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## Surviving a post-election Thanksgiving: Tom Krattenmaker

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*Clever retorts over pumpkin pie won't change anyone's mind. But we can listen and be heard.*



(Photo: Getty Images)

If you want to make sure the scorched-earth election doesn't morph into a scorched-earth Thanksgiving dinner, consider borrowing the Native American tradition of the "talking stick." That's what minister Nancy Taylor and her congregation at Old South Church in Boston are doing to prepare for the holiday.

By this method, all those in the conversation listen silently to whoever holds the real or metaphorical stick and, thus, the floor. No interrupting, arguing, rolling your eyes, or sighing in exasperation. Eventually it's your turn, and you receive the same consideration, while remembering that the stick, like the opportunity to speak, is not to be used to bash anyone.

Actual stick or not, this is a good way to approach the holiday, and to make the most of an aspect of Thanksgiving gatherings for which we should be truly grateful this year: the rare opportunity to interact with people different from us and our usual company.

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A study by the Public Religion Research Institute (<http://www.prii.org/research/divide-americas-future-1950-2050/>) finds that nearly half of white working-class Americans, for instance, report having no one in their immediate social network who supported Hillary Clinton for president. In my own blue state network — blue in terms of depression, now, as well as voting tendencies — I encounter few Donald Trump supporters. This is a shame because, as the Dalai Lama and Arthur C. Brooks recently pointed out in a commentary (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/04/opinion/dalai-lama-behind-our-anxiety-the-fear-of-being-unneeded.html>), "The problems we face (in society) cut across conventional categories; so must our dialogue, and our friendships."

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(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2016/08/21/jesus-teaches-love-donald-trump-column/88966600/>)

Our encounters with our political opposites, on the rare occasions when they do take place, are often those of the Facebook variety, frequently involving upper-case letters and ending in unfriendings. (IT'S NOT THE CASE THAT SOMETHING YOU SAY ON SOCIAL MEDIA IS AUTOMATICALLY TRUE IF WRITTEN IN CAPITAL LETTERS.)

When Taylor asked her Boston congregation whether their families were divided over this election, three-quarters of them raised their hands. This points to the likelihood that many of us are headed toward Thanksgiving gatherings where we'll be sharing the table with family members who voted for the other candidate.

Isn't it best to ignore politics for the sake of politesse and argument avoidance? Shouldn't we keep the chatter confined to football and what the kids are doing?

Maybe, if our feelings of anger or cocky triumphalism are still running hot. If you're a Clinton supporter and your Trump-loving parent starts in about the evils of political correctness — and you are simply not up for *that* conversation — play the Thanksgiving card, advises psychologist and author Deborah Sandella. Point out that Thanksgiving is a day for gratitude, not political arguments. And if you're the one tempted to do the goading, give it a rest.

But if we're in the right frame of mind and able to muster some curiosity, Thanksgiving presents a grand opportunity. True, we are not going to change our father-in-law's mind with our clever retorts over pumpkin pie. But we can listen and learn about how things look from the other side. And we can have the valuable experience of having our own views heard and considered.

Orchestras are too important to fail: Column

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2016/11/16/symphony-orchestras-national-endowment-arts-column/93487116/>)

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Trump enthusiasts, you might contemplate the fact that some of the people with whom you are gathering at Thanksgiving are devastated by the election result and thinking Trump and his supporters are all bad, only bad. Prove your Clinton-loving relative wrong. Treat him or her with graciousness.

Clinton supporters might do something that's even harder. We might admit that despite our supposed sophistication, we missed the juggernaut that Trump activated and rode to his Electoral College victory. We might concede that despite our confidence in a Clinton victory and our supposed superior understanding of the world, we, like so many pollsters and analysts, were wrong.

Family ties and the love they represent are too valuable to squander over an election, says Christian Piatt, author of the new book *Leaving A-Holiness Behind* (<https://www.amazon.com/Leaving-Holiness-Behind-Pious-Not-So-Pious/dp/1945455993>), in which Piatt urges his fellow Christians toward more gracious interactions with those of different beliefs. Piatt, a progressive, is challenging himself to hold that thought high in his mind as he heads into his own Thanksgiving interactions with conservative relatives.

That's a lead we ought to follow on Thursday, whichever way we voted on Nov. 8. In real life, after all, we can't unfriend our family.

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