

Heartbeats

The Company of St. Angela in the 21st Century

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A Heart of Hospitality

The climate in Brescia and in the Church in Angela's time was one of war, conflict, and division. Angela's words, "Seek peace and harmony wherever you are," have particular significance in this context. As disputes arose among citizens and nobles alike, they turned to Angela for help. A story is told about two noblemen, Filippo Sala and Francesco Martinengo, who literally had been at daggers drawn for many months. It was Angela who brought them together and helped them to reconcile.

A very clear sign of our time is "polarization" creating a "culture of contempt" in both politics and public life. One author maintains that the most significant cause is the growing influence of certain ways of thinking about each other. Some expressions include either/or thinking; absolutizing one's preferred values; viewing uncertainty as a mark of weakness or sin; assuming that one's opponents are motivated by bad faith. It is too easy to make a straightforward 'us versus them' list when it comes to blame for polarization. The habits and temptations of polarization are always with all of us.

Angela read the "signs of her time" and stayed engaged with her heart of hospitality. Our invitation - engaging in our time with that same heart.

Working in Washington

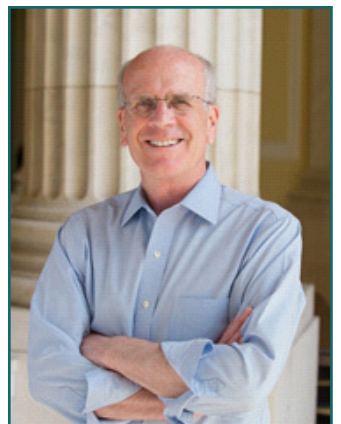
Heartbeats has invited Peter Welch, congressman from Vermont, to share his experience of working in Washington, D.C.

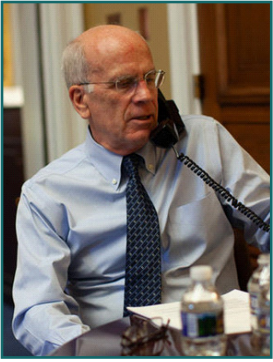
“Congress has always been partisan; both the Republicans and Democrats want to win and be the majority party, but seldom has it been as partisan as it is now. In the past both sides have fought fiercely but both sides shared an awareness that our work wasn't just about winning a victory for our party. The ultimate goal was progress for the country.

On a day-to-day basis it meant that fight as hard as we would, all of us knew principled compromise was ultimately the secret ingredient for moving forward together.

Those days seem like the distant part of a nostalgic bygone era. But, in fact, tough as it is, many members of congress are doing their best to find ways to work together.

My attitude is to approach my Republican colleagues with an appreciation that they were elected just like me. Rather than getting into arguments about the President or issues where I know we disagree, I bring up problems we both share -- high prescription drug costs no one can afford, the universal financial pressure on our community hospitals so vital to the citizens we both represent, and the devastation of the opioid crisis in our communities.





By talking concretely about problems we share rather than arguing about the abstractions of our political philosophy, it begins to build common ground and the trust needed to pass legislation.

Another approach is to visit another member's district. I serve with a member from West Virginia whose constituents are

being devastated by the loss of coal mining jobs.

Our planet is being destroyed by carbon emissions. My West Virginia colleague and I work together on energy efficiency but designed on the use of coal. I went to a coal mine with him, 950 feet down and then four and a half miles in, to a seam of coal being mined by some remarkable and hardworking coal miners.

It was a way of me acknowledging my respect for the coal miners. After all, they didn't create climate change. We then worked together on legislation to restore healthcare

benefits to coal miners who lost them when their employers went out of business.

And we redoubled our efforts on energy efficiency and many of my coal state colleagues began to see my advocacy for renewable energy was not an attack on the livelihood of the hardworking people they represented.

Members rush to the airport right after the last vote at week's end. There is much less time for casual socializing where friendships are forged. So I found informal dinners at my apartment with a bipartisan mix helpful to create good levels of friendship, all helpful to reaching agreements on legislation.

So, divisive as congress is, there are ways to get things done. Don't judge colleagues by their party. Talk about specific challenges you and they face in representing the people of their district. Of course, treat your colleagues with respect; respect given leads to respect received.

It's not all that complicated."



"Through encountering lived realities . . . we can invite new ideas and perspectives into our spirit. We can only work for the common good if we understand the needs of the country."

—Emily TeKolste, SP NETWORK

Sr. Nancy Sylvester of the Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue offers us some tools personally and communally to new ways of being and acting toward each other rather than the same old debate, persuade or demonize strategies:

The 5 Why Process

1. Pose a question: e.g., When I reflect on the current state of our government, I feel _____ (name an emotion).
2. And why does that (answer of #1) make me feel this way (the emotion)?
3. And why does that (answer of #2) make me feel this way (the emotion)?
4. And why does that (answer of #3) make me feel this way (the emotion)?
5. And why does that (answer of #4) make me feel this way (emotion)?

For Reflection:

- > What are your habits and temptations toward polarization?
- > Pose your own question and engage with another in the "5 why process."
- > What do you discover?
- > "How can we be the 'good Christian' who meddles in politics so that those who govern can govern?" (Pope Francis)

" . . . authentic dialogue demands a capacity for empathy. For dialogue to take place there has to be empathy."

Pope Francis