

Voices: Communion, shared meals bridge post-election chasms

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The election is over. Now thank we all our God, no matter who received our votes. You may have noticed that pundits no longer refer to an election season; they now speak of the election “cycle.” This seems apt, as the term evokes the Mayan calendar, in which a cycle lasts 5,125.366 years.



Ellen Di Giosia During this interminable election cycle, the airwaves have been filled with divisive rhetoric, accusations of illegal and immoral behavior, and a shocking coarsening of political discourse. America seems to have completely abandoned civility.

Browsing Facebook is no longer a fun activity. For every adorable kitten picture, there are 20 political memes. As you scroll through your feed, you have to dodge auto-playing videos of crude and hateful speech. Perhaps it is time to add a Fifth Fragile Freedom to our cherished Baptist distinctives—the freedom to avoid the comment section.

Chaos awaiting?

Over the summer, as the election circus became increasingly nasty, I wondered what the consequences might be for our church. The congregation I serve, Woodland Baptist Church, is filled with people whom I admire and love and trust. But we disagree on many things—the role of government, tax policy, foreign affairs. Our congregation is a big tent politically, and it was troubling to think the chaos outside might seep into our speech or actions toward one another.

Then I heard Nichole Nordeman’s song, “Please Come” on a podcast about the Lord’s Supper. While I drove, tears spilled out, the lyrics reminding me of the gift that Jesus gave us for just such a time:



*Somebody somewhere decided that we’d be better off divided,
And somehow, despite the damage done,
He says, “Come.”
There is room enough for all of us.*

Demonstrate unity

We at Woodland didn’t want political differences to poison our fellowship. We decided the most fitting way for us to demonstrate our unity was to gather around the table that matters most, the communion table. We joined a movement called Election Day Communion, a 300-congregation show of unity in the face of political division and unrest.

We did not come to the table of Jesus because we ceased to be Democrats or Republicans there; we came to the table of Jesus because he is not Democrat or Republican. We wanted to proclaim our allegiance is first and foremost to the kingdom of God, as revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Perhaps more importantly, we wanted to remind ourselves where our allegiance should lie.

Around 40 members of Woodland gathered after the polls closed Nov. 8. We read Scripture together. We sang and prayed. We listened to words of wisdom. Then we got out of our seats and gathered around the table. There, shoulder to shoulder and face to face, we took bread and juice and remembered why we are a church. As we sang “For the Healing of the Nations,” we looked up from our hymnals at one another and felt the healing begin in us. It was an incredibly powerful service of worship.

But can I be honest? When I left that gathering, I thought the election would go my way. I hate to admit it, but it felt easy—magnanimous, even—to offer a place at the table to the “losing” side. As I chewed my fingernails in front of the television later that night, I wondered how I could sustain the warm, cozy feelings of unity and charity when, as it turned out, my allegiance was still far too divided.

Both hard and real

Here is how it happened: The next morning, our church opened its doors for English classes, as it does four days each week. Woodlanders took food and flowers to the Center for Refugee Services. I sat down at my desk and made some plans for Sunday school. I prepared to make Advent art with our children. And that evening, as we gathered for our regular Wednesday evening meal, I sat at another table laden with food and looked into the eyes of people on the opposing political team.

What I saw that night was not magic. I saw tables full of people who disagree on many things, but they were reaching out to one another. In some cases, bear hugs followed, but in others it was more tentative. It was kindness. There was tenderness, a softened look in the eye, fewer forceful words. It was hard, and it was real.

It reminded me that communion is not magic, either. It is a practice, something we do over and over again because we know that it shapes and

forms us. We cannot walk away from the table with high-fives and back pats, as if unity is guaranteed by one meal. It is a beginning that requires us to continue its work from bread and grape juice to green bean casserole and sweet tea.

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