

The fact of coexistence

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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I don't get that excited about the perennial calls for civility in politics. Treating others with respect is important, and I certainly have no *problem* with political discourse that's even friendly and good-humored. But it's not clear that the latter serves any purpose beyond itself—that it builds understanding or encourages useful moderation or enables compromise. Chatting may be generally preferable to yelling, but it's not really a solution to division and gridlock.

I do, however, appreciate timely reminders that our neighbors include those we disagree with. This is a fact, after all, not just a gauzy sentiment—and it's a fact that has serious implications for us as citizens and as Christians.

Last night in Charlotte there were several points where the gloves came off, notably in former Ohio governor Ted Strickland's speech. (I don't really object to the ordained person on the program giving 'em the most hell, though I didn't love the way he [turned the synoptics' "treasure in heaven" saying into an "America first" zinger](#).) But there were also two speakers who went out of their way to remind listeners that their opponents exist as more than just opponents.

The first, Rep. Jared Polis, began with a bit of super-patriotism—he's an American before he's Jewish, gay or a father? Really?—but soon [offered this](#):

I don't just ask my fellow Americans to respect my relationship with my partner Marlon and my role as a father to our son. I also ask them to respect the Christian family concerned about decaying moral values and crass commercialism. I ask them to respect the difficult decision of a single mother to bring a child into this world, because of her heartfelt beliefs.

And it is why we must help that courageous woman have the support she needs after her child is born. We celebrate Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs, even Republicans, because this is their future, too.

Well said. Then at the end of the night, Blood:Water director Jena Nardella gave the benediction. Another caveat (sorry): I think the practice of having religious leaders pray at political conventions is, while perhaps not the gravest threat facing church or state, at least a bit silly. But I liked much of [what Nardella had to say](#), especially this:

I pray for our president, Barack Obama. May he know your presence, oh God, as he continues to serve as a leader of this nation, as a husband to Michelle, and as father to his daughters. Help him to seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with you.

I pray as well for Governor Mitt Romney. May he know your presence, oh God, as he continues to serve as a leader, as a husband to Ann, and as a father to his sons and their families. Help him to seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with you.

The choice of Micah 6:8 is a good one; it's a verse that presents itself as a summary of the life of faith, from a text that is sacred for both candidates, and its implications are sharply political but not partisan. But I was particularly struck by the wisdom of praying the same thing for each of them, rather than trying for something more particular. (It reminded me of how happy my wife and I were, in an age of custom his-and-her wedding vows, to take the exact same vows.) Obama and Romney have very different backgrounds, personalities and visions for the country, but they both identify themselves as followers of the God of the Bible. According to the Bible, this God has already shown both of them what is good and what is required of them. In a politically divided environment, that's an appropriate and important prayer.

Reminders of those things we have in common don't often lead to having more of them. Brian Brown and Dan Savage found this out recently when they had their dinner debate, an event that seemed to leave each of them unchanged—and [unsatisfied with the experience](#). But I think that's setting the bar too high. I [watched](#) the debate, and while it's true that being civil and friendly didn't lead to a substantively different conversation, reining in the rhetoric did actually help clarify their arguments a little (however frustrating it felt to them).

More importantly, the event highlighted for viewers that conservative Catholic social warriors and married gay sex columnists coexist in society—and share the need for food and drink and family. Not that they *can* share things in common, a sweet possibility that might make us be nicer or something; that they *do* share things in common, a simple and inevitable fact. Simple, but easy to forget.