
From the Pastor's Desk

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The Church and the 2016 Election

As a pastor, I dread election season. We have become such a divided nation, and the divide seems to have gotten more bitter over the past few election cycles, even sometimes spilling over and touching the fellowship of the church. It's not so bad for some churches, where nearly everyone shares a political perspective, but United Methodists have always included people from all sides. I've sometimes thought that our denominational motto should be: "The United Methodist Church – Cancelling Each Other's Votes Since 1968."

What makes it so hard is that the two sides (Conservative-Evangelical-Republican vs Liberal-Progressive-Democrat) can both be supported biblically and morally. The two sides choose to emphasize different passages of scripture and have different theological foundations, but neither side is just wrong. Good, dedicated, committed, faithful Christians hold each perspective, and most of the time it doesn't make any difference. People with different political views worship together, work side-by-side in the Personal Needs Closet, sing together in the choir, and gather together at the Lord's Table for Communion. It's just during the crazy time of elections that our different political and theological slants become divisive. As I said, I dread election season.

But this year has been weird, hasn't it? The differences that have divided us for the past century or more – having to do with the appropriate size and



"I met those of our society who had votes in the ensuing election, and advised them, 1. To vote, without fee or reward, for the person they judged most worthy: 2. To speak no evil of the person they voted against: And, 3. To take care their spirits were not sharpened against those that voted on the other side."

— John Wesley, October 6, 1774

role of government, taxes, welfare, regulation of business, etc. – almost seem forgotten in the press of issues having to do with globalization, immigration, trade agreements, and widespread suspicion of everyone in the government. My own sense is that the new politics has arisen from deep anxiety over the changing ethnic make-up of America and worry about how the new global economy will effect us, but I've been wrong in every projection I've made about this election, so please don't listen to me.

So I have no idea what to say about this election and the church. Will it be more divisive? Less divisive? I don't know. So I've decided to let John Wesley speak for me, in this selection from his journals: