in the period following Election Day.

Following the event, we formed a small working group of spiritual leaders—intentionally bipartisan, multiracial, and interfaith—to take action. Despite the unsettling prospect of civil unrest, the Carter Center's experience across the globe has shown that faith leaders can use proven strategies to prevent political violence in their communities. The process is surprisingly simple: **the right words at the right time from the right people make a real difference.**



photo by Jennifer McKinney

Our group devised a series of messages, based on the research of conflict experts across the nation. We cast them in Southwest Pennsylvania-specific terms, such as the language of neighbor from our beloved Fred Rogers. To express the necessity of waiting for all votes to be counted, for example, we drew on the classic Pittsburgh experience of pouring Heinz ketchup.

In this troubled season, the Prince of Peace brings with him the promise that peace might truly reign on earth as it does in heaven, and that each one of us, following him, might be a peacemaker.

At the same time, we worked to identify our people. We diagrammed all the sectors of our region's common life: our industries, our foundations, our sports teams, our entertainers. Who did we know? Who could speak in ways that would be heard and welcomed by the broadest possible audience? We made lists of those we might call on to bring our messages forward if the days after the election were tense or even violent.

Thanks be to God, the unrest we feared has not come to pass in our region. But the hours we spent in preparation were far from wasted. We learned just how critically important our houses of worship are to our region's public life. The trusted voices of diverse religious leaders, the breadth of our connections, and the ways we have cultivated those relationships over decades: these are the ties that bind us into a cohesive community, across all our dimensions of difference.

And of course, we do not do it on our own. Our own words of peace are inspired by the one who is the Word made flesh, who came to us in Bethlehem: the right Word at the right time. He is the one who called the right people to receive him: not prominent influencers but ragged shepherds and foreign Magi. The relationships we build mirror the relationships in God's very nature as Trinity, and all the relationships down through the centuries that we call Church.

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May the blessings of Christmas be with you and your communities, this year and always.

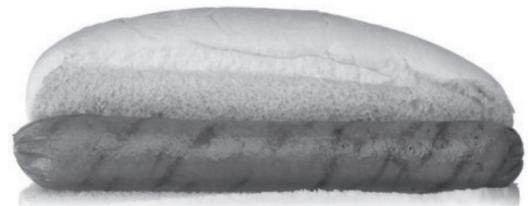
Your sister in Christ,

The Rev. Liddy Barlow
Executive Minister
Christian Associates of Southwest PA



Some things are worth waiting for.

Now that voting is closed, our job is to wait patiently as our election workers work hard to count and verify every vote.



This graphic was among a set of ten Pittsburgh-themed post-election graphics designed by the bipartisan working group.