Dear Friends, Family, and Colleagues ..

A day early ... but a very Happy New Year to each of you and your families!

First, a little reiteration from my last update where I suggested the hope of  *"... re-discover(ing) our abundant common ground in bridging the chasm that divides us."*

The metaphor of stadium skyboxes as an example of today's separation especially resonated with several readers with one saying we should *"look for what connects us and let go of things we don't like (about others)."*

Some others indicated that this is much easier said than done and that's why I offered my Blessed Sacrament Parish Council experience in the '80's as a possible model of how to do this.

To expand upon that, a couple of stories. Our Parish Council at that time provided a forum occasionally for the so-called "right" and "left" voices to meet at the council table (as well as other committee meetings) to discuss particular social justice topics and perhaps lead to a call to action or advocacy.

One specific recollection that comes to mind was when our pastor recommended that the church basement be utilized for an overnight shelter for the homeless, one of the first ever in Rochester. This was not without some protest, yet a remnant of this initiative lives on today over 40 years later with the longstanding Southeast Rochester Catholic Community Supper Program located at Blessed Sacrament. As a footnote, tragically Homelessness still thrives in our city and across the country.

Another one I recall was when Father Phillip Berrigan, a famous peace activist at the time (along with his brother Daniel who was also a Jesuit priest), was invited by our pastor to speak at the parish. The church was packed as were the sidewalks outside with protesters including several friends! Yet everything remained peaceful and life went on.

With some courage and a "common ground" attitude, the same is possible today at our churches today and other forums. And at the same time,we can still be vigilant and wary about our political guardians irrespective of party affiliation as a democracy expects. There might be some balancing required, but if a commitment to *"... re-discover(ing) our abundant common ground in bridging the chasm that divides us"*  can be attained and sustained, miracles can happen and the impossible can become possible. Our churches are a good place to start.

A related thought is something Robert Reich said in a recent article: "*The biggest divide in America today is not between “right” and “left,” or between Republicans and Democrats. It’s between****democracy and oligarchy****. The old labels — “right” and “left” — prevent most people from noticing they’re being shafted. The way to overcome oligarchy is for the rest of us to join together and win America back, as we did in response to the oligarchy that dominated America’s last Gilded Age."*

As recent events vividly portrayed regarding the government funding negotiations before Christmas, we are at risk of becoming an oligarchy defined as a small group of people having control of a country, typically unelected and composed of the super wealthy, or billionaire class, who want more money, power, and influence.

The rest of "us" no matter whatever our political or non-political leanings may be, are all residing in another tent (outside of the skyboxes) where common ground can be mutually discovered  and discussed to counter the motivations of a very powerful, but numerically very small, group ... the oligarchs.

To quote from an article in the January 2025 Atlantic magazine *"... politics is best when it's face-to-face and based on respect, that most people are complicated and even persuadable, and that .... one can 'see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise' (Fitzgerald quote)."*

See you at the middle of the bridge where there is common ground!

Here are a couple of reflective links this month from Fr. Richard Rohr for your New Year's consideration:

* <https://email.cac.org/t/d-e-ssuhkl-tlkrtkjkyd-yh/>
* <https://email.cac.org/t/d-e-smtlil-tlkrtkjkyd-yd/>

And another is a link to an essay I've written on my own personal journey regarding change, specifically the 'Spirituality of Change' . It's about my post-publication work over the past three years and is posted on my blog site at  <https://www.wewynneauthor.com/2024/12/24/change-a-personal-story-of-transformation/>.

It's a little longer than other posts and if you do read it, I hope you enjoy it and I'd appreciate any comments.

In conclusion, 2025 promises to be a fascinating year of discoveries on many levels. As we begin this journey, let us pray that it brings the peace we desire for ourselves, our families, our country and the world. We have the whole year ahead of us to make this hope a reality!

Peace and in hope ... Bill

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