



The Importance of Civil Discourse

(August 2020)

As a nation and as a community we are living through disruptive and chaotic times to a degree many of us have not experienced in our lifetimes. We are dealing with a global pandemic that has upended how we work, live, socialize, and educate our children. In the midst of this, we are also recognizing inequities that have exacerbated the impact of this epidemic on minority communities and those already most vulnerable. Furthering the strain on our collective consciousness is the civil unrest catalyzed by the brutal police killing of George Floyd, which has heightened public awareness of the systemic racism, and implicit bias in our criminal justice system and prompted reflection across all of our governing bodies' policies.

Now, more than ever, we need to come together as a community to communicate with each other respectfully, to engage in dialogue to really hear and understand different perspectives, and to collaborate to develop solutions that can serve the needs of our community and our goal of becoming more inclusive. Discussion and factual debate about the issues facing our community is absolutely appropriate and important. But disrespectful accusations or comments impugning a lack of integrity as have increasingly been posted online and in communications to local government leaders are rarely appropriate but almost always harmful to the very system that we depend on.

We are fortunate in Wilmette to be led by thoughtful and committed individuals in leadership roles across our governing bodies, including elected and appointed officials as well as dedicated staff. Each Board is working to reconfigure core programs and address significant financial issues, often without complete information. They are all making difficult decisions of tremendous import, which impact people's health, safety and livelihood. These community leaders deserve our gratitude and respect, even when we disagree with their opinions or actions. At the same time, individuals and families are under tremendous stress as they seek to protect their family, continue to make a living

and educate their children. Fellow community members also deserve compassion and empathy.

As our leaders continue to make difficult decisions and as we head into the final months leading up to the November general election and move from there into our own municipal elections, we encourage everyone to approach discussions and debates with mutual respect to ensure that qualified individuals are positively disposed to consider volunteering their time to serve in office. Let us try to reflect on how we conduct ourselves online and in our communication to government leaders and recommit ourselves to exemplifying the best of our democratic process. Let us not sink to the lows that we may see in politics elsewhere in our state and our country. Let us be role models for our children. And, finally, let us agree to respect not only each other's opinions but more importantly, each other's integrity. At the end of the day, we are all neighbors in this incredibly special village.