



# WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

700 Prospect Ave.  
Cleveland, OH 44115-1110  
Phone: 216.736.3700  
Fax: 216.736.3703

**Bentley de Bardelaben**  
**Executive for Administration and Communications**

**Witness for Justice #529**

**May 23, 2011**

**Off to the RACES...**

**Bentley de Bardelaben**

It feels as if we, the American people, just ended the 2010 political race. Now we are off and running toward the 2012 Presidential election. In recent days, we have seen and heard a brood of political candidates squawking and emerging from a cauldron of Republican soup. There was the loud mouth, self-serving, egomaniacal, reality TV host who regularly uses foul language. There is the 1990's former House speaker, self-proclaimed workaholic, adulterer, family-values-Gestapo and hypocrite. And there's the pearly-toothed, gray hair temple, former New England governor who championed statewide universal healthcare.

Then add to the list the gun toting, loud mouthed siren from the 49<sup>th</sup> state, the anti-government libertarian who opposes the passage of the "Civil Rights of Act of 1964" citing infringement on private property rights, the African American pizza magnate from the south, the evangelical governor from Minnesota, and the former senator from Pennsylvania. Wow, we are more than eighteen months away from polling day! Who else is going to show up?

Friends, I hope that we won't suffer from political amnesia this season. Four years ago, the 2008 Presidential race was up and

running twenty-two months ahead of voting day. Have we forgotten the costs? The price tag was estimated at a cool \$5.3 billion. The upcoming election will surely be higher. But what about the psychological and/or spiritual costs? Negative campaign ads spoon feed half-truths and slick lies which often result in people feeling apathy toward government and those we elect to represent us. Can this campaign tomfoolery be good for anyone?

Politicians say that they want civility within their campaigns, but history reveals that mudslinging works. However as a person of faith, I am guided by a bible verse from Ephesians 4: 29-32. *“Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of your redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as Christ has forgiven you.”*

Our political leaders claim also to be people of faith. While they participate in the public square, their interactions and engagements with all of us should be of a higher standard, particularly those with whom they disagree. Faith provides a spiritual depth to elevate conversations to a different plane. According to the Director of Justice and Witness Ministry’s Washington office, Ms. Sandra Sorensen, “We can choose respect and hope over animosity and bitterness. We can choose to listen and learn rather than attack and insult. We can choose to have civic discussions in civil tones.”

Being a hot-blooded American male, I often remind myself of the biblical passage cited above as well as tools found in the document, *“Being a Civil Voice in Uncivil Times”* located at [www.ucc.org/ourfaithourvote/civility.html](http://www.ucc.org/ourfaithourvote/civility.html). CHANGE must originate with us and now is the time. As we are aware, some horses have already left the gate.

*The United Church of Christ has more than 5,300 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.*