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The next mayor of New York?

Maureen Fiedler | Oct. 4, 2013 NCR Today

The latest polling reported in *The New York Times* [1] shows that the Democratic candidate for mayor of New York, Bill de Blasio, has 68 percent support, compared to Republican candidate Joseph Lhota at 19 percent.

What's amazing to me about all this? I actually know Bill de Blasio and worked with him at the Quixote Center in the 1980s, when we were both trying to stop the Reagan wars in Central America, especially the contra war against the people of Nicaragua.

Religious people and groups of all kinds, especially Catholics with millions of co-religionists in Central America, were involved in those days with Witness for Peace, which educated people by sending delegations; the Pledge of Resistance, which coordinated nonviolent civil disobedience to protest funding of the wars; various solidarity groups; and a congressional lobbying group that worked to change the minds in Congress (and did -- "contra aid" was cut).

Bill de Blasio worked on another pillar of that movement: the Quest for Peace, a large project of the Quixote Center that organized cargo containers of humanitarian aid for victims of the contra war in Nicaragua. It was "aid with a purpose." Cargo containers were regularly parked in front of a congressperson's district office as they were packed with aid. It was all followed by a press conference. Bill organized a great deal of that effort.

I have no idea what religion, if any, Bill de Blasio professes today. But his campaign does not disown, or even ignore, those early years in spite of articles calling him a "leftie" or even a pseudo-communist. Rather, he cites the religious nature of that movement and the Jesuit roots of the Quixote Center, founded by Jesuit Fr. Bill Callahan, Jesuit Fr. Bill Michelman and Dolly Pomerleau.

His overall platform emphasizes "the least of these," those at the bottom of the economic ladder in New York. He cares. He cared in the 1980s and has apparently never lost that spirit.

If he can retain that integrity, he's someone to watch -- whatever his religion these days.

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[1] http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/04/nyregion/new-york-city-mayor-poll-bill-de-blasio-joseph-lhota.html?_r=0