

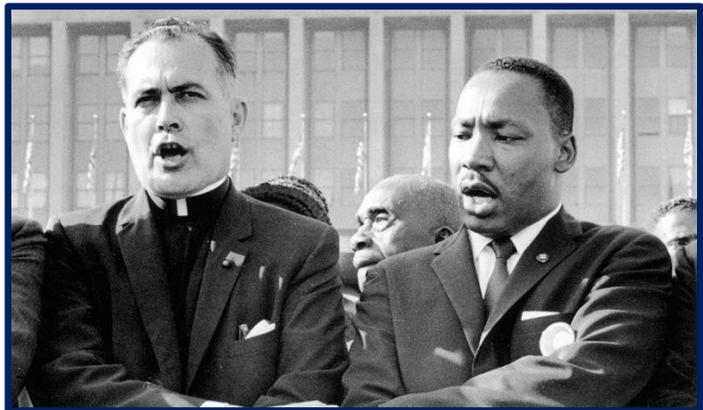
# Unheard Voices: A Faithful Democracy Toolkit

With one of the most historic and impactful elections less than a year away, our democracy is not ready. Cynicism permeates the national attitude: Americans are questioning the value of our vote, the integrity of our elections, and the interests that our elected officials serve. While public trust in our current system is diminishing, our faith in the promise of democracy remains steadfast. The Faithful Democracy coalition sees the year ahead as a unique and hopeful opportunity. Our statement of principles, outlined in the Voters Covenant, calls for reforms that ensure our democracy will truly reflect our national ideals.

## What role should Faith play in Politics?

Democracy is more than a political system. How society is governed and self-organized speaks directly to how we form community and value members of that community. A faithful democracy reflects a commitment to the equal value of each person. In the words of Theodore Parker, “Democracy means not ‘I am as good as you are,’ but ‘You are as good as I am.’”

The democratic process requires trust in the development of each individual conscience. Faith in humanity means believing that individual growth and responsibility benefit the common good and that such development is possible for each of us. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations point us to collective responsibility within the larger community. Treating people with dignity and value has systemic implications--and in a democracy that means having a voice and a forum to be heard.



***A democracy without faith is just a machine without power. Nothing can make it function except faith in itself, in the ordinary man and woman. (Eleanor Dark)***

## **Faithful Democracy: Restoring the Voters Covenant**

Living into our call to the prophetic pursuit of justice, equality, and the common good, the Faithful Democracy Coalition comes together in 2020 for a restoration of our nation's founding principles. The faith community affirms that every human being is a person of dignity and worth. In a secular democracy, fair and just democratic systems are central to the assertion of that dignity and worth.

Free of cynicism and ever-hopeful, the faith community holds firm to our trust in the spirit of self-governance and the strength of our aspirational founding principles. However, we move into the election season with concerns about the wellbeing of our national body politic.

Our nation is segmented into those who are "worthy" of a voice in our political system and those who are not. Democratic systems are used to perpetuate systemic racism and silence the voices of the marginalized, particularly poor people and people of color. Our democratic processes have been corrupted at every level: through voter suppression and intimidation; outsized financial contributions from anonymous donors and corporate interests; gerrymandering; and foreign actors hijacking public discourse in bad faith.

We call on our elected officials to heed the government's sacred responsibility to:

- the common good rather than special interests;
- the equality of citizens and the need to protect the disempowered from the powerful; and
- the danger of public cynicism and the erosion of trust in public authorities, honesty, and accountability.

The faith community has a distinctive role in the public debate as the moral conscience of the state, and so we call our elected leaders to an examination of conscience.

Our Constitution asserts this nation's covenant with the People: that "no state shall...abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States" (14th Amendment). More specifically, "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude" (15th Amendment). A democratic system that suppresses the vote of any U.S. citizens is unconstitutional.

Voting is a core means of political expression on the part of citizens and demands fair and reliable democratic processes. Each election, we call on people of faith to cast their votes according to their conscience. We now call on the federal government to repair our democratic systems and restore the voice and vote of all citizens in the United States.

People of faith and conscience demand free and honest elections to determine the will of the people.

It is immoral and contrary to a healthy democracy when...

**...corporations are given the rights of people and allowed to finance campaigns as a form of free expression.** *Secret special interest money has poured into influencing elections and drowned out the voices of actual voters. The temptation to use money to buy unjust favors is a moral matter for the religious community, and moneyed interests have undue influence on our elected leaders.*

**...there are no protections from racially discriminatory voting rules that prevent citizens from voting.** *Currently, state and local laws cannot be challenged until after the votes have been counted and the election is called. The Voting Rights Act must be fully restored to protect voters' rights before an election takes place, especially voters of color whose voices have historically been suppressed.*

**...voter disenfranchisement is clearly rooted in racist policies and history.** *Formerly incarcerated citizens are disenfranchised even after serving their time. These populations deserve equal voting rights and representation, like all other citizens of the United States.*

**...trust in our democratic systems is dwindling.** *Evidence of orchestrated attempts by outside parties to covertly interfere in our nation's elections has sown discord among the populace and deepened political divisions. When our elected leaders fail to provide the needed resources to secure future elections from predicted hacking, they invite interference by nefarious actors. Confusing electoral outcomes could sow further discord and potentially threaten an orderly and peaceful transition of power.*

**...leaders in power wield that power to manipulate and diminish the representation of some citizens over others.** *Gerrymandering primarily restricts and curtails the voice of communities of color by undermining their political expression, thus depriving them of their right to participate equally in elections. Residents of the District of Columbia are relegated to second-class citizenship without voting representation in Congress.*

**Additionally, we urge Congress to restore the well-being of our democracy by:**

- ✓ *Ensuring the accessibility of polling locations (ex. locations, hours, advertising),*
- ✓ *Expanding voters' options to cast their ballot (ex. early voting, absentee voting, and vote-by-mail),*
- ✓ *Making registration a seamless process (ex. registering on Election Day, banning discriminatory voter roll purges, and automatic registration),*
- ✓ *Implementing policies that incentivize electoral participation (ex. multilingual ballots and Election Day holiday).*

## **The Unheard Voices toolkit**

This multi-faith toolkit is meant to guide parishioners, congregants, groups, and individuals of goodwill invested in creating a democracy that reflects our ideals. Voting is crucial, but also is only a small part of being a citizen. *Unheard Voices: A Faithful Democracy Toolkit* is for people ready to take a hard and faithful look at the state of our democracy and the necessary steps to create a truly democratic system. A new chapter of *Unheard Voices* will be released every two months leading up to the 2020 election to highlight a key aspect of our democracy that urgently needs attention or reform.

The faith community has played an important role in democratic reforms since the founding of our nation and provides a unique perspective. For people of faith, creating a fairer, more representative democracy should always be the goal. These ideals are spelled out clearly in our foundational documents—even as we have historically fallen short of living them out as a nation. The *Voters Covenant* articulates these values, which also reflect the spirit of the faith community and go beyond partisan narratives. They speak to deeper truths of the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

Each chapter of the *Unheard Voices Toolkit* will briefly explain the history of the issue at play, the current democratic impacts, what's at stake and how to fix it. This toolkit is designed for use by religious groups and classes, individuals and faith leaders to learn and mobilize around the given issue. This resource is meant to paint a clear picture of the issues at play, what steps to take—legislatively and otherwise—and additional ways to engage.

### **Unheard Voices Toolkit Series**

- *Voting Rights and Disenfranchisement (November 2019)*
- *Money In Politics – the Root of All Evil (January 2020)*
- *Census 2020: Part 1 Laying the Democratic Foundation (March 2020)*
- *Census 2020: Part 2 Gerrymandering – Tipping the Scales (May 2020)*
- *Democratic Engagement and Civic Discourse (July 2020)*
- *Elections: Vigilance and Participation (September 2020)*