

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

700 Prospect Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44115-1110
Phone: 216.736.3700
Fax: 216.736.3703



Wally Ryan Kuroiwa
JWM Consultant

Witness for Justice #479

June 7, 2010

A Politics of Competition

Wally Ryan Kuroiwa

Politics is, if nothing else, quite predictable. Even from my tiny window here in the southwestern corner of New Mexico, the drama that is Washington politics shines as predictably as the ever-present New Mexican sun. After twelve years in the justice offices of the United Church of Christ, I have gained a new perspective of our nation's political landscape. And yet, I wonder and lament with the writer of Ecclesiastes, is there anything new under the sun? What I am talking about is the gridlock that dominates the political landscape inside the beltway.

I say this because Washington does not get the intractable outrage that exists on Main Street USA over the inability of our elected politicians to work together. As I sit in the local coffee shop here and share conversation over steaming brew, engaging in the same banter that goes on in millions of similar corner booths throughout America, I hear the same themes as I have in every other place I have been. Why can't they get along? Why can't they get beyond partisan politics? Why are they so beholden to special interests? Why are they more interested in getting re-elected than getting things done?

Barack Obama tapped into this outrage with his rhetoric of change that swept him into office two years ago. I have seen him from afar try to bridge the ideological and political chasm that has dominated Washington politics for too long. And even as he has moved closer to the center—something this progressive thinker finds uncomfortable—he has been met with more resistance than is appropriate. It seems that what is most important is not to solve the problems of our day, but who wins. We are caught up in a culture of competition.

We live in a day when sports have been elevated to a place of supreme importance. I speak as an unabashed fan. I love my favorite teams, win or lose.

I get caught up in the medal frenzy during the Olympics. I root for America in the Ryder Cup golf competition. But it is not only sports. Consider the competition that exists on television, from *The Biggest Loser* to *America's Got Talent*. Everything is being turned into a competition. Subconsciously, I think we have made the public square into a national coliseum, wherein we win or lose. It's "Just win, baby!" as Al Davis, the Oakland Raiders team owner used to chant. But the public square is not a gridiron, and politics cannot be reduced to a game. Throwing out the losers in an election is not the solution. It will only begin with a change of culture and to devise radically new rules to the way we conduct politics, such that the endgame is not winning, but the enabling of the common good. That is what our forebears imagined when they created the new experiment that was America, and it is to that vision that we must return. How we get there needs to be the agenda for our national conversation, and it begins with all of us together.

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,300 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.