I am Rev. Dr. Bill Lyons, spiritual leader for the 42 congregations of the United Church of Christ in Arizona, New Mexico, and El Paso Texas.

Voting is the heartbeat of the democratic process. It is the access point for people of every race, ethnicity, cultural heritage, ability, age, gender expression, sexual orientation and political ideology to engage public dialogue and voice their will in local, regional, state, and nation public policy decision-making processes, shaping our collective life.

As a Church we affirm “the responsibility of ... each generation to make this faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God.” The Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ stands in solidarity with the Arizona Hunger Strike for Democracy because you exemplify and are taking action to defend Democracy, protect voting rights make Democracy your own in your generation.
When they lose elections politicians and political parties should hear that as Democracy’s invitation to change their politics and to make it easier for working people, students, and people of color to cast ballots. Instead, many our elected officials have chosen to fill their coffers with dark money, redraw their districts, and make it harder for people to vote. “So far this year, at least 19 states have enacted 33 new laws that restrict access to voting,” according to a Brennan Center’s nationwide survey. “In over 20 states more than 245 similar bills stand to be brought into next year’s legislative sessions.¹ Passing the Freedom to Vote Act now will protect Democracy’s fundamental principal that elected officials serve the interests of and are accountable to voters.

These hunger strikers have been forced to take drastic action because the Senate’s rules have prevented debate on FTVA. Jesus taught us rules are made to serve people not to prevent people from doing good or realizing the common good.

Protecting our democracy is NOT a partisan issue. 84% of Arizona voters and 70% of voters nationally support the reforms within the Freedom To Vote Act. When rules must be employed to protect politicians’ self-interests from 70-84% of voters, Democracy is crying out for the rules to be changed so that the interests of the people are served.

The Freedom to Vote Act restores for this generation and for future generations the democracy for which my generation was taught America stands. Corruption, party-base driven campaigns, extremism, and a pathological lust for control by the few has subverted the will of the many and justice for all. The United Church of Christ is committed to creating a just world for all. Passing the Freedom to Vote Act this year takes us one step closer. These hunger strikers are righteous in their demands. Their commitment, courage, and willingness to put their bodies on the line for the benefit of every American, not just the ones with whom they agree, restores my hope in America’s future.
Too many generations of political leaders have been unwilling to tackle the biggest problems currently facing our democracy by setting national standards to protect access to the vote, ending partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts, beginning to overhaul our broken campaign finance system, and creating new safeguards against subversion of the electoral process.\(^2\) The time has come to listen to and partner with this generation as they create the Democracy they want for their future. The time for passing the Freedom to Vote Act is now.

\(^2\) https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/breaking-down-freedom-vote-act