

On the Eve of the 2024 Presidential Election

*“Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,
looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith”*

~from Hebrews 12:1-2, NRSV

To the People of the Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina:

Dear friends in Christ,

Presidential elections in this nation always fall within a few days of the Church’s celebration of All Saints. In this election cycle, even after all the votes have finally been counted and winners have been named, it will not be over. Our political divisions will continue, and fear for our nation’s future seems justified, regardless of whom we ultimately elect.

At our recent Clergy Conference, Eliza Griswold was our speaker. *Circle of Hope*, her most recent book, tells the story of the impact of this nation’s culture wars on the life of a progressive evangelical congregation in Philadelphia. That’s right: in the swing state of Pennsylvania! As she led us through the stories of the people profiled in her book, many of us were easily able to identify with one character or another. We were able to be vulnerable with one another, drawing on our experiences of being and leading church during these last years and sharing our hopes and our fears and our deep fatigue. My homily, offered during our closing worship, called on those present to listen widely, to hold each other tightly, and to be ready to “let go.”

When we listen widely, those who have been strangers or adversaries to us become neighbors and perhaps even friends. Even if we continue to disagree with one another’s opinions, we might find ourselves more able to have compassion for one another.

When we hold each other tightly, we express and receive a little bit more of the unconditional love of our gracious God. We are more able to avoid the loneliness and isolation that too often lies heavily on our bodies and our souls. We might find ourselves more able to work “across the aisle” with those who are different from us, all with the goal of building healthier communities.

When we become ready to “let go,” we may find that we place less value on ideas, opinions, and positions to which we have been clinging. We have more energy for the people and priorities that are most important. When we practice “letting go” in our personal faith and in our church communities, we find ourselves more open to the neighbors all around us and to their needs rather than our own.

This life, as followers of Jesus, is more of a marathon than a sprint. We might like to cross the finish line quickly and rest, but, instead, we face a lifelong challenge. Let us give thanks that, in one another, we have been given good companions for this race. Let us give thanks that we are surrounded and supported by “a cloud of witnesses” whom we might name as saints, those who live in this life and in the next. Let us give thanks that, in Jesus, we have been given an example of a life of radical obedience that led through the shame of death on the cross to the glory of God’s eternal presence.

As the “saints of God,” may we listen widely, hold each other tightly, and be ready to let go as we continue to run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

Peace and blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rob". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.

Bishop Rob Skirving

A Prayer for the Human Family

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son:
Look with compassion on the whole human family,
and especially on the people of these United States;
take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts;
break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love;
and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth;
that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony
around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer, p. 815 ~ revised