

Becoming Spirit-Filled Voters

Our Faith & Election Day

Introduction

The principles of Catholic Social Justice are central to NETWORK's work, and have guided the choices of lay and religious people for over a hundred years. The principle calling us to participation, in particular, has special importance during an election year. Together, we will explore how this call to participation in our society and our politics should direct our actions. Inside, you will read personal stories, reflect on the wisdom of fellow justice-seekers, and be invited to contemplate how you live out the responsibility to engage in our democracy.

We call this collection of wisdom and instruction "Becoming Spirit-Filled Voters: Our Faith and Election Day" because we are called to think and act for the common good through our democratic systems. People of all faiths or no faith are welcomed and encouraged to learn from and live out of these beliefs to restore faith, dignity, and morality in our nation.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to be used by individuals or groups. Following this introduction there will be six chapters, each one dedicated to how to engage with our democracy with readings, quotes, reflection questions, and a prayer. We recommend spending the season of Lent, or another 6-7 week period, working through all of the material. You may choose to divide the content into multiple days for reading and reflection, or set aside time once a week to go through a full chapter.

We encourage you to share your experience, learnings, and feedback with us over social media (@NETWORKLobby) or via email (info@networklobby.org). To join us in our advocacy while using this reflection guide or after, visit NETWORK's website at www.networklobby.org.

What Role Does NETWORK play?

NETWORK's mission and values arise out of the long and rich tradition of Catholic Social Justice. This tradition encompasses the teachings of the Church (Catholic Social Teaching), but is also broader, including the witness of all Christians and people of faith who have committed to proclaiming the love of the Gospel and the justice of God's kingdom in the public sphere. We at NETWORK are inspired by the unwavering commitment of Catholic Sisters to proclaim the good news of the Gospel in solidarity with people whose votes are at the margins of our society. Our faith teaches that we have a responsibility to participate in politics out of a concern for, and commitment to, the good of the community. This responsibility to participate means each person also has a fundamental right to participate, and must be equipped with the resources to do so with confidence.

NETWORK believes that it is our responsibility to ensure all people in our nation have access to democracy, health care, citizenship, and housing. We are called to mend the gaps through voting,

advocacy, and change. Starting with our individual communities, we see disparities that can be fixed, given the proper support and policy.

Approaching Election Day with Faith and Hope

Voting is an important civic and spiritual responsibility. We are called, as people of faith and as active participants in our society, to engage fully in the process of choosing our elected representatives. Throughout this toolkit, we will pray, reflect, and act on the many dimensions of actively participating in our democracy.

Preparing Ourselves to Act for Justice and the Common Good

This is a challenging time in the United States and in much of the world. Local problems, national issues, and international crises demand our attention. It is tempting to look away and it is difficult to find hope. As people of faith, however, we cannot detach ourselves from these struggles. We are called to actively participate in politics to promote the common good, especially when it is difficult.

We know that voting is not only a civic responsibility, but a spiritual one as well. Making our voices heard through voting, emailing and calling our elected officials, participating in town hall meetings, attending protests, and going on lobby visits, is one of the best ways to create a more just society. Still, the implementation of our democracy are not perfect. Too many voters, particularly voters of color, are disenfranchised by discriminatory policies and excessive burdens, or have lost their right to vote entirely.

As we prepare ourselves to vote and encourage others to “get out the vote” in this upcoming election, we are mindful of the individuals and communities whose right to vote has been stripped from them. Substantive legislation has been introduced that would restore and safeguard the right to vote for all U.S. citizens, and NETWORK actively supports these efforts to mend the gaps in access to democracy.

Our nation is stronger when everyone’s voices are heard. We must protect the right to vote because, as [Sister Quincy Howard, OP says](#), “In a secular democracy, voting is the closest thing we have to a sacrament.” By participating in our democracy and choosing our political leaders through elections, we show our respect for human dignity and the worth of all individuals. It is critical that we protect and promote the integrity of our votes and our elections because in doing so we protect and promote human dignity.

Free and fair elections not only respect the agency and dignity of all voters, but they are also the way we improve structures and enact policies that mend the gaps. This can happen through both ballot initiatives and by electing lawmakers who write and pass legislation that serves the 100%. When we participate in our democracy -- *of the people, by the people, for the people* – we can advance the common good.

We Pray

A Hymn for a Time of National Crisis

O God of All the Nations

LLANGLOFFAN 7.6.7.6 D ("Lead On, O King Eternal"; "Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers")

O God of all the nations, your ancient prophets saw
that kings and institutions are not above the law.
Integrity is precious, and truth will one day stand;
Your way is peace and justice, and love is your command.

O God, when times are troubled, when lies are seen as truth,
When power-hungry people draw praise and not reproof,
When greed is seen as greatness, when justice is abused,
We pray that those who lead us will know what they must choose.

We pray they'll gather wisdom and lift up high ideals,
To guide our struggling nation along a path that heals.
We pray they'll have the vision to value each good law,
To put aside ambition, to seek the best for all.

O God of all the nations, may those who lead us see
that justice is your blessing, that truth will set us free.
Give all of us the courage to seek the nobler way,
So in this land we cherish, the good will win the day.

Tune: Traditional Welsh melody, from Daniel Evans' Hymnau a Thonau (Hymns and Tunes), 1865 ("Lead On, O King Eternal"; "Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers")

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Take Action

1. Watch ***Suppressed: The Fight for the Vote*** to see how the application of several voter suppression tactics in the State of Georgia influenced the 2018 election. (35 mins.)

Watch the film: www.bravenefilms.org/suppressed.

2. Browse **NETWORK's 2020 Election Toolkit** and begin to think about how you are called to engage this election season. Resources in this toolkit will prepare you to ask candidates questions at a town hall, write letters to the editor, and join the conversation on social media.

View the toolkit: www.networkadvocates.org/2020election.

Placing Encounter at the Heart of Action

We are faced with the challenge of answering difficult questions about issues facing our country as we approach an election. When offered oversimplification or stereotypes, it is crucial that we instead listen deeply, encounter the truth of lived realities, and remain open to new ideas — and encourage others around us to do the same.

Listen First, then Act

There are many different and important ways to participate in our democracy: voting, emailing and calling our elected officials, participating in town hall meetings, attending protests, going on lobby visits, and more. At the foundation of these actions, however, must be deep listening to lived realities, particularly the lived realities of the most marginalized members of our society. We can only work for the common good by listening to the needs of those around us.

This deep, intentional listening is countercultural. Today, only the loudest, most opinionated voices are heard at the expense of others. We are encouraged to accept easy answers, stereotypes, and oversimplification, and we are discouraged from pursuing experiences of true encounter. As justice-seekers, we see this is an inadequate understanding of the complex world in which we live.

Recently, Cardinal Peter Turkson, head of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, [delivered a message](#) to economic and political leaders gathered to discuss the world's problems at the Davos World Economic Forum. He said, "We need to listen and respond urgently!" Listen first, then respond. We cannot move directly to action without being informed by purposeful listening.

Even Jesus, in the Gospels, asks those he encounters what they need. He says "What do you want me to do for you?" to the blind man outside of Jericho (Mark 10:51) and "Do you want to be healed?" to the sick man beside the pool in Jerusalem. (John 5:6) Jesus waits for their responses before taking action. We must also ask our neighbors, our communities, and ourselves "What do you need?" and listen to the answers before we act.

Listening is an important component of living out what Pope Francis calls a [culture of encounter](#), which he describes as "Not just seeing, but looking; not just hearing, but listening; not just passing people by, but stopping with them; not just saying 'What a shame!', but allowing yourself to be moved with compassion." When we encounter another's struggles and are moved with compassion, we are compelled to "involve ourselves with their problems." When our motivation comes from encounter, we are moved to act to make our policies, programs, and systems more just and more humane. In the upcoming sections, we will explore the ways we act for justice, informed by this listening.

Six Commitments of Common Good Communication

By Vote Common Good

One way of listening during tough conversations is showing active interest. Vote Common Good is an organization dedicated to "inspiring, energizing, and mobilizing people of faith to make the common

good their voting criteria.” Leading up to Election Day 2020, Vote Common Good has made it their mission to connect with voters and discuss their priorities for the future of our nation. To facilitate conversations, they developed this toolkit for politicians, faith leaders, and all people of good will to set a positive example by communicating constructively.

Vote Common Good expresses these commitments in terms of values because they believe we will only learn to communicate deeply and honestly if we speak from the heart, not just the head, from level of values, not just opinions or arguments.

The Six Commitments of Common Good Communication

1. Example

I will demonstrate integrity and lead by example in my communication, in public and in private. When I fall short, I'll admit it, apologize, and reaffirm my commitment to lead by example.

2. Curiosity

I will show uncommon curiosity by asking honest questions, staying open to new information, seeking to understand others as I would want to be understood, and listening with empathy.

3. Clarity

I won't hold back, speak half-truths, be intentionally vague, or attempt to deceive. I will self-report my feelings and my underlying values whenever possible.

4. Decency

I will strive to show genuine courtesy toward everyone, especially when we disagree. I will not mock, call names, or dehumanize any person or group. I will establish and uphold ground rules for respectful conversation whenever possible.

5. Fairness

I won't compare my side's best with the other side's worst. I will not assume the worst motives in my opponents. I will acknowledge the upsides and downsides of all positions. I will praise my counterparts when they deserve it, and challenge my allies when they deserve it. I will notice who isn't at the table, and I will do my part to be sure they are included and heard.

6. Persistence

I expect this work to be hard and I know we will make mistakes. I will stay in the room with difference, be resilient after failure, never giving up and always seeking the common good.

Learn more at: www.votecommongood.com.

We Pray

Dear God, Lord of Mercy, Giver of Mercy:

We thank You that, in Your ultimate wisdom, You have granted every human being with equal worth. Please forgive us for failing to fully honor that reality through our nation's electoral system and help us to do better.

Grant that every individual has an equal voice in our upcoming election.

Protect us from those who wish to silence our voices in this election, whether through voter suppression laws or by encouraging foreign interference.

Then, in spite of these obstacles, please strengthen our faiths in this political process. Keep despair far away from our hearts!

Grant us all the will to cast our votes, to make our voices heard, in defiance of those who seek to silence us.

Let us be governed by people of our own collective choosing, people who will lead our nation righteously and strengthen our democracy for years to come.

We have faith that it can be so, because we have faith in You, who can do all things.

Ameen!

Written by Maggie Siddiqi

Maggie Siddiqi is a Muslim Chaplain, interfaith strategist, and Director of the Center for American Progress Faith Initiative which works to strengthen the religious, spiritual, and moral values that inspire us to achieve a more just, merciful nation and world.

Take Action

In the summer of 2016, Nuns on the Bus went to the Republican National Convention and the Democratic Convention. At both, Sisters offered convention attendees a glass of lemonade and asked them three questions to hear about their hopes and fears leading up to the 2016 election.

1. Who in your family is it difficult to talk to about politics? Why?
2. What worries you about this election?
3. What gives you hope for our nation?

Hold a "Lemonade Ministry" in your community and ask these questions to your friends, neighbors, and those you may not know as well. Encourage them to answer without resorting to stereotypes, and listen to their answers without making assumptions. Use what you learn from these conversations to guide your actions as we prepare for Election Day.

Share the responses you hear with NETWORK by emailing them to info@networklobby.org.

Discerning Our Role in Working for Change

Being active in our democracy requires evaluating where your contributions are most needed. Everyone has an important seat to take at the table of politics. Where do you see yourself?

Where Are Your Resources, Strengths, and Skills?

As we listen to the lived experiences and needs of those in our community, we are also called to consider how to best respond before we dive into action. Finding the place where we can actively making a difference is not easy. As people of faith, we believe in the unique human dignity of every person, which means that we all have different gifts and strengths.

We are not all called to do the same work in the pursuit of justice. Instead, we are called to the tasks that suits our particular situation and abilities. This does not mean always staying in our comfort zone, but we should feel fulfilled and inspired by the work we are taking on.

The same principle of identifying a person's unique skills or strengths is central to successful community organizing. Organizing has been one of the most consistently effective drivers of change across time, geographic location, and issues. Therefore, basic organizing principles shape much of the work we do at NETWORK.

In successful campaigns, organizers assess their community's assets and create a strategy based on those strengths. This is not judgmental, it does not focus on what the community lacks, but is an honest look at what resources are available to be utilized for a common purpose. Once there is a clear understanding of these strengths, then strategy can be made and action can begin.

We can "zoom in" and evaluate ourselves in the same way. What strengths or abilities do you have that can be used in to promote the common good in our nation? What connections to other individuals or groups do you have? Which issue or issues are most important to you? Do you have a connection to an issue — a personal story or profound belief — that people should hear? Where are you a trusted messenger or where would someone else be a better ambassador for your cause?

Try to answer these questions for yourself, and keep these answers in mind as you continue working for justice in our nation.

Finding My Part in the Body of Christ

By Sister Simone Campbell, SSS

Throughout my career, I have been called to respond to different challenges at different times. Our country is facing an enormous challenge right now — one we are all called to respond to. New policies and programs are announced every day that increase suffering and deny the dignity of families and individuals across the country. Too many of our elected representatives are out of touch with the reality of vulnerable communities and do not feel a sense of urgency to respond and meet their needs.

But, we can succeed in making change if we first know our part, and then do it!

One way I reflect on the work is by pondering Saint Paul's writing to the Romans. In his letter (Romans 12:5 et seq.), we are called to realize that we are all joined in one body. We are called to do our part in the body with joy. This has led me to realize that I am called to think of myself, and all of us, as belonging to the body of Christ. This has also led me to know that different parts of the body have different functions to play. We are not all the same. And, a consequence of this insight is that everyone is important in the body, even if their part is different from my own.

Living out my faith has taught me to know that we, together in creation, are all one in our effort to live with integrity and embody justice.

Right now in my role at NETWORK, I'm not feet. I am not hands. I do not do direct service. Instead, I think my contribution at this moment is to be stomach acid. I help liberate energy. I stir people up. I travel the country, meeting people and groups and I help break down food (ideas, struggles, frustrations) to liberate energy. This gives those who are the hands and feet the energy and the ability to do their part.

What part in the body of Christ are you called to be?

Are you the hands, doing the work of justice?

Are you the heart, praying for change?

Are you the mouth, speaking truth to power?

Are you the ears, listening to the experience of others?

Think about what kind of work you enjoy doing, and what is needed in our current environment. Reflect on where you feel most alive and most effective in working for change. Everyone has an important part to play in the body of Christ, even though we might have different functions. And no one is left out of the body of Christ... or out of our care.

What part of the body are you?

Sister Simone Campbell, SSS is the Executive Director of NETWORK Advocates for Catholic Social Justice.

We Pray

What happens in the mean time?

This is the question that guides my place in politics.
It pulls me back and centers me.

A lot of us are working hard to fight for policies and candidates we believe in.
A lot of us are planning rallies, and advocating; watching debates and canvassing.
A lot of us do our part in working for big, structural change.

And still, I am left thinking, *what happens in the mean time?*

Lent reminds us that in the time between now and Election Day these injustices are still happening. Deportations are happening **right now**. People are in detention centers and prisons **right now**.

These 40 days allow us an opportunity to balance addressing immediate needs and long term change. For many, it's a privilege to think about or work on the long-term change when the immediate needs rule the lives of so many.

I pray that we remember the push and pull of these complexities and that we may always be rooted in our communities first.

Amen.

Written by Melissa Cedillo

Melissa Cedillo is a graduate student at Harvard Divinity School. She is an advocate for bridging the gap between progressive politics and religion in our nation.

Take Action

This week, we are inviting you to discern your role in this election season. As you reflect, you may want to begin with Sr. Simone’s question, “What part am I in the Body of Christ?” Then, think about “How does this inform what I’ll do this election season? What is mine to do?”

Remember while the work you choose should feel authentically you, it may also challenge or stretch you a bit. God doesn’t call us to easy, comfortable places, and the Spirit is always creating anew!

Once you have a sense of the work you are called to, make a commitment to yourself that you will do your part. We hope that the prompts below help you in living out this commitment.

My 2020 Election Commitment

Because I care about: _____

I will _____

_____ during this election season.

I will work with these people or organizations: _____

If I don’t do this, then (what are the consequences for myself, my loved ones, my community?):

I will ask this person to hold me accountable for my work and actions:



Transformative Conversations to Bridge Divides

After reflecting on “where” and “why” we are called to work during this election season, now we turn to the “how.” By finding our own moral foundation and then connecting with others’ own values and morals, we can encourage them to join us in supporting policies that mend the gaps.

Advancing the Common Good through Moral Reframing

The central question to ask ourselves now is “How can I bring others to support policies and candidates that mend the gaps?” Whatever role you are called to play this election season, whether you are working in person, digitally, or a combination, it is crucial to have *transformative conversations* with those who you don’t agree with, instead of the same dead-end ones.

When having a transformative conversation, it is important to remember that the person you are talking with often has very different experiences, psychological makeup, social background, motives, and even values. People make decisions based on values and emotions, and if they feel their values are threatened, they will respond negatively. Difficult conversations tend to not go anywhere and people will agree to disagree is because we can’t speak each other’s language. [Prominent research](#) from political scientists Matt Feinberg and Robb Willer indicates that if you want to persuade people, you should attempt to frame your argument using your counterpart’s moral framework. This is known as moral reframing.

Without moral reframing, people tend to fall back on the moral frameworks of their own side when making arguments. When you can frame the discussion in such a way that also speaks to your counterpart’s moral framework, you are far more likely to persuade them on a particular policy issue. Values others might hold include: care for people and creation, fairness and equality, liberty, loyalty and patriotism, authority, and moral purity and sanctity. Once you have identified one or more of the values another person holds, try to demonstrate how a mend the gap policy supports that value.

By being in relationship and conversing with people about their beliefs and backgrounds, you can begin to understand their moral framework and, in turn, construct the conversation in a way that appeals to their values. When paired with compelling arguments for policies that support the common good, moral reframing is a powerful tool to help us mend the gaps in our nation.

This information comes from NETWORK’s [Transformative Conversations to Bridge Divides](#) resource, which can be read in full at: www.networkadvocates.org/transformativeconversations.

Reflecting on Dr. King in 2020

By Bishop John Selders

This reflection was published for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in January 2020.

As I reflect on this year’s installment of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday, I am reminded of what Professor Michael Eric Dyson wrote in his book, “I May Not Get There With You,” a number of years ago. He said, “A private citizen who transformed the world around him, Martin Luther

King, Jr. was arguably the greatest American who ever lived.” His life and work, we lift up annually now is living testament to be celebrated by all who’d claim to stand under the freedom fighting banner. And I, personally, am keenly aware I stand in the midst of a historic legacy of faith leaders who stake out a moral position for righteousness and morality that transcends the partisan nature of discourse so familiar in today’s polarizing rancor.

It is with this backdrop that I’m compelled to offer brief words of reflection on this observation of this man of faith who symbolizes so much of what many of us are attempting to live up to. This radical spiritual prophet and theorist of change, on the evening of Dec. 5, 1955, in the aftermath of Rosa Parks’ arrest, addressed 5,000 people gathered at Holt Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, AL. Folks filled the sanctuary, the basement auditorium and even spilled outside to hear the newly elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His stirring speech advocating action without violence gave rise to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In his summation, Dr. King said, “If you will protest courageously, and yet with dignity and Christian love, when the history books are written in future generations, the historians will have to pause and say, ‘There lived a great people — a black people — who injected new meaning and dignity into the veins of civilization.’ This is our challenge and our overwhelming responsibility.”

I believe his words hold powerful meaning for us today. In light of the fierce battle that is raging today in our towns, cities and nation, the war of propaganda and words, of many both on the left and the right. It is clear to me that the position that lifts up the legacy that we’ve been gifted with is the position that points to what is right and what is wrong. **And do we have the moral fortitude and courage, the internal core strength to square our shoulders, stand upright and seek what is right while facing down the pushback that comes from wrong?** Are we willing to take hold of the baton passed to us to live faithful lives of reflection and action to this witness? The life of this fallen prophet demands our response.

On the night of Dr. King’s assassination, his mentor, Dr. Howard Thurman offered this expression so meaning-filled. Thurman spoke, “Tonight, what many of us are feeling is that we, all of us must be the conscience, wherever we are living, functioning and behaving. Racial prejudices, segregation and discrimination were not regarded by him as merely un-American and un-democratic, but as mortal sins against God. For those who are religious it awakens guilt. For those who are merely superstitious it inspires fear. And it was this fear that pulled the trigger of the assassin’s gun that took his life.”

I declare I’m committed to the life lived with deep abiding love. The kind of deep abiding love that continues to regard and respect while holding, supporting and centering the least, the marginalized and the disinherited. This is the central framework that upholds our work. May we lift and live up to this profound mission.

Thank you, Dr. King!

Bishop John Selders is an ordained minister serving in the United Church of Christ and one of the founding members of Moral Mondays CT. This reflection was originally published at:

www.moralmondaysct.org/2020/01/20/reflection-on-dr-king-2020.

We Pray

Divine One,

In the midst of all that surrounds us, concerns us, troubles us. The times are calling for us to be more heartfelt, more thoughtful, more courageous. Our differences are being exploited to separate and divide while so many are hurting and fearing retribution. It is with this in mind that we appeal to you, Great God!

Help us to see more clearly the reality of our commonality. Help us to sense your Holy presence ever present in our lives like rod and staff for comfort and assistance. Help us to be faithful to the task given to us to love more nearly and dearly.

We want to serve and please You. We want to honor and witness to Your mighty power. Power to move and create. Power to lift and restore. Power to hold and embrace.

In the midst of all that surrounds us, concerns us, troubles us, this is our prayer.

Amen

Written by Bishop John Selders

Take Action

Let’s practice using moral reframing. Here’s an example; when talking with someone about immigration who values patriotism and loyalty, you might say:

Refugees and immigrants who are coming to the United States are like our ancestors who came to achieve the American dream and find a better life. The American dream is what drives people from across the world to come to this land, a land of opportunity. This dream is what our nation was founded on, and it’s this dream that immigrants and refugees want to be a part of, just like our grandparents and great-grandparents.

Now, do your best to use moral reframing when talking to someone about one of NETWORK’s other “Mend the Gap” issues (Tax Justice, Living Wages, Family-Friendly Workplace Policies, Housing, Democracy, or Health Care). Write out what you could say below:

Visioning a Future for the Common Good

Even when the media is flooded with negativity and bad news, we must persevere with hope because we need it now, more than ever.

Hope and Vision are Necessary to Create Change

When Sisters conducted their “Lemonade Ministry” at the Democratic and Republican conventions, the question that was the most difficult for people to answer was “What gives you hope for our nation?” Instead of being able to imagine a positive future, people could only think of their fears and the worst-case-scenarios they heard on the news and from candidates. They had very little, if any, positive vision of the future as they headed to the polls for the 2016 election.

We cannot be Spirit-filled voters on Election Day if we are entirely motivated by worry or fear. We must also have a positive vision for a more just and compassionate future. In his [exhortation on holiness](#), Pope Francis says, “Complacency is seductive; it tells us that there is no point in trying to change things, that there is nothing we can do, because this is the way things have always been... Let us rethink our usual way of doing things; let us open our eyes and ears, and above all our hearts, so as not to be complacent about things as they are.”

May Pope Francis’s instruction open our minds to think of new ways of being in community with one another in our nation, and the federal policies that would support this vision. Your vision could focus on one issue area, or across many. Whatever it is, do not be held back by the limitations of our current reality. Then, let us share our vision with one another and use it as motivation to mobilize, organize, and vote on Election Day for the candidates who will bring our country closer to that vision.

Building a New Vision for Our Democracy: The Importance of Voting Rights

By U.S. Senator Tom Udall

This season, before an incredibly important election, we must reflect on the state of our democracy. Democracy represents more than a system of government. It is the sacred affirmation that each voice matters equally in one nation — and that a representative government must be of, by, and for the people.

But today, the American people are losing faith in our democracy. They see the evidence with their own eyes as the wealthy purchase influence in political campaigns and drown out the voices of the people. Voting rights are under assault, foreign adversaries interfere in our elections, and so-called public servants use their offices to help themselves and their friends — instead of the people they are supposed to work for.

Our voices do count. Our voices count when we vote in each election, especially this year. And they count when we organize, march, and speak out about injustice.

But there is no doubt that our democracy is in a crisis. Since coming to Congress in 1999, I’ve seen firsthand the corrosive influence that big money is having on our political system. The influx of

unlimited contributions and secret donations into campaigns has fueled the hyper-partisanship we see across the nation, including in Congress.

Special interests try to dominate the political agenda, to the detriment of the common good. This has obscured the fundamental values that should define our work. Values like social justice. Feeding the hungry. Helping the poor. Making peace. And caring for our earth.

The money in our politics fuels a disconnect between what people in our democracy want and what Congress is giving them. The people want action on climate change. The people want universal, affordable health care. Economic justice and food security for families. Commonsense gun safety laws. And they demand that we welcome the stranger and treat immigrants as human beings.

These are priorities for the vast majority of Americans. And there is a direct link between Congress's inaction on these issues and barriers to the ballot box and our broken campaign finance system.

We live in a representative democracy. But Congress is not representing the people. The 1% are heard, while the other 99% are not.

In Congress, we are fighting for reforms to make our democracy work: increasing access to the ballot box, putting an end to the influence of secret money in elections, and raising the ethical bar in government.

The For the People Act (H.R.1) makes it easier to register to vote and to cast a ballot. In a society where special interests artificially widen and sustain our divisions, it has never been more important to ensure that each and every voice is heard. H.R.1 also returns our campaign finance system to the hands of the people, shining a light on secret campaign contributions and empowering small donors.

We need to put an end to the idea that money equals speech and reign in an out-of-control campaign finance system. And the only way to do that is to exercise our most fundamental and sacred democratic right — the right to vote.

Our democracy cannot be fully realized unless we, the people, vote. We deserve a representative democracy, with elected leaders who understand our concerns and are committed to fight for all voices to be heard. For our common values. And for the future of our democracy in this election and all the elections to come.

Senator Tom Udall represents New Mexico, and is a champion of restoring voting rights to marginalized groups for a more equal and just democracy.

We Pray

Close your eyes.
Place your hand over your heart.
Take a moment to feel your heartbeat.

Feel its strength...
Feel its complexity...

Your heart connects you to your ancestors. The same people who labored for their vision of a just world.

Sit this way for a few minutes.

When you're done, keep your hand over your heart and recite this prayer:

During these difficult times,
 We recall the labor of our ancestors
 We pray for strength of heart.
 We pray for our labor for justice.
 So many of us have embarked on the journey
 Of working for a just world for all.

When we began this work,
 We were overfilled with the imagination
 Of what that just world would look like,
 But through obstacles, policies, elections, deportations, and deaths;
 Our vision of a just world became blurry
 And has seemed almost impossible.

It's not.

We must push on.
 We must remind ourselves what that just world looks like.
 We must share our vision of that just world with
 our colleagues, friends, community,
 and most importantly with the next generation.
 We must remember that vision when we feel it is impossible

We pray for strength of heart.
 We pray for our labor for justice.
 We pray to never forget what that just world looks like.

Written by José Arnulfo Cabrera

José Arnulfo Cabrera is the director of education and advocacy for migration for the Ignatian Solidarity Network.

Take Action

Every night during Nuns on the Bus trips, there is a town hall meeting where local residents share their hopes for their communities with Sisters and their neighbors. It's critical to think about and share our vision for positive change, so that we can begin planning how to make them a reality.

Join NETWORK for a **Digital Town Hall** to gather with other members of our Spirit-filled network and share your vision for the future of our country!

Thursday, March 26, 2020 from 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM EDT

Register: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/4824737692720245261>

If you can't join the Digital Town Hall, we still want to hear about your vision. Comment on our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/NETWORKLobby) or tweet at us ([@NETWORKLobby](https://twitter.com/NETWORKLobby)).

Co-Creating Our Reality

The world and the systems we inhabit are neither predetermined nor permanent. As human beings with dignity and free will, we are charged with taking an active role shaping the world we seek.

Creating Change Begins with Our Actions

With a vision of justice and peace for the future in mind, it is up to us to transform our society to more closely embody that vision. We are co-creators of our political, economic, and social systems. We cannot complain about the “powers that be” without claiming our own power to make change.

For those living in the United States, this ability to co-create our reality should be understood through the lens of the U.S. democratic political system. Our representative democracy provides an accessible route for each of us to directly influence our politics. No matter what political system is in place, however, residents of every nation of the world have some power to shape the world around them.

Individually, each citizen of the United States *should* be able to vote in federal, state, and local elections (though that right is too often stripped away), and all U.S. residents pay taxes and are free to join political parties or other associations to work for shared goals. Individuals can work to influence their fellow U.S. residents, and even their elected officials, by persuading them to support a certain position. Even if your favored candidate does not win the election or a bill fails to pass through the legislative body, it does not mean that your participation was ineffective. Every moment Spirit-filled voters are engaged in our democracy, you are shaping the fabric of our nation.

If you are bothered by elected officials telling lies, denounce the lies and spread the truth — to yourself, to your friends, or to the internet. If you support a piece of legislation, call your Representatives and ask them to support it. Run for office yourself!

There are many ways to be involved, but first we must accept the responsibility of being co-creators of our reality. Otherwise, if we do not accept this responsibility consciously, and we refuse to act with intention, our indifference will shape the society we live in.

Our Voice is Our Vote

By U.S. Representative Terri Sewell

As a proud daughter of Selma, Alabama, growing up I was surrounded by the heroes and sheroes of the civil and voting rights movements. I was reminded every day of the powerful change that ordinary Americans can achieve.

My home church, Brown Chapel A.M.E., is where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. planned the Selma-to-Montgomery marches and where protesters sheltered on Bloody Sunday; on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, which looms large over downtown Selma, my colleague and mentor, Congressman John Lewis, was beaten bloody by billy clubs.

There was rarely a family gathering or church function that didn't include proud participants of the movement, their stories told and retold as a reminder to us all of what ordinary Americans are capable.

The history of Alabama's 7th Congressional District sets it apart, as one of our country's most potent testaments to the triumph of human courage; the power of grassroots, community organizing; and the resilience of our democracy.

I would not walk the halls of Congress today if it were not for the foot soldiers of the civil and voting rights movements, who marched, bled and died for the right to vote.

Sadly, old battles have become new again. Modern-day barriers to the ballot box – strict voter ID, polling location closures, and voter roll purges – have prevented too many Americans from making their voices heard.

Since the Supreme Court's 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision gutted the Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 and halted federal preclearance, elections have taken place under laws that were later found in court to be intentionally discriminatory. In states across the country and, particularly, in many previously-covered under the preclearance requirements of the VRA, new state laws and voting procedures have diluted the voting rights of certain vulnerable communities – the elderly, disabled, minority groups and younger voters.

In the 2018 midterm elections, the Republican candidate for governor in Georgia used his powers as Secretary of State to put 53,000 voter registrations on hold, nearly 70% of which belonged to Black voters. In North Carolina, the state legislature closed 20% of early voting locations in 2018. In New Hampshire, Florida, Texas, and Wisconsin, students faced higher hurdles to cast their ballots.

And this year, on Super Tuesday, a Houston resident waited seven hours to cast his ballot. No one should have to wait hours in line to exercise their constitutional right to vote!

In 2012, before the *Shelby* decision, Texas had one polling place for every 4,000 residents. By 2018, that figure had dropped to one polling place per 7,700 residents. It's no mistake those closures disproportionately took place in growing African American and Latino neighborhoods.

Since the *Shelby* decision, changes to state voting laws are leaving the voices of millions of citizens behind. The road to justice is long and winding, but no citizen deserves to be left in the rearview mirror.

We must double down on our commitment to the voting rights movement and elect candidates who are committed to restoring the protections of the Voting Rights Act and expanding voter access across the country.

The foot soldiers of the civil rights movement reminded us that every one of us can change the course of history. Our vote is our voice. We must use it this November!

Terri Sewell is a Member of the United States House of Representatives 116th Congress. She represents Alabama's 7th District, which includes Selma, Alabama, the birthplace of the Selma to Montgomery March for Voting Rights.

We Pray

Lord,

On the first day, you created light and dark. You saw that it was good.

On the second day, you separated ocean from sky. And you saw that it was good.

On the third day, you created earth and all of the plants. You saw that they were good.

On the fourth day, you made the sun, moon, and the stars. You saw that they were good.

On the fifth day, you created animals of the sea and the sky. And you saw that they were good.

On the sixth day, you brought forth animals of the earth and human beings. You made humans in your divine image. You looked around and you saw that all of your creation was good.

Help us to always remember that our life and our purpose comes from you, our Creator. By virtue of our divine creation, we are called to care for the earth and cultivate a world of justice and peace for all.

Give us strength and perseverance to structure a society that cherishes all persons and the earth.

Amen.

Take Action

One way to take an active role in co-creating the world in which we live is sharing your beliefs in the media. Letters to the Editor (LTEs) are among the most widely read sections of newspapers and magazines, and they are closely monitored by elected officials and political campaigns to find out what voters are thinking. Write and submit your own letter to the editor about an issue that is important to you using our LTE tips.

Tips for Writing Powerful LTEs:

- Submit your LTE to a local media outlet, following the guidelines of the specific publication to ensure you have the correct length, style, and format. Most publications prefer letters to be 200 words or less.
- Frame your letter in relation to a recent news item or topic. Editors are more likely to publish a letter when written in response to a story printed in that publication.
- Use local, specific information whenever possible.
- Be aware of your audience: use talking points that will appeal to the readers, avoid jargon and abbreviations, and don't engage in personal attacks.
- Include your credentials.
- If you're working from a sample letter to the editor, don't copy talking points verbatim. Papers can search for canned content after it is published one time.

You can find more information about LTEs and a sample LTE at www.networkadvocates.org/2020election/LTEs, or contact NETWORK for assistance with your LTE by emailing info@networklobby.org.

Love Your Neighbor by Voting

We often use the phrase “Love Thy Neighbor” when discussing policy issues, especially around immigration; it is less common to associate this phrase with voting. When we bring our faith and moral compass to the ballot box, we vote for justice and dignity for all people.

Choosing Solidarity with Vulnerable Communities on Election Day

As people of faith, we are called to love our neighbor. There are many different ways to do that, and voting is probably not the first thing that comes to mind. But, if we are to be Spirit-filled voters in November, then we must understand voting as a fundamental way of expressing our love for our neighbors.

When we vote on Election Day, we cannot only consider our own self-interest or the success of the stock market. We must consider the hopes and the needs of our neighbors, especially those who are most vulnerable. We must consider the needs of the worker who is uninsured, the mother who is undocumented, the friend who is experiencing homelessness, and all our neighbors who experience any form of oppression. If we vote with those members of our community in mind, then we will vote for the candidate whose policies will mend the gaps in our nation. On Election Day, we must vote for the most vulnerable in our nation because our faith demands us to prioritize their needs over those who have enough.

Others may criticize this stance as too liberal or being “politically correct,” but this is the faithful stance. Jesus chose to sit at the table with those who were marginalized instead of the powerful. When we cast our ballots, we are called to do the same.

Simply Love Thy Neighbor

By Tralonne Shorter

For faith-filled social justice advocates, the past four years have been like a never-ending roller coaster ride. The days leading up to President Trump’s inauguration were agonizing. Uncannily similar to the slow upward crank of a roller coaster caboose peaking skyward. We knew that what lay ahead was not going to be a thrilling joy ride. Rather, a jarring rapid descent into territory that so few were actually ready for. As we braced for impact we leaned on our virtues of faith, hope, and perseverance, and tried our best to show love for our neighbors.

Undoubtedly, the sharp twists and turns over the past four years have been brutal to endure. Our [Mend the Gap vision](#) for 2020 was suddenly under attack. Immediately, the Trump administration besieged us with rollbacks of civil and human rights protections targeting our neighbors: people of color, Muslims, immigrants, refugees, LGBTQ+ individuals, and the poor. Every Trump administration budget has laid out a detailed blueprint of 10-15 years of work requirements and steep budget cuts to more than 83 vital human needs programs including Medicaid, SNAP, affordable housing and more. At the same time, President Trump gifted tax breaks to the ultra-wealthy by signing into law the \$1.2 trillion Tax Cut and Jobs Act of 2017, paid for at the expense of working families. Meanwhile costs for health care, transportation, childcare and housing continue to rise. Without permanent federal action to increase to

the minimum wage, expand the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit, and lower housing costs, many more families will be taxed into poverty for generations to come.

President Trump's attacks on our immigrant neighbors have been among the most inhumane and unrelenting of any U.S. president. His Department of Justice enacted the Zero Tolerance policy as a deterrent to families crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. This policy has separated over 5,400 children from their families since 2017. On President Trump's watch, babies and children were housed in detention centers, sexually and physically assaulted; malnourished and traumatized, pregnant mothers forced to deliver babies while handcuffed to walls; and many died. President Trump led crusades into "sanctuary cities" by mili-terrorizing our communities and filling jails with mostly non-violent individuals and year-long backlogs still awaiting adjudication. President Trump's unyielding desire to build a border wall led to the longest government shutdown in history, in which 800,000 federal workers went without pay for 39 days. Moreover, pending before the Supreme Court are proposals by President Trump to end DACA protections for 700,000 childhood immigrant arrivals and repeal the Affordable Care Act.

This is not a pro-life agenda. Instead, it's an anti-life agenda that is antithetical to our mission to carry out the Gospel. Jesus sacrificed his life so that we may have an abundant, eternal life. His challenge to us to "love thy neighbor as thyself" is similar. As we look ahead to the next four years, we have an opportunity to decide if we want to get off this roller coaster ride by electing someone who will mend the gaps in our country. There is so much riding on the outcome of the 2020 elections. As people of faith we must remain vigilant, fervent advocates for the Beloved Community. The time is now to answer the call that Jesus commanded of us. We have the power to elect a president and members of Congress who will prioritize the common good over self-interest. The choice is simple.

As I reflect on the state of our nation, this is my prayer:

Lord, our world needs you right now.

We are plagued by mounting afflictions; inconsolable sadness.

Corrupt forces promulgating lies, spurring dissension, feigning false hope.

Democracies hacked by self-interest.

Leaders dismantling families, locking up babies and mili-terrorizing our communities.

whites against Blacks, men against women, corporations against the common good.

Champions of "I" instead of "We."

Your Divine Love commanded us to a higher calling:

simply to love You and our neighbor as thyself.

What great virtues: love and sacrifice.

A mission too complicated for all but One.

Oh Lord, Our Creator, hear our plea: redeem us from our unchaste love for self that has turned us against Your virtuous sacrifice.

As we brace for impact of the 2020 elections amid this horrific pandemic,
may there be renewed inspiration to *love thy neighbor as thyself*.

May this time, we collectively prioritize voting for candidates who are committed to care for the sick, feed the hungry, help the less fortunate; welcome the stranger; do good, defend the widow and orphan, show mercy for the imprisoned; be humble, walk justly.

That's how we love thy neighbor.

Simply to Love.

Imagine that, a global call to love.

Tralonne Shorter is a Senior Government Relations Advocate at NETWORK.

We Pray

Holy God, hear our prayers.

We enter Holy Week wading through the disequilibrium of unknowing, the grief of friends and family lost and the terror that we could be next.

Righteous rage rises each day as primal screams greet televised propaganda telling us all is well when all is not well!

We see the sick and hungry and imprisoned, the immigrant, the naked and the thirsty waved off and told to fend for themselves.

We see our federal government investing in body-bags and refrigerator trucks for “the least of these”—not ventilators and hospital beds.

We are tempted to believe the kingdoms of men are too much for us — too much for you — God. But, the Resurrection... new life... breath... new bone... new muscle... a new way of being in the world... Resurrection is your promise.

If we do not believe in your power to raise the dead, then we have no faith at all.

God, gird us for the coming days. Set our faces toward the ballot box where your people might lift the only weapons we have in defense of the least of these—our votes.

Amen.

Lisa Sharon Harper is the Founder and President of FreedomRoad.us, an Auburn Theological Seminary Senior Fellow, and a speaker, writer, activist, and artist.

Take Action

Choose an upcoming election that you will be voting in. It could be a primary or general election for a House or Senate seat, or the Presidential election. Choose two candidates in that race and compare their positions on each of NETWORK's [Mend the Gap issues](#) by visiting their website, watching interviews or debates, or by speaking to the candidate or someone from their campaign yourself.

Download NETWORK's DIY side by side at: www.networkadvocates.org/2020election/sidebyside.

Choosing Hope over Fear

Our faith teaches us to choose hope over fear, welcome over exclusion, and love over hate. Formed by our reflection and preparation, may we be moved by compassion and hope to work for justice between now and Election Day.

Acting Boldly for Justice and the Common Good

Easter reminds us that we are a people of hope who celebrate seeing God's love at work. In the joy of the Resurrection, we are emboldened to go out and be that love in the world.

When Pope Francis [addressed Congress](#) in September 2015, he began by saying "Each son or daughter of a given country has a mission, a personal and social responsibility." Throughout the weeks of Lent, we reflected upon the mission that we are called to in these challenging times. Now, we set out to live that mission boldly as Spirit-filled voters.

Boldness is one of the five great expressions of love with particular importance for today's culture named by Pope Francis in "[Gaudete et Exsultate](#)." Pope Francis highlights passion and boldness as an antidote to "negativity and sullenness; self-content bred by consumerism; individualism." He writes that Jesus's compassion, did not "make him hesitant, timid or self-conscious, as often happens with us. Quite the opposite. His compassion made him go out actively to preach."

Let us be driven to action by our compassion. Let us use our Lenten reflection to motivate our work for justice. Let us commit to living and acting boldly. Let us spread a message of justice and joy, of abundance, not scarcity, of hope, not fear. And let us welcome all justice-seekers into this work of building the kingdom of God.

Between now and Election Day, may we act to ensure that **all** have access to democracy, and **all** can participate in this year's election. We cannot allow policies that keep voters, especially low-income voters or voters of color, from voting. We need everyone's voices to be heard in our democracy because when We the People vote, we can elect politicians who work to mend the gaps and advance the common good.

"What Will You Do at Such a Time as This?"

By Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner

As I consider the importance of our democracy, I think of my Grandma Fannie. She came to this country by herself when she was only 16 years old. A dreamer. A refugee. A stranger in a strange land who didn't speak English and had no money.

She had the courage to make the journey after she saw the rabbi of her town in Russia dragged to his death, his beard tied to a horse. When she came to America, thank God - the light of the Statue of Liberty was lit and welcomed her to this country.

Here she found the promise of a country that gives “to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance”

And as I consider the importance of our democracy, I remember my visit to Pittsburgh, to the Tree of Life Synagogue just hours after the tragic massacre, the worst incident of violence against Jews in American history. Thousands of us gathered in Soldiers and Sailors Hall; standing-room-only with countless others outside the venue watching on flat-screen TVs.

A Muslim leader committed to raise the money for the families of the victims and offered that his community would stand vigil outside synagogues to keep us safe; he was followed by a prominent Black pastor who said three things: First, let us remember that this was antisemitism, an attack on Jews - and an attack on Jews is an attack on all of us.

Second, he reminded us that three days before two black people were shot at a Krogers supermarket because the black church the shooter tried to enter was locked, because of the murder of nine Blacks folks at Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston three years before.

And finally, he said this synagogue was targeted because they were a HIAS congregation – the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society – seeking to welcome refugees, migrants and strangers.

Spontaneously at that moment, thousands of people all around me started to chant:

Vote!

Vote!

Vote!

I understood then the lesson that my refugee grandmother’s journey taught me:

Our security comes in our solidarity. Our safety comes through our democracy.

This election will determine the future for Dreamers, immigrants and refugees. This election will impact the lives of women, LGBTQ+ folks, and people of color. This election could declare our commitment to saving our planet, lifting people out of poverty, ending the plague of gun violence.

This election could bring on a time as the prophet envisioned that all who dwell here will “merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while everyone shall sit in safety under their own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make them afraid.”

So, what will you do at such a time as this? What will you do to support the countless souls’ whose future is at stake?

Will you join us?

A spirited advocate for social justice, Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner is the Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. He also serves as the senior vice president of the Union for Reform Judaism. Rabbi Pesner first delivered this reflection in a speech at the Union for Reform Judaism’s Biennial 2019 announcing the Reform Movement’s Civic Engagement Campaign.

We Pray

Almighty God, most merciful and providential, as people of faith, we come to you today in a spirit of humility and hope. During these challenging times help us to restore the sacred responsibility of our leaders to the common good, to equality and inclusion, and to protect the disempowered. We know that every human being is a person of dignity and worth. In this powerful and troubled nation, guide our efforts to shape a more just democracy that values this truth. Root out the corrosive power of money and restore the common good as the purpose of our politics.

Dear God, we ask that you deliver this nation from cynicism and from the erosion of trust that divides us. Help us to remain ever hopeful and to hold firm to our faith in the spirit of self-governance and the dignity of democratic representation. Empower us with free and honest elections reflecting the collective wisdom and the will of the people. Watch over us in this moment of our nation's history and grant us the insight to know the right way forward and the perseverance to create a truly faithful democracy.

God of humanity, open our eyes to the rightful priority of people over money and power in our politics.

God of abundance, let the wisdom of our democracy be guided by the richness and diversity of the American people.

God of liberation, free our democracy and our elected officials from the stranglehold of money and special interests.

God of conversion, soften the hearts of our lawmakers and open them to needed reforms in our democratic institutions.

God of unity, energize people of goodwill across the nation to join movements for positive change.

God of righteousness, help us create a democracy that addresses the needs of the silenced and the marginalized.

God of truth, restore the faith of the American people in the promise and the spirit of our democracy.

God of reconciliation, help us shape a shared national identity rooted in kindness and healthy civil discourse.

Amen.

Written by Sr. Quincy Howard, OP. Sister Quincy is a Dominican Sister of Sinsinawa and a Government Relations Specialist at NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice.

Take Action

Pledge to be a Spirit-Filled Voter: Take the NETWORK pledge to be a Spirit-filled voter in the 2020 Elections. This means evaluating candidates' positions on mend the gap issues, having transformative conversations with fellow voters, sharing your vision for a future of justice, and more.

Together, we can transform our nation! Visit: www.networkadvocates.org/spiritfilledvoters/pledge.