

Dear Northern Great Lakes Synod,

It may be 2021, but it still feels like 2020, as if we are in the 13<sup>th</sup> month of a year that refuses to end since not much has changed. We are still in a pandemic. Congregation leaders continue to discern the logistics and timing of in-person worship and ministry efforts. Please trust and respect their difficult discernment even as I know churches in your neighborhood may well be following different metrics. Your pastor and leadership have your safety as a priority, and paying attention to the advice of the health department and the number of available ICU beds is a faithful response to our current challenges.

Thankfully, there is a vaccine. And in some ways, this makes people even more anxious – impatient to get it, impatient to see results, impatient to return to “normal” worship, economy, and so much more.

All in good time.

And truthfully, we are distracted from that impatience as we worry and wonder about the challenges to the democratic systems of our great republic. Last Wednesday January 6, on a day when we celebrate Epiphany, rioters breached our nation’s Capitol building; destroying and defacing, looting and injuring. Five people died. Some say security guards were complicit, some say they were overrun. Some watched what was happening with satisfaction. Some watched with horror. There is a lot I do not understand about all that went on. There is even more that grieves me: the violence and the lies that drove it, the blatant racism, the partnering of “Jesus Saves” signs with a noose and gallows and calls to hang Vice President Pence, the beating of police officers by those who carried flags in support of police. It was an Epiphany moment that gave the whole country new clarity as to the depth of our divisions, the power of disinformation to deceive, and hypocrisy.

Where do we go from here? As people of faith, as Christians who believe and proclaim the law of love in Christ, I want to offer a clear word about what I do know.

Racism is a sin.

White supremacy is sinful and in direct opposition to the Christian witness. It is an ideology incited by the father of lies and has no place in communities of faith or people that proclaim themselves to be Christian.

I do not know what is going to happen in the next week, ten days, or ten months. But I remain hopeful that the Church, and our congregations, are filled with the Holy Spirit of Christ to embody a voice of reason and truth, create spaces for rational discourse where we can meaningfully discuss our disagreements, and be a unifying influence that will nurture healing, patience, and compassion.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Katherine Finegan