



Election 2016 Discussion Guide

“The path ahead, then, is dialogue among yourselves, [...] dialogue with lay persons, dialogue with families, dialogue with society. I cannot ever tire of encouraging you to dialogue fearlessly.”

– Pope Francis, 9/23/15

This election season is unlike any we have ever seen. With one candidate focused on spewing hateful rhetoric, it is crucial that we engage in civil dialogue about the issues of our time. One of the ways we can bridge the divides is to start the conversation not from a place of politics or party lines, but from our personal faith and values, issues that are important to us, and our concerns about—and hopes for—our communities. Together, our Spirit-filled network of justice-seekers can provide alternatives to the hateful and divisive rhetoric that we are seeing from candidates, in the media, and in our own communities.

During the 2016 Nuns on Bus tour in the heat of July, the sisters attended both the Republican and Democratic National Conventions where they engaged in “Lemonade Ministry,” offering ice cold lemonade to people walking by and asking them about their fears and hopes this election season. Now, NETWORK is inviting you to dialogue, whether it is with strangers in front of your grocery store, friends and acquaintances over coffee or donuts in your place of worship, or with guests in your home before watching the presidential debates.

We hope these discussion questions help you engage in thoughtful, authentic dialogue about this election season and strengthen your sense of community with others too!

In this guide, you’ll read some of the questions we asked during our Nuns on the Bus trip and get some ideas of how to discuss them in your community.

Discussion Questions

Voting

- When was the first time you voted? What did it feel like?
- Who in your family is difficult to talk to about politics, and why?
- Why are civic engagement and voting important to you?

Candidates

- How do your faith and values inform your evaluation of candidates?
- What worries you this election season? What gives you hope?
- What would you like the presidential candidates to know about your community?
- What have you heard from presidential candidates that you particularly liked or disliked?

Mending the Gaps

- Read over NETWORK's Mend the Gap policies (attached at the end of this guide). Which one or two gap issues concern you the most?
- Share a story, either from your own personal experience, or that of a friend or family member, about being affected by one or more of the gaps.
- How are these gaps affecting different parts of your community? For example:
 - Families
 - Schools
 - Businesses
 - Places of worship
 - The overall character and well-being of the town or city
- What would you like to hear from the candidates (tonight if at a debate watch party/this season) regarding these gaps?
- What would your community look like if we mended these gaps?
- What would our nation look like if we mended these gaps?

Suggestions for Using these Discussion Questions

At a Debate Watch Party

Are you planning on watching the presidential or vice presidential debates? Invite your friends and neighbors over for discussion before, during, and after the debate. You might consider hosting a potluck where the discussion questions are placed around the table for people to answer while they eat.

Here is the debate schedule:

All debates are held from 9:00pm – 10:30pm ET / 6:00pm – 7:30pm PT

First presidential debate	Monday, September 26
Vice presidential debate	Tuesday, October 4
Second presidential debate	Sunday, October 9
Third presidential debate	Wednesday, October 19

At a “Coffee and Donuts” Type Gathering at Church

Many places of worship gather for fellowship after service. Use this as an opportunity to mingle with your community to discuss the election and the importance of voting. One way to bring the discussion questions into the conversation is by writing the questions on paper coffee cups beforehand. You could also leave the questions around the room on tables for people to discuss.

Host Your Own “Lemonade Ministry”

When the Nuns on the Bus traveled on their recent tour, they engaged in dialogue with delegates at the Republican and Democratic conventions and offered lemonade as a way to take a break from the heat. You can host your own Lemonade Ministry by gathering a few of your friends (or members of a group you are a part of), and taking clipboards or notebooks to a park, a grocery store parking lot, or a church parking lot. When you offer passerby a glass of lemonade (or, if it's cold, hot chocolate), you can ask the following questions:

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

You can then record responses on your clipboard or notebook. If you have NETWORK information like Mend the Gap Pledge Cards or Candidate Side by Sides with you, share those materials with the people you speak with.

NETWORK would love to learn from your discussion to hear what people in your community are saying about this election. You can let us know by emailing info@networklobby.org.

NETWORK's Mend the Gap 2020 Policy Vision

Federal policies enacted since 1980 have exacerbated vast economic and social divides in our country. These divides are eroding the very fabric of our society. Enlivened by Pope Francis's challenge, NETWORK renews its more than 40-year commitment to create an economy and society of inclusion.

Mending the Wealth and Income Gap Three sets of policies can help mend the U.S. wealth and income gap:



Tax Justice: Tax policy changes are made to reduce the income gap, especially the racial, ethnic and gender wealth gaps. Examples of success: The Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit are expanded. Tax reform closes loopholes so corporations and the wealthy pay their fair share.



Living Wages: National legislation moves from adjusting a minimum wage to creating a living wage. Examples of success: Significant minimum wage increases are enacted federally and indexed for cost of living. Living wages are calculated and implemented.



Family-Friendly Workplaces: The needs of women and families are integrated into federal workplace policies. Example of success: Legislation advances pro-family policies, such as paid leave, and paycheck fairness for women.

Mending the Access Gaps Economic disparity has created perilous gaps in access to four key areas that burden daily lives and livelihoods:



Access to Democracy: No individual or community of color is disenfranchised by federal policy. Examples of success: The Voting Rights Act is fully restored and strengthened. The census is fully funded and responsibly executed resulting in congressional districts that are fairly and accurately drawn.



Access to Healthcare: Racial and economic disparities in healthcare are eliminated. Examples of success: The Affordable Care Act is fully funded, implemented, and expanded. Quality affordable healthcare is accessible to all.



Access to Citizenship: Immigrants are welcomed into the country. Examples of success: A clear pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants is created. A 21st-century immigration policy is enacted that repairs the current outdated law.



Access to Housing: Everyone has access to safe, affordable housing. Examples of success: The National Housing Trust Fund is fully funded and housing vouchers fully restored and expanded. The U.S. enacts a just and inclusive federal housing policy.