

# A Modest Proposal For A Contentious Election

Updated: Nov. 01, 2020, 5:25 a.m. | Published: Nov. 01, 2020, 5:25 a.m.



A California United Methodist church flies a banner that says "compassion matters." In a guest column today, Lori Wald calls on voters to find a friend or colleague who will be voting the other way this election, and make a pact of compassion and concern, whichever presidential candidate wins.

[Opinion](#)

**By Lori Wald**

**Guest Columnist, cleveland.com**

CHAGRIN FALLS, Ohio -- My father, to his utter disbelief, somehow raised me as a feminist. This meant our politics usually collided. As he grew older and, at times, grew pricklier, our political discussions became more and more polarizing for both of us. We resolved nothing.

On the morning of Nov. 9, 2016, I woke up gobsmacked by the election result and had one burning desire— to pretend that yesterday had not happened. I pulled the blanket back over my head and began strategizing how to cancel every commitment that awaited me that day.

My phone vibrated. It was my father. At the time he was 94 years old, my mother 90. If he called, I always answered.

He spoke just three words: Are you OK?

I couldn't believe it. After millions of incendiary political discussions, shouting matches, statistics and quotes and absolutely undeniable facts that supported each of our respective sides, he was calling not to gloat, but to see if I was OK, which, in fact, I was not.

I explained to him how raw and betrayed I felt. Just a year earlier, I'd emerged from a destructive marriage and this election result felt almost as personal and equally as hurtful. My father listened, sympathized and waited nearly a week before he launched back into his righteous political fury towards everything I held dear.



Lori Wald is a mindfulness meditation coach/facilitator.

Election 2020 looks different for me. My father died a couple of years ago and I've remarried. Society has become even more divisive, many relationships have unraveled over politics, and the culture of contempt is thriving. All of us have someone with whom we share DNA or a workplace or a decades long friendship who supports the other candidate. Maybe you talk to this person every day, maybe you have agreed not to talk about politics or maybe you've decided it's best not to talk at all. None of us has figured out a way to have a productive political discussion with the other side.

Recently, I listened to a [conversation](#) between Arthur Brooks and Tim Shriver. Brooks is the author of a book titled, "[Love Your Enemies](#)," and Shriver has formed [an initiative called "Unite."](#) a project aimed at finding ways for the United States to become, well, more united. Brooks explained how all of us, on either side of the spectrum, assume our own motives are inspired by love and that our opponent's ideology springs from hate. This leaves us in a state of contempt for each other. What we really need is to find compassion.

Very soon, half the country is going to wake up heartbroken and scared and angry. Brooks suggested a radical concept for the winners: Be magnanimous. What might change if, before the election, each of us picked one person we're connected to who is voting for the other candidate and made a vow to them? After the election results are settled, if my candidate is declared the winner, I will call you and simply ask how you are. I will listen compassionately to what you have to say. If your candidate is declared the winner, I hope you'll do the same for me.

This is not a solution to heal our fractured society; it is simply a wish to make an incremental difference in beginning to repair our personal and challenging relationships with those with whom we disagree. Just because something is subtle does not mean it's not powerful.

As for the upcoming election, I'm bracing myself for the possibility of a difficult result. I hope there might be someone out there from the other side to call and ask me: Are you OK?

*Lori Wald is at work on a memoir and is a mindfulness meditation coach/facilitator. Her website is [nothingdoingdaily.com](http://nothingdoingdaily.com).*

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