

## **Statement in Support of Democracy and Election Integrity**

September 27, 2020

In this critical election season, the Session of Southminster Presbyterian Church calls on all our elected officials and community and church leaders to stand for democracy before and in the days following the upcoming election. Elections in the United States should be decided by voters. They should be free, fair, and administered in a non-partisan and transparent manner. Every legal vote should be counted, and the losers should respect the results and transfer power peacefully.

Why are we concerned and speaking out publicly? Recent statements from elected officials in high governmental offices have cast doubt on the democratic outcome of our upcoming election. In particular there have been repeated unfounded claims that voting will be fraudulent, that mail in voting is a scam, and that the results of the election do not need to be respected. There have been attempts to undermine the U.S. Postal Service. Also concerning are statements that any result other than reelection must be fraudulent. Some prominent officials recently said that the Supreme Court, rather than voters, would need to decide the outcome of the election. There have also reportedly been discussions that some state legislatures in key states may nullify the election and put forth their own slate of electors. These are alarming, anti-democratic, authoritarian statements and strategies which must be countered by concerned citizens and organizations.

What are the facts? Both mail-in voting and absentee ballots are an essential option at this time due to COVID-19. The increase in legal voting by mail is to be expected and should be accommodated rather than demonized. In the upcoming election, a higher than average number of mailed ballots may cause delay in the results, so results may not be final for several days or weeks after the election. This delay could lead to confusion in the days or weeks following the election. There is no evidence that mail-in voting is fraudulent or that there is any type of widespread voting fraud in the United States. In the event of delays, we call on everyone to be patient and wait for accurate results.

Election integrity is a non-partisan issue. Free elections are essential. Our democracy was founded on the principle that all the people are represented by individuals they freely elect and all citizens are equal. Our government operates with the consent of the governed. Of major concern is the fact that marginalized and less powerful people in our society are particularly at risk of being disenfranchised in this election. That violates our country's democratic foundations.

Respect for the conscience of the individual anchors Presbyterian reverence for everyone's right to vote. Public service is seen by us as a high calling, and government itself is a servant and agent of the people, accountable to all citizens. Politics, as public decision-making, has an ethical purpose and benefits from laws that prevent corruption by special interests against the common good. Weakening the rights of citizenship for some, and unfairly enhancing the power of others, distorts the practices and legitimacy of democracy.

It's important for individuals and organizations like Southminster, Presbytery of the Cascades, and PCUSA to speak out loudly for democracy and against authoritarianism and use whatever influence we have. We urge everyone to be aware and prepared to act if a crisis should arise with the election or the results.

Sincerely,

Southminster Presbyterian Church Session

Frank Angelo

Cindy Bartholomew

Diane Bender

Pam Brown

Karen Butler

Rick Collins

Mary Gehr

Kathleen Huddleston

Greg Jones

Ronald Lehr

Kristin Moreno

Michel Mouzong

Aleta Parker

David Pierce

Matt Schulze

Kirstin Fredrickson, Clerk of Session