

---

## *Feelings in Our Country*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by Dean Sam Candler**

I was twenty-two years old when I presented myself, eager and earnest, to become a priest in The Episcopal Church. In those days, the pre-seminary discernment period lasted a full year and a half, and it was highly therapeutic. Over and over again, my supervisors implored me to get in touch with my feelings. “What are you feeling?” they asked. “How do you feel?” As someone who enjoyed using my head and thinking about things, I was startled to realize how little substance mattered.

I had thought my vocation to be a priest was about my belief, and about the substance of my character and history. But I got it. “Getting in touch with my feelings” was good for my young faith. I became far better able to acknowledge sadness and loss, confusion and pain, and the more embarrassing feelings of anger and fear. I realized how often anger and sadness were lying just under the surface of whatever I was saying. Acknowledging and expressing those feelings was messy, and scary, but it was good for me. I realized I could own my feelings, but still be bigger than they were.

I remember all this as I reflect upon the results of our country’s long presidential campaign, and this week’s election. My summary is this: We have had a campaign and election obsessed with expressing our feelings. Like many of us—Democrats and Republicans alike—I have been shocked by the coarse and crude, raging and rude, comments during our campaign. And I don’t mean just from one of our candidates, the one who is our president-elect. When I asked many a citizen about the campaign, I was likely to receive a torrent of anger or dismay from either side.

I could not believe how little substance mattered in this presidential campaign. I believe Donald Trump is our president-elect because he tapped into our country’s latent feelings of anger and loss, fear and dis-respect. Many of us Americans do feel those things, and some of us felt we had no other way to express those feelings except with a vote. Trump appealed to our inner anger and frustration, even to our envy and jealousy that—no matter who we are, rich or poor—things do not always go our way. Sufficient evidence or consistent substance were not necessary.

In an opposite way, the candidacy of Hillary Clinton seemed unable to tap into any feelings at all. She was often characterized as aloof and unapproachable. Again, the substance of what she was offering the country seemed to matter only secondarily to the way people felt. She seemed the most free and available a few days before the election when the rain began to pour during her speech. With wet hair and clothes, she raised her hands in a most emotionally available way; it was unusual. People just didn’t like her, in much the same degree that people just didn’t like Donald Trump.

But in a contest of free-flowing and ungoverned feelings across the country, and with erratic substance, Trump was elected. I admit that this entire campaign has saddened and angered me. I have especially been horrified by the ways that our country’s anger has been expressed by racism, and misogyny, and anti-immigration, and even violence. And I continue to lament the fundamentalism and absolutism I hear from both parties, fundamentalism of both the conservative and the liberal variety. Our country is better, much better, than that. For weeks, I have been looking forward to the days after November 8, 2016. Now they are here.

Like all of us, I have good friends who voted in different ways on November 8. Whether we voted for Donald Trump or

Hillary Clinton, I pray that our country can be bigger than our feelings of anger, loss, and fear. As important as our feelings are, our country is bigger than our feelings. Indeed, our country is bigger than any one person. Our country, unified and loyal, is an amazing and diverse community of strength and hope. "You Can't Go Home Again," said Thomas Wolfe, and he was right. But, with God's strength, we can always go forward; and we are always creating something new. In the grace and love of God, we can be faithful citizens in a country with liberty and justice for all, "pledging to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our Sacred Honor."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

---

© The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.