



MINNESOTA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

## NEWS RELEASE

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Faith and Politics Institute and National Faith Leaders including Minnesota's Rev. Canon Peg Chamberlin Call for a Higher Standard of Public Discourse as U.S. Political Parties Prepare to Meet, National Campaigns Begin Final Push**

*President Lincoln Once Called Upon Americans to find the "Better Angels of Our Nature" - That Time has Arrived Again*

*Shootings in DC, WI, CO, confirm need for faith leaders to model civil disagreement and respectful dialogue, avoiding demonization and attacking of political opponents*

Washington, DC - The Faith & Politics Institute (FPI) today, along with noted national faith leaders, released the "Better Angels Statement" in which prominent Christian leaders have pledged their commitment to a ministry of reconciliation in a shared effort to promote civility and peaceful conversation. Faith leaders agree to model respectful behavior and help our nation move beyond the vitriol, name calling and stalemates that currently define the American public square.

"I embrace the call to our Better Angels because people of faith are increasingly faced with evidence of a society-wide scale refusal to acknowledge our common created humanity. It is time to repent of whatever role we have had to play in creating a culture that makes violence and rumors of violence seem like an acceptable response to one person's disagreement with another," said Rev. Canon Peg Chamberlin, executive director of the Minnesota Council of Churches.

The statement is the product of the two-day "Better Angels Summit" hosted by The Faith & Politics Institute, which brought together prominent Christian faith leaders from across a broad ideological spectrum and denominations.

At the Summit, **The Honorable John C. Danforth** exhorted the gathered group; “All of you, no matter where you are on the religious spectrum or where you are on the political spectrum, must take seriously what St. Paul said, that while we hate evil, we're supposed to love one another with mutual affection and live in harmony.” Danforth concluded; “You have the ability to affect the tone and the substance of American politics.”

The statement (printed below) has been signed by 18 religious leaders, including **Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Rev. James Forbes of Riverside Church, Rev. Pierre Bynum of the Family Research Council and Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church.**

The “Better Angels Statement” will also provide the framework for a “Better Angels Rules of Engagement” that will be offered to representatives from faith communities, the media, Congress and the general public with an invitation to sign on.

“We are extremely pleased to facilitate this fruitful dialogue which we believe will lead to real changes in our nation’s political discourse. The participants genuinely sought to engage one another, cultivating relationships and having honest conversations on the challenges in our political and cultural landscape;” said **Liz McCloskey, President of The Faith & Politics Institute.**

The Better Angels Summit was held over two days from June 27-28 in Washington, D.C. A response to the current climate of acrimony and division, the summit created a space for America's Christian faith leaders to sit around one table together. During the two-day dialogue, they were able to honestly engage in dialogue about the challenges the nation faces and practical solutions and religious resources for creating more civil public discourse. The summit was well attended and featured in prominent stories by the [Christian Broadcasting Network](#) and the [Christian Post](#).

Richard Land, of the Southern Baptist Convention, called the current political climate “pernicious and cancerous,” and went on to say; “It is up to us people of faith to try to lead by example and by exhortation to get people to elevate the discourse by understanding that we can disagree with everything somebody may say without attacking them as a person.”

#### *‘BETTER ANGELS’ STATEMENT*

**I. As people of faith in leadership positions, we will seek to model civility and achieve the following goals in our personal spheres of influence:**

1. Lead by example, modeling civil discourse with and respect for those with whom we disagree.
2. Lead by recognizing that our deeply held beliefs, values and principles will not be compromised by courteous, respectful and civil disagreement when we interact with those with whom we disagree
3. Lead by tackling the controversial issues of our time without resorting to clichés, resorting to stereotypes or putting people into preconceived boxes
4. Lead by establishing relationships that will allow each of us to express our convictions openly in our interactions with each other knowing that we will be heard and respected.

**II. We agree to the following “Commitment to Reconciliation.”**

We are faith leaders from various Christian traditions and have different, sometimes opposite, opinions on important subjects of religion and politics. While we do not agree on some issues, we are concerned that excessive polarization in politics is harming America. We affirm that differences on some matters should not create polarization on all issues. We believe that where we disagree, we should do so in a spirit of mutual affection, showing honor to one another. We believe we are called to a ministry of reconciliation. We shall make our best effort to seek understanding of and respect for our differences and identifying areas where we can work together with mutual respect.

**III. We agree to begin working toward a broad initiative that will influence church members, media, and all of society toward greater civility.**

**IV. We agree to pray for each other and for our leaders of all different political views.**

**Rev. Pierre Bynum**, Chaplain, Family Research Council

**The Rev. Canon Peg Chamberlin**, Immediate Past President, National Council of Churches

**Mr. Richard Cizik**, President, New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good

**Dr. Janice Shaw Crouse**, Dir & Senior Fellow, Beverly LaHaye Institute, Concerned Women for America

**Bishop Sally Dyck**, Minnesota Annual Conference, United Methodist Church

**Rev. James Forbes**, Senior Minister Emeritus of the Riverside Church

**Bishop Richard Graham**, Metropolitan Washington DC Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

**Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori**, The Presiding Bishop, The Episcopal Church

**Dr. Cathleen Kaveny**, Professor, University of Notre Dame

**Sister Carol Keehan**, President, Catholic Health Association

**Dr. Richard Land**, Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, Southern Baptist Convention

**Mr. Dwayne Leslie**, Public Affairs & Religious Liberty, Seventh Day Adventist Church

**Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II**, Director of Public Witness, Presbyterian Church USA

**Rev. Franklyn Richardson**, Chair, National Conference of Black Churches

**Reverend Gabriel Salguero**, President, National Latino Evangelical Coalition

**Dr. Barbara Williams Skinner**, Co-Founder and President, Skinner Leadership Institute

**Rev. Ed Stetzer**, President, LifeWay Research

**Dr. Harold Dean Trulear**, Professor, Howard University Divinity School

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\*Christian leaders who signed this statement did so as individuals seeking to influence their own faith communities.

**The Faith & Politics Institute Vision**

Leadership that brings people together

**The Faith & Politics Institute Mission**

The Faith & Politics Institute advances reflective leadership among Members of Congress and congressional staff to bridge the divides that arise in a thriving democracy.

### **About Minnesota Council of Churches**

The Minnesota Council of Churches' mission is to manifest unity in the church and to build the common good in the world. The Minnesota Council of Churches programs align with three broad categories: welcoming refugees, mobilizing the faith community to engage in public policy, and strengthening communities through relationships and understanding. For more information, visit [www.mnchurches.org](http://www.mnchurches.org)

# 30 #