

Standing up for love and dignity

The mass killings in Quebec City remind us how real politics can be. But the reality of politics works in both directions.

[TOM KERTES](#) / Feb. 11, 2017 6:00 p.m. / [NEWS](#)

If you're a regular reader of this column, you won't be surprised that I see the political in nearly everything. That's because politics is about relationships and connections, an idea expressed through the concept of *ubuntu*, a Nguni Bantu term internationally popularized by South African leaders Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. According to Tutu, *ubuntu* means "I am human because I belong." This is to say that when we co-recognize each other as fellow human beings we transform ourselves and create shared humanity. Like dignity, *ubuntu* speaks to human entitlement. Nobody grants you humanity and nobody can take it from you. But it must be recognized to be realized in the practical sense.

By political I mean connected, not necessarily partisan. While partisan politics are part of modern life, there is a lot more to politics than factions within elected government. Far more important are the daily details of our lives — how we treat one another, the conversations and stories we share with each other, and the ideas and values that we hold dear. Last week Canada was witness to the tragedy of a mass killing in a Quebec mosque, a hate crime aimed at terrorizing Canadian Muslims. According to the *Globe and Mail*, the murderer was motivated by an "alternative right" ideology, another label for racist nationalism.

The mass killings in Quebec City remind us how real politics can be. But the reality of politics works in both directions. Here at home in Haida Gwaii, we welcome refugees because this reflects our values as a community. We welcome people in need and are enriched by their presence here. Instead of excluding Muslims from majority-Christian countries like Canada, we embrace diversity and treat each other as fully equal in our shared humanity.

I don't understand most of the reasons for the war in Syria. But I do have an understanding of the pain of this war, especially because that war has personally touched people in my community. That I know anything is largely because local community leaders stepped up to the international need to welcome refugees into safe havens. I am deeply appreciative of how they have welcomed refugees to Queen Charlotte, Sandspit, and the rest of Haida Gwaii. Not only because my values are reflected by the work of this welcoming, but also because I've been touched by the newcomers themselves.

When I hear Muslims in Quebec City are being targeted and threatened by violence, my heart goes out to all of my Muslim neighbours — both here in Haida Gwaii and throughout all of Canada. Your presence connects me to the reality of the situation and the need to be better guided by love and a shared sense of humanity. I want to make silent and invisible the calls for hate and exclusion. But I know that I cannot ignore these calls of hatred. We must instead stand up for our values, making clear that we welcome and love all our neighbours.

As an immigrant to Canada, I am grateful and proud to call this my new home. You welcomed me to Canada and for that I am deeply appreciative. In sharp contrast to my original home, America, Canada is leading the way in supporting Syrian refugees (even though much more is needed still). Now with U.S. President Donald Trump's Muslim ban, the American government is shamefully turning its back on people in need. My hope is that Canada continues its commitment to ubuntu, so we can deepen our shared humanity by loving and recognizing each other always.

That said, ubuntu is meaningless if it does not extend to everyone. We are called to do more than speak kind words or oppose hateful ideas. We are also called to act. And in acting, we must remember that newcomers to Canada are not the only people in need. So too are many of our other neighbours. Canada's history of colonial domination is also violent; an affront to human dignity. Let's therefore remain committed to extending and expanding the values of love and dignity to all.



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