

## Dale Janssen's Summer Reading Challenge

When many of us were young and attending Sunday School, we were taught that God loves all people. The Gospels are filled with stories of Jesus treating foreigners, the poor, the sick, and social outcasts with compassion and respect. Recently, however, it seems those lessons are being ignored by many who call themselves Christians. Instead, the emphasis too often appears to be on vilifying individuals and groups, seeking revenge, and showing cruelty.

Some have blended selective versions of Christianity and patriotism into a form of Christian Nationalism that emphasizes only the parts of Scripture that support a particular agenda, while ignoring passages that may challenge their views. That is not what I believe Christianity is meant to be.

I recently read a book called *Separation of Church and Hate* by John Fugelsang. The book discusses how Christian Nationalism distorts Christianity by cherry-picking Bible verses to support political opinions. Rather than focusing on what Jesus actually said and did, some people tell us what they believe Jesus would think about today's politics. Fugelsang carefully cites relevant Biblical passages to support his argument that Christian Nationalism is inconsistent with the words and actions of Jesus.

If you are uncomfortable with the mixing of religion and politics, I understand that concern. In my opinion, Christianity should first and foremost be about our relationship with God and His Living Word. At the same time, Jesus repeatedly taught us to care for the welfare of others, and government policies and laws affect all of us—sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. Because of that, I'm not sure religion and politics can ever be completely separated.

This summer, I want to challenge you to read this book. It is available at bookstores, libraries, and online in print, electronic, and audio formats.

After you finish reading it, please pass it along to someone else in your household or congregation. There will be a sign-up sheet on the table at the back of the sanctuary. Everyone who reads the book should sign the sheet by August 27. For every name on the list, I will donate \$10 to the LUMC Open Pantry.

We will gather that evening to discuss the book at my house. If there are too many participants, we will meet at the church instead. **You do not have to agree with the book to attend.** The goal is simply to have a thoughtful and respectful discussion.

Please take my challenge. Let's see how much money we can raise for the LUMC Open Pantry — and maybe even make me break my piggy bank.

