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Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

\"We, though many, are one ...\"

Pat Marrin | Nov. 3, 2009 NCR Today

"We, though many, are one ..." --Rom 12:5

I like the little stickers they give you at the polling place for showing up to vote. I wear mine all day, glad I got to participate.

The common good is one of the basic social justice principles, and I apply this to ballot issues that may not affect me directly but serve the general good. Retired seniors do this when they support school bonds or sales tax initiatives for projects they won't benefit from personally but that are good for the community.

Voting is an amazing exercise in the peaceful transfer of power, whether it is a turnover at the federal level or the election of city commission or school board. Controversial issues are thrown into the public forum where persuasion and consensus decide the outcome instead of threats or violence. Social change evolves through the often messy process of self-government instead of by edict or civil war or coups. Even if elections are fraught with manipulation and propaganda, at the end of the day, everyone got to mark their ballot, have their say.

The relationship between voting and nonviolence was eloquently expressed in this quote from Taylor Branch in describing Dr. Martin Luther King's commitment to nonviolence during his years of struggle for voting rights, not just as a religious idea but as the essence of democratic process:

"Nonviolence is an orphan among democratic ideas. It has nearly vanished from public discourse even though the most basic element of free government -- the vote -- has no other meaning. Every ballot is a piece of nonviolence, signifying hard-won consent to raise politics above firepower and bloody conquest" (from the preface to *At Canaan's Edge*, Volume 3 of *America During the King Years*).

This has implications for settling local questions and for American policy and intentions in Iraq and Afghanistan, for the resolution of the standoff in Honduras, for every fledgling democracy or autocratic state, and even for life in our Church. Human dignity lies in self-determination, ownership follows on participation.

My little sticker makes me think about these things.

Source URL (retrieved on *05/06/2015 - 00:50*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/we-though-many-are-one