News



Bishop John P. Dolan of Phoenix offers the final blessing at the end of an ecumenical Prayer Vigil for Peace Sept. 9, 2024, at the Conventual Church of Our Lady of the Angels in Paradise Valley. It was the first of three such prayer services to be held in Arizona before the Nov. 5 elections. Dolan challenged those attending to be peacemakers during this time of "great tensions" over the 2024 elections. (OSV News/Tony Gutiérrez)

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Therese Skelly has personally lost friends over political divisions.

"I've had a lot of pain because people are so polarized," Skelly said.

She recalled that when former President Donald Trump, the Republican presidential nominee, survived an assassination attempt July 13, a friend said it was "too bad that they missed."

"That's not Christ-like," she recalled telling her friend. (On Sept. 15, Secret Service agents thwarted a second assassination attempt against Trump on his golf course in West Palm Beach, Florida.)

"It's OK if we have differences but it's not OK to hate each other," Skelly told OSV News. "Everybody gets to have their own vote, their own opinion, but shouldn't hate each other or cancel each other or cause harm."

Skelly, who attends a Unity church, attended an ecumenical Prayer Vigil for Peace Sept. 9 at the Conventual Church of Our Lady of the Angels, where her aunt is a parishioner.

Bishop John P. Dolan of Phoenix led the prayer service — the first of three being held throughout the state ahead of this year's Nov. 5 elections — with six of his counterparts from other Christian denominations in Arizona. A Lutheran church in Tucson will host the second vigil and a Disciples of Christ church in Sun City will host the third.

"With these days leading up to this election, we know that there's a great tension within this nation, and in our state and county and our cities," Dolan said in his reflection at the service.

Referencing the hymn, "They'll Know We Are Christian by Our Love," the bishop said that as Christians we are called to make those words "concrete." He challenged

those attending to be peacemakers during this time.

"It's so easy for us to be divided. It's hard to love. It's hard to be at peace," Dolan said. "Peacemaking begins with our fundamental faith in our Lord. So, let them know that we are Christians by our love, by our peace and by our desire for faith and fidelity to each other and to our God."

Bishop Carlo A. Rapanut of the Desert Southwest Conference of the United Methodist Church, led the ecumenical gathering in praying the Prayer of St. Francis, inspired by the life of the patron saint of peace. Although Catholic, St. Francis is venerated across multiple Christian communities, and the prayer is often prayed in Methodist churches, the bishop said.

"It really tugs at the core of what it means to work for peace, and that is to offer oneself to that work of peace," he said. "I love how it spans the opposites. 'Where there is hatred, sow love.' It's almost a call and response, calling people to, 'If this is what the world is doing, then may I be on the other side.'"

Describing Jesus Christ as a "reframe," Rapanut noted that the Lord would speak in a pattern of "You've heard it said … but I say to you."

"This is our way of living in the footsteps of Jesus, of saying, 'You've heard it said that the way of politics is the way of violence and divisiveness,'" he said. "But I say to you, we say to you, Jesus says to you, that that is not the way. The way is really of peace."

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Poor Clare Sister Judith Ann Crosby, who was on a personal retreat at the Franciscan Renewal Center attached to Our Lady of the Angels, told OSV News that people practicing whatever their faith tradition may be will lead to peace.

"As Franciscans, peace is very important to us. But beyond that, the political climate just needs prayer," Judith Ann, who is based out of Great Falls, Montana, said. "We're all children of God, even the people that we don't like their attitudes or their political stance or anything else — at the bottom, we're all children of God. We're loved."

The idea for the prayer vigil came during one of the monthly gatherings that the bishops and regional leaders have together. With the elections coming up and increasing polarization, they wanted to make a "public witness" for peace, the Rev. Jay Hartley, regional minister and president of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Arizona, told OSV News.

Hartley had just returned from Belfast, Northern Ireland, where he learned that the church remained silent as more than 3,500 were killed during the "Troubles," violent sectarian conflict 1968-1998 between Protestants and Catholics.

"With the tension and conflict around this election and the division that we feel, and I didn't want to have a group 30 years later saying, 'the church was silent,'" said Hartley. "There is nothing in Christianity that argues for demonization of each other, that argues for violence. It is a religion of peace and unity, and we're called to that."

Sun City Christian Church, which falls under Hartley's jurisdiction, will host the third prayer vigil Nov. 4.

Bishop Deborah K. Hutterer of the Grand Canyon Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, said she felt inspired by the participation in the prayer vigil from the laity.

"It helps me see how we're yearning for places to come together, how we might be the people of God, and how we can disagree, we can hold differing opinions, and yet, how we can have a common goal of caring for each other," she said.

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, which falls under her jurisdiction, will host the second prayer vigil Oct. 14.

Referencing the evening's theme, "Faith over Fear" taken from Mark 5:36, Dolan told OSV News that during such a politically tense year, Christians — and Catholics in particular — can't forget that God is bigger than political outcomes. Instead, we should recall Christ's words that "fear is useless," the bishop said.

"We tend to focus on division, and a lot of that is based on fear. If we can focus on peace and focus on de-escalating that fear, that's going to be good," Dolan said. "We're asking that individuals take that and run with it and make that their daily prayer between now and Nov. 5 and then beyond."

This story appears in the **Election 2024** feature series. View the full series.