

BELIEF *By The Rev. Kathryn Barlow-Williams*

Hours-long wait to vote at church yields a miracle

When I saw the line wrapped around the church and learned there was an hour wait, I almost left.

A mental fencing match clanked in my head:

"I'm tired. It has been a long day."

"Think of all the people in the world who would love this opportunity."

"The line is so long, and it is not moving at all."

"Your great-grandmother didn't have this right."

"My vote will hardly count anyway."

In the end, the responsible voice in my head won the duel.

I got in line. The longer we stood, the more agitated people grew. Some walked away.

Frustration drilled in my head like a jackhammer. "This



Barlow-Williams writes that the country needs gracious hospitality this election season.

is America, for heaven's sakes! Why is this not better organized? Couldn't they have predicted a high turnout?"

Never mind that I did not volunteer to help at the polls to manage the chaos.

An hour passed. I had moved about 6 feet forward. A friend texted to say I should go home because the primaries already had been called for Ted Cruz and Hillary Clinton. The mental fencing clanked in my head again.

"The presidential race is

over."

"But the local elections are not. Plus, I've waited an hour. How much longer could it be?"

After two hours, we finally entered the building. By that time, the boiling agitation of the waiting crowd had simmered to resignation.

Once inside, we could sit down. A youth pastor brought out hot popcorn and pitchers of water. A woman asked him for chocolate. He disappeared and returned with a gallon of chocolate milk. "This is the only chocolate I could find."

The woman said, "I'll take it."

"Anyone else want some?" the young man asked. People raised their hand. One woman said she hadn't had chocolate milk in years. "It tastes like

being a kid again," she said.

As we shared our snack, we also shared our lives. Old and young, male and female, wealthy and poor, we created our own political party.

Celebrating an uncommon but nonetheless sacred communion of popcorn and chocolate milk, something big happened. Though political divisions were clearly among us, not one insult was hurled. Bridges of respect were built as we waited to achieve the one thing we had in common: a desire to vote.

After three hours and 20 minutes, I finally stood before the voting booth. Some might say it was a waste of time, but they would be dreadfully wrong. Not only did I get to vote, I got to participate in a miracle. Because of one

church's hospitality, people from all walks of life found a common ground on which to stand. When that happens, the church is at its best, and common ground becomes Holy Ground.

Our country is in desperate need of gracious hospitality during this election season. Therefore, let's create a diverse "political party" where no one is insulted and everyone is welcome to share in an unusual but sacred communion. It's time to fill buckets of grace and cups of childhood wonder so that we can live on Holy Ground.

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