

# After the election: Breaking bread across the aisle

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Red/blue pairs on Election Day stood outside polling places. Here, Jim Mayer and Peggy Prichard braved the rain at the Mahomet Public Library location.

It's been several weeks since the election — and just as many since a Braver Angels column ran in this newspaper. In fact, our last column ran on Election Day. The break was by design — to give our writers a much-needed respite from deadlines and to spend time with family over the Thanksgiving holiday.

Now that the election is in the rearview mirror and we've had over a month to mull over the results, we felt it was time to check back in with our readers and provide an update on our activities.

Last week, the Eastern Central Illinois chapter of Braver Angels met for a combined holiday potluck and monthly meeting.

The goal? To break bread and share our thoughts about the election. There is no doubt that we will continue our mission as a bipartisan organization. Fostering better understanding and reducing divisiveness between people with different political views — both on a national and local level — is still our mission.

Braver Angels is made of up people of all political beliefs. As such, we expected a variety of opinions about the election. Some are ecstatic that their candidates won, others disappointed or even devastated that theirs lost.

Even with these varied opinions, the mood at our meeting was not of rancor. Instead, members greeted each other enthusiastically — some with hugs or handshakes. This isn't a group divided by politics. We came together for fellowship, to share our thoughts, good and bad — and discuss the ways we can work together for the common good of our country and community.

Our December meeting accomplished all of that and more. After greeting each other, we loaded up our plates and gathered at small tables to catch up while we enjoyed our shared meal. We discussed many things — and much of it wasn't political.



Braver Angels at their December meeting/holiday potluck talk over post-election thoughts and observations.

We asked about each other's Thanksgivings, families and travel plans. We enjoyed tasting favorite recipes and marveled over culinary skills. The normal things friends talk about — and in our case, friends with different political views.

And after we had eaten our fill — much like a second Thanksgiving meal — we commenced to talking politics. Our co-chairs presented a few questions about the election results to ponder and discuss in our small groups.

What disappointments linger in you?

What makes you feel optimistic?

Or: Are you tired of talking about the election, or even politics in general?

First, the disappointments. Several members were frustrated with how the campaigns were run — on both sides. One person experienced the result as a “punch in the gut.”

On the other hand, there were several optimistic observations:

— A few members felt that it's more likely that we will be tuned in to each other, as we simultaneously find out more about ourselves.

— Someone mentioned that the vice-presidential debate left them feeling optimistic about the potential for candidates actually being civil with each other.

— Another felt it possible that some Republican leaders will exercise independent judgment in response to Donald Trump.

— A few stated that this will be a wake-up call for Democrats, who will look at themselves, and own what happened.

— One thought it likely our capacity and our willingness to look at ourselves has increased, instead of just being angry, or retreating to our silos.

— One sees the potential for the government working better and more collaboratively, given that this was not a landslide and congressional margins are narrow. We might just end up less polarized, making solutions possible.

We discussed the role that young men voting played in the election, the theory of “voting against a party instead of for the other party,” and how many voters chose to stay home.

We talked about how some politicians in the Senate and the House seem genuinely willing to work together. I shared a comment by Pennsylvania Democratoc Sen. John

Fetterman, who stated in an interview about Trump nominees, “I’m not going to pre-hate this. ... I’m open to having a conversation. ... I don’t understand why it’s controversial to say, ‘Let’s have that conversation.’”

Since the election, I’ve been doing a lot of reading about the results. There are so many deep analyses of demographic shifts, how the campaigns worked (or didn’t work) and lots about Cabinet selections. I’m sure there will be no dearth of punditry regarding this election for months to come.

I’ve also done a lot of thinking about friends who were deeply disappointed in the outcome. We had discussed this; no matter the result, there would be many deeply disappointed voters. Several of us had agreed in advance to check on our friends who voted differently and let them know we really do care about their concerns — because that’s the Braver Angels way.

Peggy Prichard is a member of the East Central Illinois chapter of Braver Angels and is a columnist for the News-Gazette. Follow her on Substack at [pprichard.substack.com](https://pprichard.substack.com).

About this series: This is the 19th installment of a [series of “Braver Conversations” columns](#), which appeared every two weeks leading up to November’s election in Town Hall. Braver Angels is a national organization dedicated to bringing Americans together to bridge the partisan divide, with a local presence in East Central Illinois. The public is invited to attend the next Braver Angels meeting at 7 p.m. Jan. 28 at the Champaign Public Library.

### **Post-election thoughts from East Central Illinois Braver Angels:**

— **Mary Dixon:** “I am grateful to be a part of a group where not everyone thinks like me. This group broadens my understanding of the country I live in. If I just stay with like-minded people, I won’t have a full picture.”

— **Lesley Lee Dzik:** “I felt surprise that (Kamala) Harris didn’t win; relief that there wouldn’t be (Donald) Trump protests about the results; gratitude for the lives of unborn Americans whose lives would be more protected without Harris in office; wary of Elon Musk’s future role in Trump’s government; outraged at how much money Harris spent in 100 days of campaigning; cautiously curious about Trump’s future actions; and sobered to pray without ceasing for our president, governors, Congress, judges, leaders, churches and nation to have supernatural wisdom and courage, and to be submitted to God to rule and lead America with truth and justice.”

— **Jim Mayer, Braver Angels ambassador:** “My involvement with Braver Angels has helped me realize just how nuanced and individualized people’s voting decisions can be. And, I’ve learned how red and blue voters who take a chance on open, civil conversation often have much more in common than they imagined. This gives me hope for our country.”

— **Sara Kelley:** “After the election, I have spent time listening to podcasts that give voters a chance to explain why they voted the way they did. This has been really helpful. I was especially curious to understand why people flipped parties for the presidential candidate.

"Just as I have learned through my involvement in BA, we cannot assume how voters — Democrats or Republicans — may think on specific issues. And this naturally influences their votes. We all brought different perspectives and life experiences to the voting booth. And they were reflected on Nov. 5.

“Like many families, mine is politically diverse. Yet, we are committed to our annual Thanksgiving gathering in Michigan. As our group of 18 sat down at the dinner table, the host (my brother-in-law) surprised us with a toast. 'We may have political differences, but let's always remember that family comes first.' The harmony of the clinking wine glasses was music to my ears.”

— **Tony Schutz, Braver Angels co-chair:** “Braver Angels has helped me to recognize how nuanced political discussions and topics are. The media wants us to think there are only black and white issues, or right and left — but you can learn much more about your own point of view by first listening to others' points of view.”

— **Michael Trout, outgoing Braver Angels co-chair:** “We just can’t afford any longer to be arrogant about our beliefs — an arrogance which has led us, in the past, to demonize the other side. Surely, we have learned that we are just not as sure as we thought we were that we’re right.”