



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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Election 2016: An Imperfect Choice in an Imperfect World

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*I write this piece peering into the dark of the future, puzzled and worried.
I can't say what will happen, but I trust that God is alive in this moment too*

EXPERIENCE

As I travel around the country I have encountered a variety of responses to this presidential election cycle. I've met families whose food stamps (and food security) have been reduced by state policies, and they don't know how they will get by. I've met a woman in Kansas who was very worried that her daughter would never pay off the debt from college but was committed to making sure her daughter had an education. In Seattle I met a waitress in her early 40's raising two children who told me that her wages are not enough for anything but the daily bills, even with the raise that Seattle voted on earlier this year. She said that when she has an unexpected bill she has to pawn something to get the money to pay it. It is abundantly clear that there are so many families walking on the edge of survival.

I feel slightly frantic that many people are so economically vulnerable while the few amass even more wealth and income. My heart breaks that we can't fix the broken immigration system. I weep with the number of people who are homeless in our nation and know that we can do better. It is difficult to read the morning newspaper and see the anguish of violence.

This reality has bubbled over into our elections this year. I've met people who say that they will vote for Donald Trump because they have "had it with politicians." I've met people who support Secretary Clinton and tell me that "she can't lose." And in New York City I met some women who said that if the election were between Clinton and Trump, they wouldn't vote. It is this temptation to absent ourselves from the "perfect" candidate or "perfect" election that I have been asked to explore. How do we act when we have serious reservations about each candidate?

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SOCIAL ANALYSIS

For the last few years, NETWORK has studied what is going on in our nation and world. We have come to see that the income and wealth disparity fueled by individualism is the result of federal policies and some global developments. The good news about this is that policies got us into this mess; policies can get us out...if we create the political will to make change.

The policies that have created this mess include: 1) income tax policies that tax high earners not at 80% (the top bracket after World War II) but 33% (with Republican proposals to reduce it further); 2) a minimum wage that has stayed flat for years and thus kept other wages low; 3) undermining of unions so that workers do not have power to negotiate; 4) lack of adaptation to women in the workplace with no protection for equal pay for equal work. Additionally, there are policies that undermine people's ability to vote, to get healthcare, to access housing and to fully integrate into our society as documented immigrants. It is no secret that these are our stumbling blocks, and the willful refusal of Congress to address these issues has widened the gaps in our nation.

It is this daily struggle of reality that has resulted in the anger that we see in this election cycle. Many white men and women in the middle and lower economic classes find themselves not living up to the "American Dream" as they were taught. They do not see that it is policies that have created the problem. Rather, they blame it on people around them: immigrants and people of color.

Their anguish is fueling the tea party-style anger of the Trump campaign. Additionally, Mr. Trump himself seems to enjoy fueling this rage. His incapacity to create policy or a thoughtful approach beyond the "huge" soundbite has many terrified.

On the other side, Secretary Clinton has lived in a protected bubble since the 1980's. She has not lived the struggle of most Americans. This has led her to be perceived as saying only what is approved by a focus group. Some question her judgment in the use of her e-mail and her veracity generally. Others question her staying with her husband in the midst of various sex scandals.

In the face of the anguish of our time and this election cycle, what do we do? Should we sit it out when neither candidate "measures up"?

REFLECTION

In this time I have been meditating on Ezekiel 37 and Yahweh's question "Can these bones live?" It seems that our nation is strewn with the dry bones of our people often living without much hope or joy. I feel that the political choices are similarly limited. And the question becomes for us and our democracy: Can these bones live?

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will change
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The word of our God then challenges us to walk up and down among the bones and call out "Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these, that they may live." For me, this means that we are called to the challenging work of walking up and down among those who are "dead" to the common good and community. We are challenged to pray for the breath of the Spirit to come and enter in. In these challenging times we do not have the luxury of individualism. We cannot say to ourselves, "I can sit this one out because I don't have my perfect choice." Only the divine knows if these bones can live, but we are called to prayer, love, and action.

Pope Francis said last year in Bolivia that "The future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of the people." This means that in our democracy, each one of us has a responsibility to be engaged and take action. The only way our world will change is if we act.

ACTION

In short, when faced with candidates who do "not measure up" we are called to pray and act. We must vote—the common good demands it. Our vote (and then our advocacy after the election) is what our nation and world needs. Maybe these tough choices will be new breath for these dry bones. Our faith challenges us to make the best choice we can...and then ACT! We all need to vote on November 8.