

Resolved: I will not hate my neighbor

**BY THE REV. DR.
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Spirit of Life

As the analysis pours in about the reasons for the results of the 2024 U.S. presidential election, there is no shortage of blame going around. And to be sure, there are many (MANY) stones that have paved the way to the place we find ourselves in this moment. My experience of the election in Maine, however, inspires me to place my energy elsewhere — i.e., away from blaming into simply refusing to hate any of my neighbors, and recommitting myself to love.

I was privileged to participate in a new Poll Chaplaincy program sponsored by Multifaith Justice Maine (under the auspices of the Maine People's Alliance and in partnership with the League of Women Voters and Disability Rights Maine). Poll chaplains, a group of trained religious leaders (both lay and ordained) from a variety of traditions, were present at several Maine polling locations simply to support citizens as they voted. Let me tell you about my experience.

I took seriously our charge to serve as a peaceful nonpartisan presence, and to bear witness to the spark of dignity within every person there. Due to the undeniable polarization of our country, the intense fear many were feeling about the potential for violence, and my own marginalized identity, I was prepared for this to be difficult. Surprisingly, it wasn't.

For the better part of election day, I watched a steady stream of people come to the polls to vote their conscience. For the most part, I had no idea their party affiliation nor how they voted. They were women and men, young and old, black and

white, English-speaking and using translation services, and of various and sundry shapes and sizes. These things I could observe. I also know that my neighbors that day included great diversity along spectrums of ability, gender, sexuality, class, health status, religion and education; not to mention the range of emotions, dreams, and needs each person represented. One thing about them was true across the board: Every single one of them was my neighbor. And, I really meant it every single time I said, "Thank you for voting!" (even knowing that some of those people were voting against my self-interest and that of my beloveds).

What was most clear to me at the end of my shift as a poll chaplain? I do not and will not hate my neighbors. It turns out this simple acknowledgment was the thing I most needed to remember. I hope it will free me to move through the morass of other feelings, so I can identify what I am called to be and do next as I continue to work for collective liberation.

As a minister in a faith tradition that centers love, it should not surprise me that this is the lesson I needed to return to — we must invest our hearts in love and not in hate. If we want to bring about love in the world, we cannot do it with hearts or imaginations constricted by hate. Hate is too easy a response, even if I understand the appeal it can have when it is publicly rewarded and sanctioned. In the season ahead, I am resolved to resisting hate and doubling down on love for all of my neighbors, without exception.

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