



*The Rev. Dr. Arlene K. Nehring*  
*Pastoral Message*  
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### **Our Faith, Our Vote; Our Schools, Our Future**

One of the most important lessons that I learned about voting came from my high school government teacher, Mr. Cook. I remember him asking my senior class, "What is the most important election that you will participate in as an adult?"

Most of us (including me) surmised that a vote for President would be the most important ballot we would cast; but Mr. Cook disabused us of this idea, and argued instead that the most important ballot we would cast would be for school board trustees.

I was puzzled by Mr. Cook's assertion at first, but have come to understand how right he was. Mr. Cook explained that the fewest citizens vote for school board trustees, and yet, these trustees typically have the most influence on our daily lives.

School trustees define school policy and academic curriculum. They hire superintendents, negotiate union contracts, oversee building projects, and decide whether and when schools merge, split, reorganize, or close. If we are homeowners, school trustees influence whether school levies go on the ballot, and how taxes from these levies are spent. If we rent our homes, then the amount of taxes our landlord pays affects our monthly rent. If we are business owners, we depend deeply on the academic preparation that our employees receive in school. If we are raising children, school trustees' decisions have an even more profound effect on our lives, because they are partners with us in shaping our children's futures and the future of our community.

Flash forward 30 years from my high school government class to the midterm elections before us on November 2. Our public schools are being profoundly affected by the State budget crisis. Several local schools are in (or on the brink of) state-mandated improvement programs. Taxes are up and real estate values are down. To make matters worse, some school board meetings are so acrimonious that we don't have to wonder why conflict is an issue in so many of our schools. Could the importance of school board elections be any clearer? I think not. Mr. Cook was right.

Please plan to attend our candidates' forum, "Building Bridges," on Tuesday, October 26, beginning at 6:30 p.m. in Oliver Hall, and vote your conscience on Tuesday, November 2. Encourage others to educate themselves on the issues and candidates, and urge them to vote. If you drive, offer others rides to the polls, or deliver house-bound friends' ballots to the post office or polls.

Our children are counting on us. Their future—and ours—is inextricably bound up in whether and how we vote on Election Day, and how we show up (or don't) at our schools..

*Arlene*



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