

## 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](http://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*

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## 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](mailto:info@networklobby.org).