

Reaching for the Common Good
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For centuries, consideration of the common good has been promoted as a guiding principle for the choices we make. In times past, it often referred to the common good of all the people in the village. If any family had more than they needed, they felt compelled to share it with those who lacked basic resources. Later on, as communication and commerce increased, the concept broadened to the regional or national levels. In this time, in a system of global communication and commerce, the common good applies to the entire human family, the global environment and to the care of all creation. In a world threatened by disease, natural disaster, nuclear weaponry, the common good must be promoted across generations, class, creed, race and culture in order to have a viable future with a sense of purpose and hope. This calls for moral principles in all the choices we make, on a personal, social, cultural, economic, political, ecological and spiritual level.

Can we begin to imagine a world where the common good would be the guiding principle in all areas of life? It will start in the mind and heart and then hopefully actions will follow. We are often reminded that even a single thought can change the universe. Think of a world where the common good is taught in every school, in every home, and is practiced in every area of life, where there is unity of purpose and a sense of family where class, creed, color, sex are no barriers. How will we live the vision and pass it on to future generations?

What are the elements to work toward in reaching for the common good?

- Respect for each and every person, and opportunities for them to develop their full potential in body, mind and spirit and to use their gifts for the good of all;
- Social well-being, where basic needs are met – food, clothing, shelter, education and training for life and work and opportunity to work and support a family;
- Awareness and involvement in policy issues that effect all levels of society;
- An atmosphere where political, economic, trade and other decision are guided by the common good.
- Inclusion of all groups in society – elders, the marginalized, women, persons with physical challenges and diverse cultures.

Diverse groups of people from different ages, color, class or creed could be invited to share ideas on how we could design life so that no one is excluded from it. This would involve the gifts of every person in the community from the youngest to the oldest.

Explore ways to get beyond our secularized individualism and examine our understanding of what a “good life” means. Currently in the West, the good life is defined by what we achieve, acquire, and possess. We are beginning to see the crumbling of many of the idols we have created, and that have never fully satisfied our deepest longing and hunger. As a local businessman once said: “We are discovering that our affluence, like our poverty has unwanted consequences.” The current economic situation is forcing many people to reexamine their values and life direction.

How can we engage in cooperative action for the common good?

The first question to ask is “How do we want to live together in any community?”

How can we design life so that no one is excluded from it? How well do we care for the weak and vulnerable among us? How can we find and use diverse interests and gifts and direct them toward the common good?

How can we as a local community, state and nation confront continuing and expanding poverty, dependency, hostility toward immigrants and refugees? How do we resist a culture of growing violence at every level of society? Why do we as a nation continue to use violence as a means of solving problems? By understanding the underlying causes, then we will do more than come up with band aid solutions, and work to change what created the problem in the first place.

How can we begin to recognize and value diversity, and to heal the wounds created by racism, sexism, and other isms that divide and decrease the possibility of creating community? Many new resources are available to address racism and cultural diversity.

How do parents, educators and others raise the children with sound moral values, a sense of purpose and hope and an ethic of responsibility? This is a task that is up to you and me and all of us together. It takes a village to raise a child.

We have the ability and resources to bring about needed change. The question is “Do we have the will and persistence to work together to bring it about for the common good?”

Margaret Mead has often reminded us: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. In fact it is the only thing that ever has.”

If we took her belief seriously, what a wonderful legacy we would leave to future generations? Mary McLeod Bethune wrote in the mid-twentieth century to those who would come after her: “I leave you love. I leave you hope. I leave you the challenge of developing confidence in one another. I leave you responsibility for your use of power. I leave you racial dignity. I leave you a desire to live harmoniously with your fellow human beings”? Creating a culture where relationships can be healed and families strengthened and where all people can get on a path of hope and possibility is within our reach. We are invited to “choose life so that we and our descendants may live.”