



February 9, 2026

Neighbors

Have you thought about how *close* we are to Minnesota? If we happen to be already in Ironwood, then a drive of about 100 miles will take us to Duluth. (Okay, I realize you won't just happen to be in Ironwood, but I have a brother up there.) Like Minnesota, Michigan is a midwestern, purplish state, and a Great Lakes state. Whenever Michigan has a difficult winter, we may assume that it was a bit earlier and harsher in Minnesota.

At multiple locations in Michigan, we are even closer to Canada than we are to Minnesota. We can easily identify with our neighbors in Minneapolis or Toronto, because we are not far away. If Canadians are insulted or Minnesotans are attacked, we empathize readily because we are nearby. Indeed, the word neighbor comes from Old English words meaning "near" (*neah*) and "dweller" (*gebur*).

Of course, neighbors don't need to be physically close, and a "neighbor" can broadly refer to "another human being." We empathize when we learn about the pain of other human beings. In 2026, more than ever before, we are likely to see videos of our fellow citizens' human suffering in Minneapolis and elsewhere, and that suffering feels nearby. If children are separated from parents, people are shoved to the ground, or if an ICU nurse is shot and killed, we recognize that these people could be in our own community or even ourselves. These human beings might be Brown or Black or White, and they might be speaking English or another

language, but they are people who are going about their lives as we might do. They might be snatched from the streets, held in miserable confinement, and ultimately released somewhere far from their own neighborhoods—and we think about how that would feel.

In Meditation XVII of *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, English poet John Donne wrote, “never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.” (Later on, the usual wording became, “Ask not for whom the bell tolls. . . .”) In 2026, we don’t even need to “send to know,” because we are bombarded with information! We need to sort out the “deepfakes,” but our human fates ultimately have much in common. We cannot isolate ourselves from the common lot of humanity. If we’re at all perceptive, we always know that everyone is connected, and the bell is tolling for us, too.

When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus said, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt. 22: 36-39). This same commandment (“love your neighbor as yourself”), in fact, had appeared so many years earlier, in Leviticus 19:18, in the Old Testament. Jesus was saying that this was the most fundamental concept he had to teach: Love God, and love our neighbors as ourselves.

We necessarily love ourselves in order to function and survive, but loving our neighbors, *all* neighbors, “as ourselves” is a lofty goal. If we think about God’s infinite capacity to love us, though, despite our human sins, shouldn’t we honor that love by fulfilling this most basic commandment? Jesus said, “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12). We should take a stand against evil acts, but I believe that “loving one another” has to mean that we must “return to no person evil for evil,” just as our parting covenant admonishes us. Dare we assume that anyone else is beyond redemption? Isn’t everyone our neighbor?

~Written by Maurine Slaughter

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