

Other Peoples' Good

*Faith & Flourishing in Politics:
Christian Ed. Discussion*

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig - Fall 2021

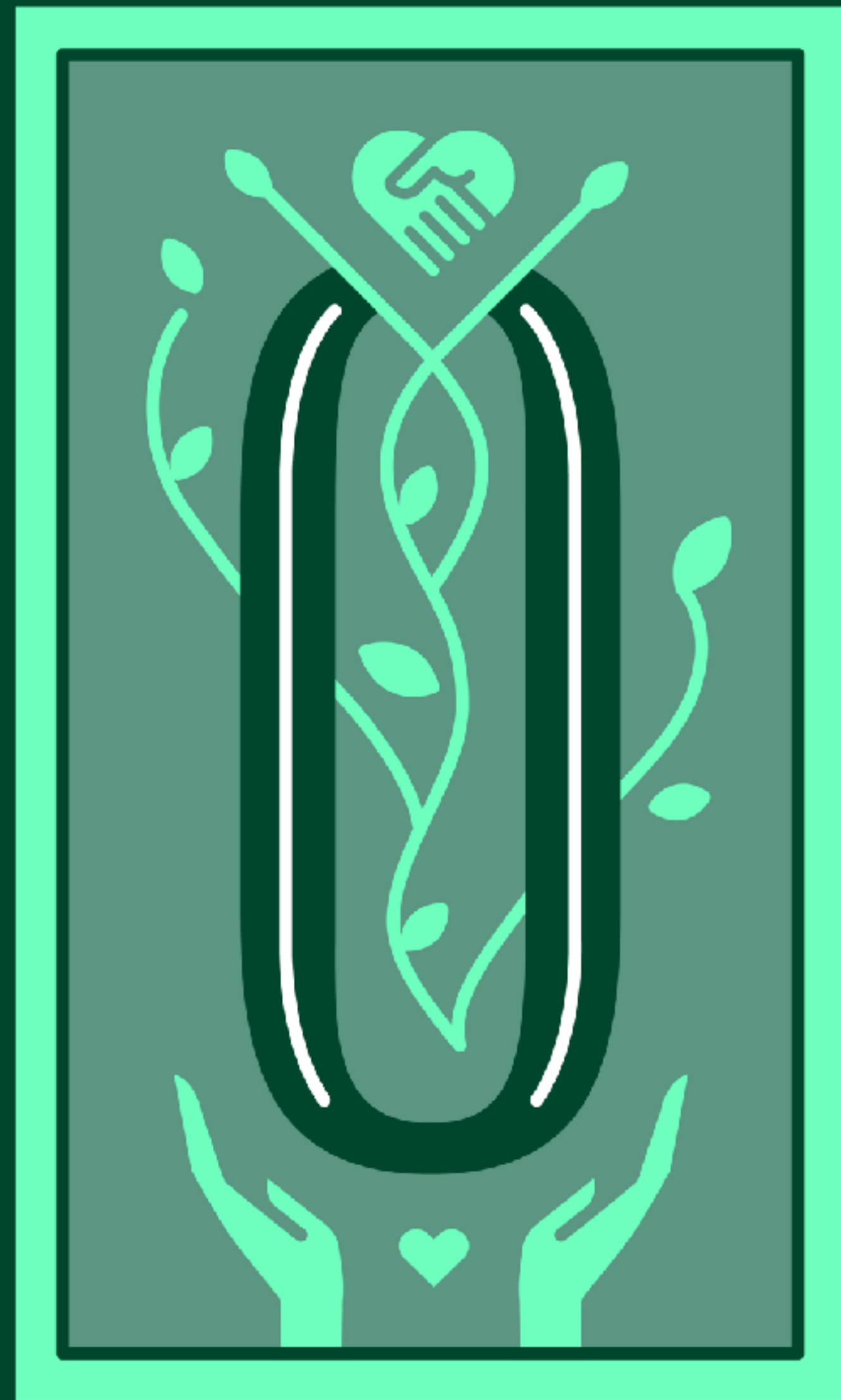
Our Garden Hedge:

1. **Listen Well** - We don't have all the answers so let's ask what others think, really try to hear each other out, and let others finish their thoughts.
2. **Speak with Brevity & Focus** - Let's leave space for others to participate and stay on track ("Keep to our hedge").
3. **Practice Gentle Courage** - Let's be bold and share our thoughts and ideas, point to what we believe the Scripture and wisdom says, and yet do so with a gentle and humble spirit.
4. **Keep Praying** - Let's pray in preparation, silently while we discuss, and to get the class started. We need the Holy Spirit!

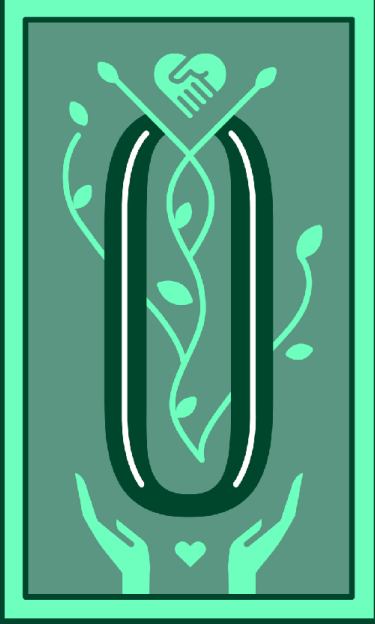




What's one word you would use to describe how you feel about politics today?



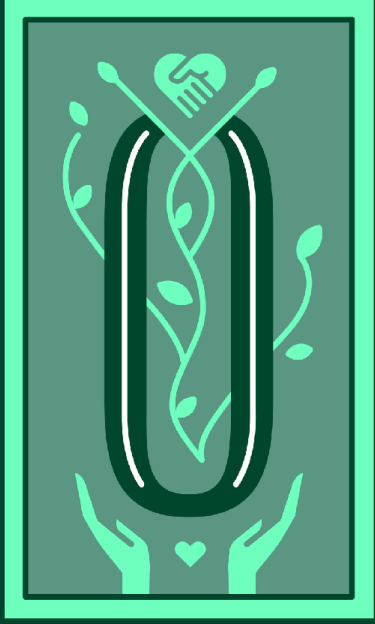
How do Genesis
and Jeremiah
give us hope in
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Genesis 1:28 (ESV)

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

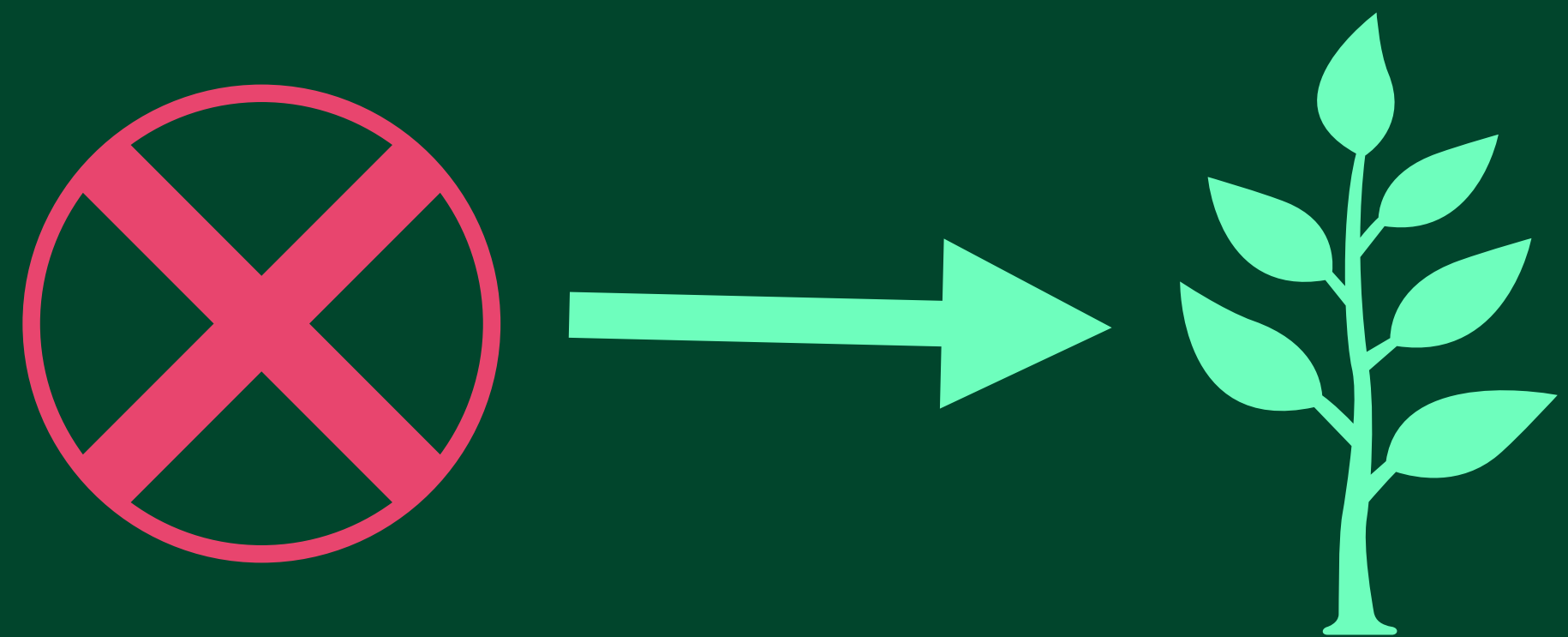


How do Genesis and Jeremiah give us hope in political chaos?

Jeremiah 29:4-7 (ESV)

4 “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

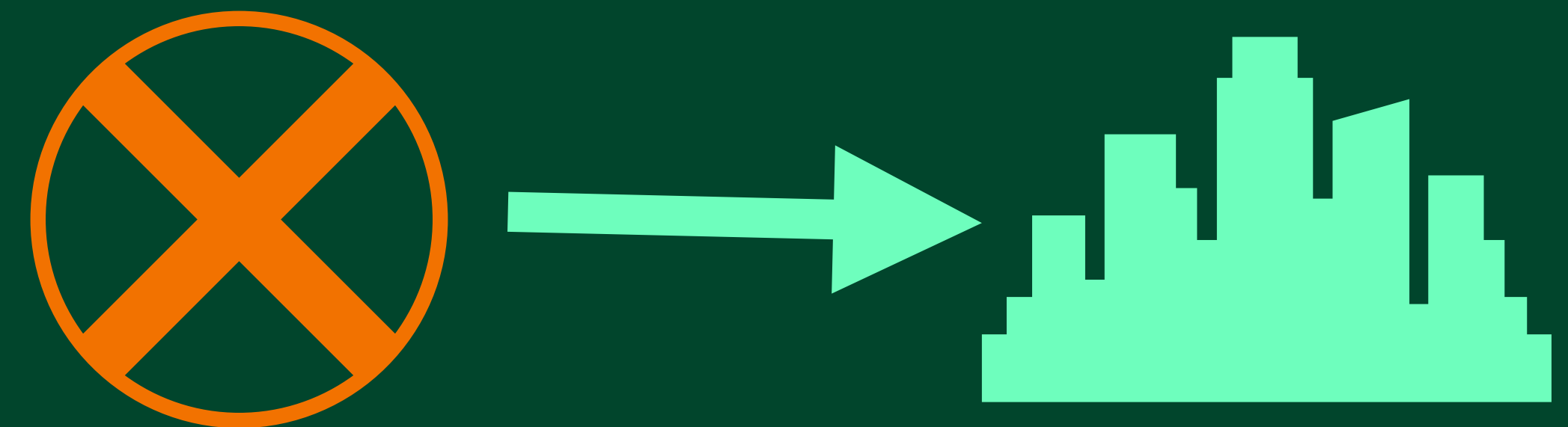
Genesis 1



Void &
Chaos

Order &
Beauty

Jeremiah 29



War &
Exile

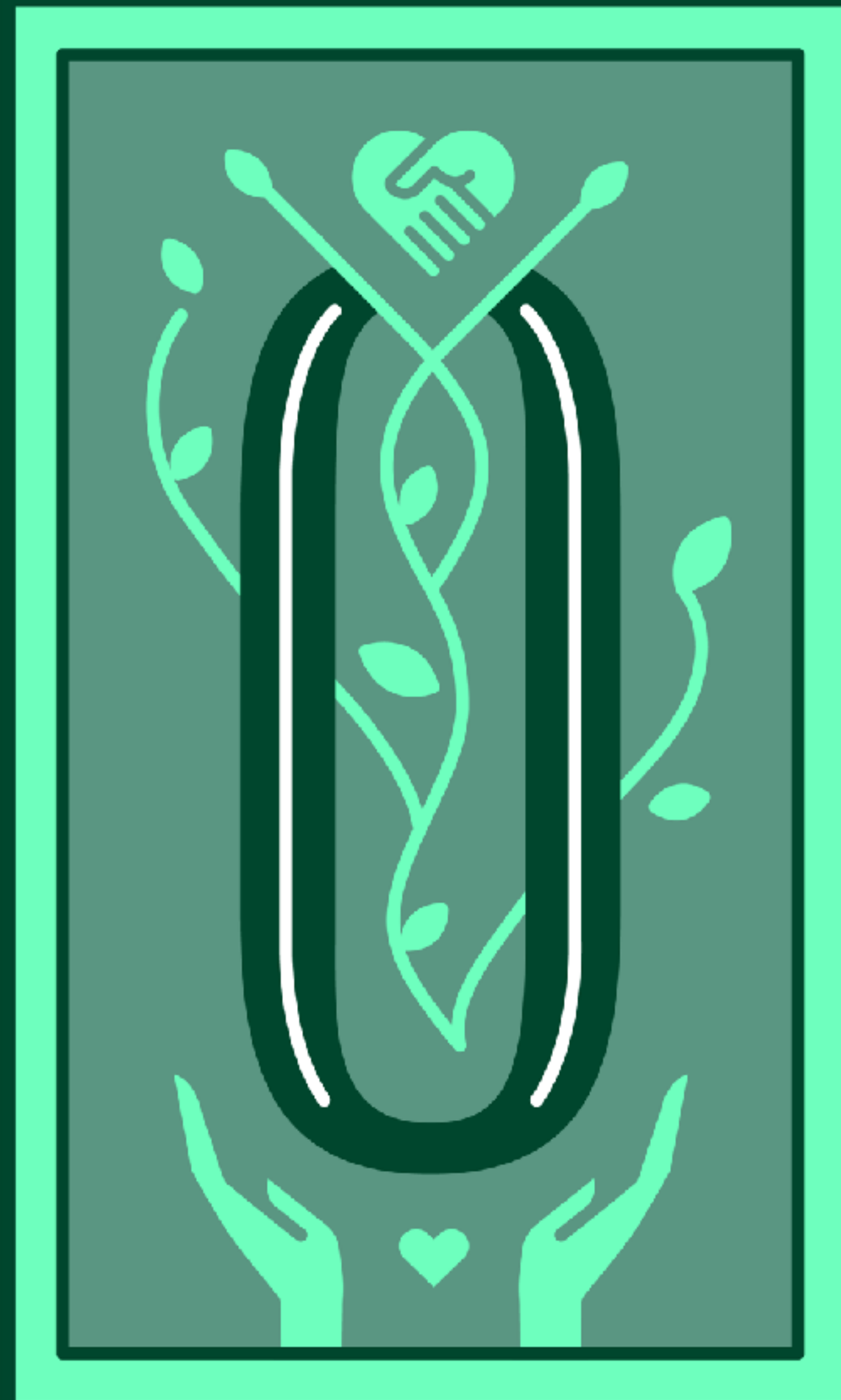
Shalom
of City

*How do Genesis and Jeremiah give us
hope in political chaos?*

The webbing together of God, humans, and all of creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call shalom. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight — a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.

Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 10.

What is shalom and why does it matter?



What is the
common good?
How is it helpful
or unhelpful?

In the summer of 2014, the managers, employees, and customers of a New England chain of supermarkets called Market Basket joined together to oppose the board of directors' decision earlier that year to oust the chain's popular chief executive, Arthur T. Demoulas. Their demonstrations and boycotts emptied most of the chain's seventy stores. What had been special about Arthur T, as he was known, was his approach to business. He kept prices lower than his competitors, paid his employees more, and gave them and his managers more authority to make decisions. Just before he was ousted he offered customers an additional 4 percent discount, arguing they could make better use of the money than the shareholders could. Arthur T viewed Market Basket as a joint enterprise from which everyone should benefit, not just its shareholders—which was why the board fired him. Yet eventually consumers and employees won. The boycott was so costly that the board sold the company to Arthur T.

Robert B. Reich, *The Common Good* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018) 125-126, Kindle.

How is this author's illustration of the common good similar or different to our biblical understanding?

Well, what I'm trying to do in our letter exchanges is to help you approach American politics and public life in a way that resists idolizing any one good, whether that be individual freedom, cultural heritage, material prosperity, or national and ethnic identity. I'm trying to help you construct a political paradigm that recognizes God's sovereignty over our nation, draws on our Christianity to work for the common good, and respects the dignity and rights of citizens who have differing visions of the common good.

Bruce Riley Ashford, *Letters to An American Christian* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2018) chap. 7, Kindle.

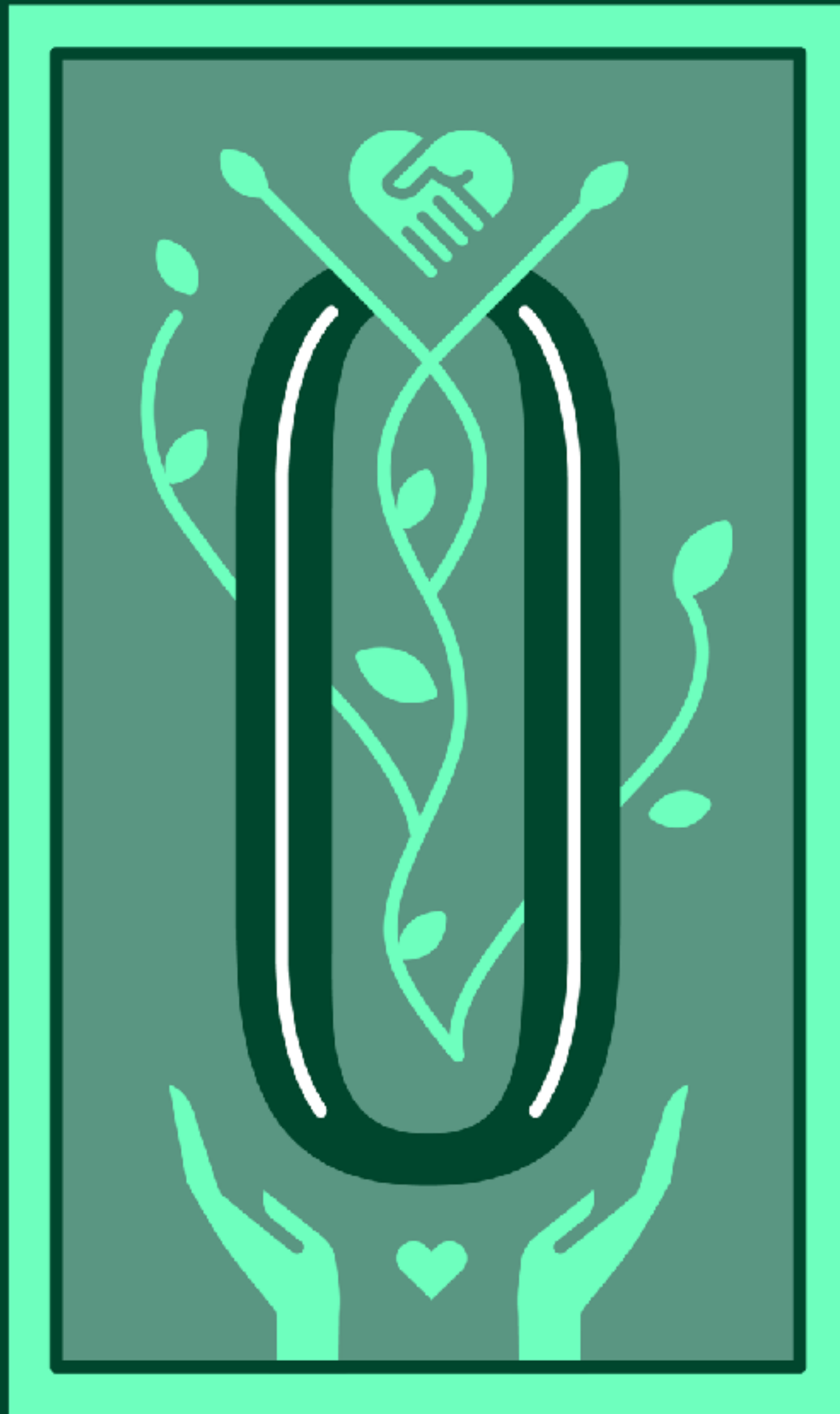
Some point to a polarization and fragmentation in society that goes far beyond the usual political partisanship. There is a growing tribalism that reveals a culture in which there is a vacated center, a loss of any shared idea of common public good. There is a profound loss of social trust that appears to be undermining all the institutions that have held our society together.

Timothy Keller, *Hope in Times of Fear: The Resurrection and the Meaning of Easter* (New York: Viking, 2021) xvii, Kindle.

“The way Christians work toward human flourishing is not by imposing on others their vision of human flourishing and the common good but by bearing witness to Christ, who embodies the good life...”

Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011) Intro., Kindle.

Do you agree, disagree? How might Christians use politics to further our vision of flourishing? Should we force it?



How is the church a
“counterculture for
the common good?”

(See Timothy Keller’s [sermon by the same name](#))

Acts 2



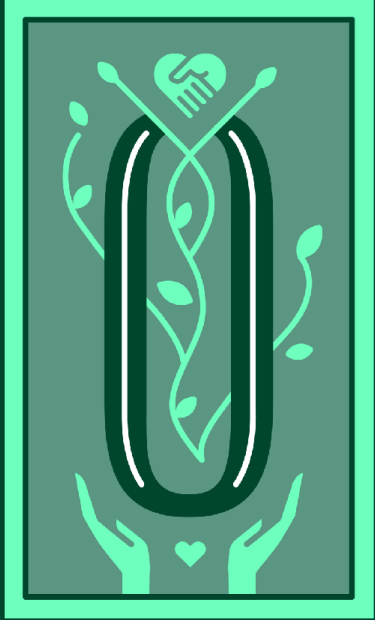
How is the church a “counterculture for the common good?”

The church is that gathering of Christian believers for worship, preaching, celebration of the sacraments, and corporate discipleship. And the church is also that same body of Christian believers sent out into the whole of the world to bear witness to Christ in every sphere of life. Another way of talking about this is through the rhythms of breathing in and breathing out: the church exists both by “breathing in” (gathered within the church building) and “breathing out” (sent into the world), in a regular weekly rhythm. A living church is gathered and sent, breathing in and out.

Michael R. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019) chap. 1, Kindle.

It is the role of the gathered church to disciple Christian believers to be responsible and engaged citizens. But it is the role of the sent church to debate and endorse specific political platforms and candidates. The gathered church cannot shy away from preaching the comprehensiveness of the gospel, even when it means touching on controversial and debated public issues (otherwise these questions are left in the hands of unformed, undisciplined Christians with little to no Scriptural guidance), and the sent church must embody and unfold the comprehensive application of the gospel in all of life.

Michael R. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019) chap. 5, Kindle.



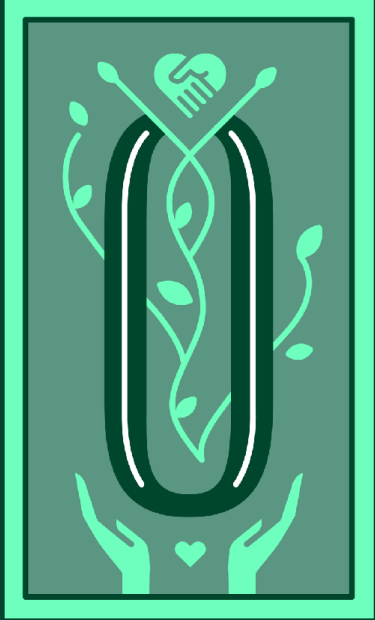
How should we pray for our nation?

2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)

if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Do you think my “caution” was fair? That it’s okay to pray this for the church (heavenly citizens in exile) but to be wary of using this verse as a claim for our nation?

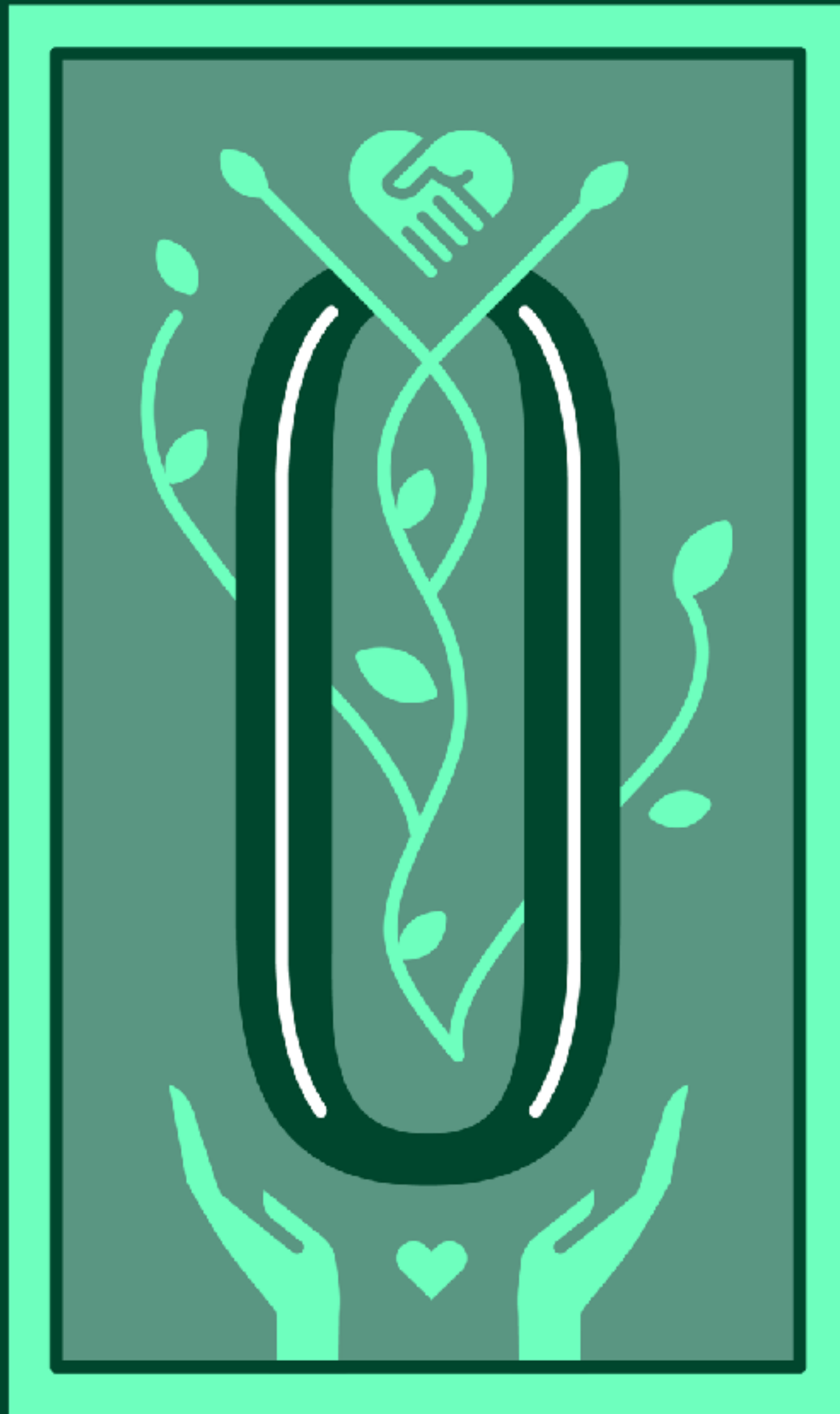
Caution!



How should we pray for our nation?

1 Timothy 2:1-4 (ESV)

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.



Let's pray for 1) the shalom of our city and state; 2) for the church to benefit the common good; and 3) for wisdom, dignity, and salvation for local and national politicians.

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