

Dear United Church Congregation,

On page 10 of The United Church's history book, "One Body, One Spirit...", there's a photograph of ten people with a caption below it that reads: "Representatives of nine denominations met in Los Alamos to discuss the method for organizing a united church." This gathering that included the Executive Secretary of the Federal (National) Council of Churches led to the eventual signing of the membership book of The United Church by our charter members and residents of Los Alamos from November 2-9, 1947. If only we could ask the organizing pastor, the Rev. Abram Sangrey (or his predecessor, Chaplain Ames), about all that went on during those meetings and study sessions—all of the near deal-breaking disagreements and arguments within their long meetings. I suspect we'd wonder how the church's Constitution and Covenant were ever composed and ratified. With the loyalty people had to their particular denomination at that time, all of those denominational representatives coming to agreement is nothing short of the unifying work of the Holy Spirit, prayer and people with a greater vision, willing to talk and listen to each other.

The United Church congregation today has grown out of this and continues to extend the 73 years of faithful mission and ministry for another year and more. That is because of God's continued grace and your steadfast faithfulness. There may not be the same level of denominational loyalty we have to negotiate in order to remain connected as a multi-denominational church, but we have other challenges. You remain a congregation of people from different parts of the country with different church and faith experiences that led/lead to a rich variety of theological beliefs. We are also a congregation with differing political views.

I've had the privilege of being a member of three churches and a pastor of three churches where people were from "both sides of the isle" (and then some) in their political perspectives, affiliations, and leanings. I can't imagine being part of a church with only one political perspective or otherwise. Maybe I have those churches to thank for my lifelong political "Independent" status. But that doesn't mean that I don't have strong beliefs and opinions about how this nation should govern and organize, protect and provide, welcome and execute justice, live within and build upon the privilege of freedom that we enjoy.

President Trump's words to the protestors in Washington D.C. yesterday, both before and after they marched to and broke into the U.S. Capital, and the violence and destruction that occurred, were an abomination. At the very least, and no matter the motivation, it was wrong! It would have been wrong after the 2016 election, after the 2008 election or after the 2000 election. I'm not going to try to convince anyone about which news

sources are more accurate concerning November's election process and results, that would be futile and presumptuous of me.

I will, instead, highlight what unites us. Rather than presume, I will assume that you know and affirm that all of us stand united in our denunciation of the violence towards others and destruction of property in general, as well as in the sad events of yesterday. I assume and affirm that we stand together in calling for peace through prayer and deed at this time, as you have in other times of crisis and as you do each and every Sunday in worship. And I assume and affirm that we want a country where each and every person is free to believe and choose any political candidate or party she wants, any involvement in serving and participating (not destroying) in society he wants, and any community of faith anyone wants to be part of (or not).

As members and friends of The United Church, we have stood firmly together in our faith in Christ, in our worship together and apart, around the Table and Fount (or river), in friendship and in trouble, in joy and in grief, in service and in our daily walk as followers of the one Lord Jesus Christ. We may disagree about the finer (and sometimes unnecessary) points of the Trinity or theory of atonement, interpretation of scripture or its application in society, what our Missions & Service budget should be or when we should begin in-person worship again--but I've seen how profoundly committed all of you are to welcoming each and every person into the communion of this body of Christ and around the Communion table. I have seen members argue fervently for people to be allowed to hold and express their opinion about faith, church and life even if they/you disagreed with them. And I've had the honor and joy of sharing in your unwavering drive to serve others in need and to share God's love throughout the community and world. All of that and more is something I believe we know is true!

In Christian faith, hope and love—let us pray for the leaders of our country as we continue to call and live for peace to reign from these "majestic purple mountains" and from "sea to shining sea".

Grace and peace,  
David