



ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM

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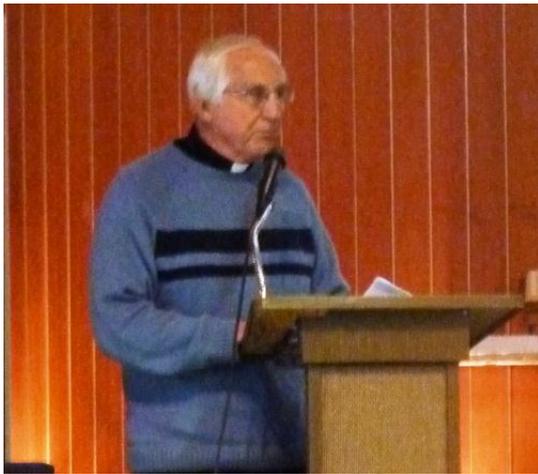


**SR. SIMONE CAMPBELL
ST. BLASE CHURCH
STERLING HEIGHTS, MI
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2020**

Introduction

Bishop Tom Gumbleton

Good afternoon and welcome to another Elephants' educational forum; and I have the happy duty now to introduce our speaker who has been with us before, and I think also, in other



parts of the diocese at different times: Sister Simone. Anyways, before I speak about her, I want to say a word about the organization NETWORK, because it's one of the most effective things that came out of the Vatican Council, and a synod document a few years later in 1971. The Council, that you remember, I'm sure, published a pastoral Constitution on Church in the Modern World; and that was a call to all of us throughout the Church to be engaged with the world, to be trying to transform our world into the reign of God. And that was promulgated in 1965. In 1971, a few years later, Pope Paul VI called a synod of the bishops of the world; and they discussed the

question of justice in the world, a clear follow up to *Gaudium et Spes* document

And at that time, at one point, the bishops, promulgated by Pope Saint Paul, the bishops wrote, and the Pope promulgated, that action for justice, and our participation in the transformation of the world. These are constituent dimensions in the preaching of the Gospel. You know, that is a very powerful statement: action for justice, doing things to change, bring about transformation, take risks, perhaps bans from speaking as Sister Simone has said before in this diocese. We have to do that, if we say we are proclaiming the gospel message of Jesus.

And NETWORK, started a short time after the Synod Council, in the early fall of 1971. In December of 1971 the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, taken the lead in our Church, as women often do, they had a group of the their religious various communities, 47 people, gather in Washington and discussed how to become a Church, where we do action for justice. As a result of their discussions, the following April, NETWORK began its work.

It's an organization that is committed to action for justice, and to profoundly participate in the transformation of the world. We are here today to hear one of the examples of how we can participate in the transformation of the world.

And Sister Simone is a very appropriate person to lead us in our discussion today. She comes from California, born in Santa Monica. She joined the Sisters of Social Service, which is an international Roman Catholic Religious Institution, modeled in the Benediction tradition, and in 1964 took her final vows. And in her educational preparation for her work, she received a bachelor's degree in 1969 from Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles. Then, in 1977, she received the degree of Juris Doctor from the University of California, Davis School of Law, where she had been editor of U. C. Davis Law Review. In 1978 she became the founder and lead attorney for a Community Law Center in Oakland, California. She continued to serve there until 1995, when she became the leader of the Sisters of Social Service. And that enabled her, obligated her, to oversee the activities of her religious community, and enabled her to travel throughout the United States, Mexico, Taiwan and the Philippines. In 2002 to 2004 she became Executive Director of an interfaith group she called JERICHO, advocating on behalf of the poor; and then, in 2004; and currently, she is the Executive Director of NETWORK.

Let me just share a couple of things about Sister Simone that in my mind makes her very special in the work that she is doing. You may remember in March of 2000, the United States debated needed reforms in health care, called the Affordable Care Act. As far as her work with NETWORK, sister wrote what came to be called "The nun's letter," supporting reforms, and asked leaders of women's religious orders to sign it. Sixty heads of religious orders, an umbrella group, signed; and the letter was sent to all members of Congress. One group that did not speak of for the Affordable Care Act was the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; so that contributed to the momentum in favor of the legislation. Sister attended the signing ceremony for the law and received a hug from President Obama. (applause)

The other thing she has become known for, and maybe some of you have even participated in this act: The Nuns on the Bus. And the idea of this is a small group of religious women have a bus which they use to travel around the country. They make tours around the country that highlight social issues. In 2012, the first year of the project, the nuns aimed to draw attention to nuns' work with the poor, and to protest planned aid cuts to the poor. In 2014, in honor of her advocacy work, Sister Simone became the recipient of the Pacem in Terris Peace and Freedom Award, Peace on Earth - the encyclical of Saint John XXIII in 1963. She was recognized as one who is a leader in her justice and peace activity by this award. Among her hundreds and probably thousands of speaking engagements, she spoke at the Democratic National Convention in September of 2012. And now, today, she speaks to us. We are very blessed to hear her speak to us about The State of the Union, an Alternative Vision. I am pleased to present and ask you to welcome Sister Simone. (applause)

The State of the Union: An Alternative Vision Sr. Simone Campbell

Well, you can tell, while Bishop Gumbleton is 90 years old, that my biography is getting longer and longer, because I am almost catching up with him. Thank you for the rich and treasured introduction. Some magic here - fixing her up with a microphone. That's when you tell we are a little bit older, when we have a little bit of challenge with all of the electronic devices. We need a third grader to make sure that we've got it right.

Well, what an honor to be here; and I love being able to talk to the Elephants in the Living Room, because don't we have a few things in the living room that we desperately need to talk about? And do I need to stand here? *(Sigh ... laughter)* All right, I will behave myself. At least where I stand, but the rest of the talk won't be.

Because, I think, this is a time in our nation, where we need to talk directly about the things that we find in our midst, that we are reluctant to engage with. It wasn't that long ago, in 2012, on the first bus trip, we were in Hershey, Pennsylvania; and this woman came up to me. Well, you have to know that in Hershey, Pennsylvania, we were going to meet in the one of the parishes; but then the chancery office got wind of it, and cancelled that one, but didn't tell the organizers; so they found out, and moved it to another parish, and the chancery office found out about it, and cancelled it. Ended up going to all four parishes in Hershey. None of them could host us; and I get a call from the woman who was trying to organize it, Ann; and I will never forget being on the bus, and she said, "Oh sister, I don't know if we can do this." She's just in tears, and she says, "I just don't want them to win." And I said, "I totally feel your pain. I get it. I get it." So, we had our town hall in a recreation center for a trailer park. It was perfect! *(laughter)* We had over 150 people show up on 24 hours notice. It was fantastic! But this woman came up to me, and she was probably mid 30's, and she said to me, "If I join NETWORK, could you tell me some people in my area that it is safe to talk to? I am afraid to talk to folks here about anything that matters." And I thought, that was 2012 and what's happened since then? Wider and wider gaps.



And I love the Gospel reading we have about the beatitudes; but in a sense, I worry that the beatitudes pull us further away; and at this point, I want to think more of the story of the apostles out on a turbulent sea. Remember that story, where they are out, and it is stormy and tossing around, and they are afraid, and Jesus is asleep in the bottom of the boat, and everybody is saying, "Oh! we are going to drown." It's really scary; and they go and wake Jesus up, and say, "Aren't you afraid?" And he says, "Oh brother, what's wrong with you folks? Ugh!"

And he gets them together, and allays their fear, and eases their hearts, and the storms calm. And so, I want to think of today a bit like, we are in the boat. We are unnerved, we are all terrified, and we are here in church, and we are shaking Jesus, "Wake up.! Help!" So, may this be helpful. May this help calm some of our waters. But, mostly, may this help us go forward as the community that can navigate this time, because isn't that the challenge? It's us continuing to move forward to be the body of Christ, to respond to the state of our world, which in *Gaudium et Spes*, this whole idea of Church in the Modern World; it's so much more needed, even now, more than ever. And that's what we are trying to see.

So, I want to talk about a few of the things that I see that are making the turbulent seas. You could probably guess a few of those. I want to share with you a few stories of what we've been about in building relationship. And I want to recommend a stance, going forward, and then, I have a few revolutionary suggestions. (*laughter*) How's that? You game? Okay. Let's get to the revolutionary part. No! we gotta lay it out first.

Okay, so what's going on? Well, what I see is an incredible individualism, life in our world. But it's an individualism, which is driven by a competitive need to win. And a few years ago, we did these business roundtables, because we didn't know about business; so, we wanted to learn about business. And we were in Chicago, had several CEO's of companies sitting around the table; and it had just come out that the average salary for a CEO of a publicly traded company was ten million dollars a year, plus benefits; and they were going for another million the next year. So, I said to this gathering - you know, I always make a joke of most things. So, I said, "Well, what is it guys?" They are all guys. "What is it? Are you not getting by on ten million, that you just need another mill, is that the trouble?"

And this one guy, who was the head of a start up that was doing really well, he said, "Oh no, Sister Simone, it's not about the money." I go, "What? It's not about the money; what do you mean?" "Oh no! We are very competitive; and we want to win. It just happens that the measure of winning is money." And as I reflected on that, and learned from that, it's that measure of winning in a sense is driving the individualism, because it is not about the team. It is not about how we come together. It's not about how we serve our communities, or our societies. It's not even about how we build up our local community. And already, being here in Detroit for less than 24 hours; I mean, I've been awake for about 9 of them. But what we have heard is about is tax benefits given to build a sports stadium or given the tax benefits to bring in manufacturing; and then, nobody ever does an audit to see if all the promised jobs ever come through. And not having enough funds to invest in the community, to invest in education, to invest in care for the most marginalized people in our society. But, if money is the measure of winning, then the only thing we care about is how much do I have - an individualism that is divisive.

There's also what I like to call a gerrymandering of political persuasion.

Not only do we have gerrymandered districts, which I understand in 2018 Michigan created a commission, and we're are going to do better this next time around. Congratulations, that is really important. But the fact is, across the country, there is all this evidence that we don't talk to people who think politically different from ourselves, unless you have to do it at the Thanksgiving dinner table with your in-laws, or something like that. *(laughter)*

I used to rag on my brother as being my example of, you know, somebody who thinks differently, 'cause he would give me a really bad time. But what happened was, in the 2018 bus trip, I did a video clip that went viral on the internet; and somebody in his group attacked me; and my brother stood up for me. I was, like shocked; and so, I can't rag on my brother anymore. But what I came to realize is, that when we are one on one, the old sibling rivalry comes out, the old family relationships. So I developed this idea of a lending library of difficult relatives, *(laughter)* because I think my brother would probably do much better with you all, and I would probably do better with your difficult relatives; and we could have much more harmony, but much less family spirit, I would think. But it is this gerrymandering of our lives into, who is it safe to talk to, that keeps us separate and alone.

There's also a huge Church divide that is an anguish at this moment. I come from Washington DC - that's where I live now - and in Washington DC we have a horror of abuse and cover up, and generations of it. And in the process, the story of Jesus is lost in the institutional compromises, in the institutional commitment to protecting itself, and not caring for the people. It's anguish. And so, how do we care for each other?

And finally, as if all that weren't enough, have I cheered you up enough yet? We've got people who are spiritually and literally hungry; hungry to know some deeper meaning; hungry to be physically fed; hungry for just a roof over their heads, a place to be; hungry for safety in our immigrant population. Hungry! And rather than being in this richest nation on earth, as we like to say, confident that there is abundance and enough, we become the hoarders in chief, and refuse to share. That is not the Gospel, you might notice. So, what in God's green earth, oh Elephants in the Living Room, are we going to do to bring in, to heal, to build community that is strong enough to sustain these turbulent seas?

Well, first of all, I want to give you a few examples of what I have come to call "holy curiosity." One of the things I think that we suffer from is that, because of our individualism, we're not very curious about each other. You may not do this, but I know I periodically play, "Want to ask a question, so I can give my answer?" Does that ever happen to you? *(laughter)* "Oh please, don't talk very long in answering my question because I want to tell you what this really is." Do you know how that goes? Ok. I have a hunch we could be engaged with a curiosity that welcomes the other perspective. And so, at NETWORK, because we realized we were all city folk at NETWORK, that we, then in 2019, did a series of rural roundtables around the country. We did 17 rural roundtables in 16 states; and people always say, "What state got two?" And I will tell you, it's Texas got two, because Texas is like at least 7 states.

But it was in the northern part outside of Dallas; we were in Poetry, Texas; and then we were down in Brownsville, on the border, because it's two different worlds.

But at the rural roundtables, I would often start by saying, and there were just a collection of rural folks, you know, maybe between 12 and 18 people sitting around the table representing different aspects of rural life, and I would start off explaining, "I am a city person, and we are doing this because we don't know about rural life." And I would say, "What do city folk get wrong about country living?" And everybody kind of laughed. "Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha." And then they start talking. But what often came up that broke my heart was that many people would say: "You know, city folk think country people are dumb and uneducated; and it's not true!" And the anger with which that was said, and the hurt made me realize the gulf of judgment between urban and rural realities. Then, I would go to my city folk and say, "Oh, I heard this shocking thing; and I was so surprised." And my city folks' friends would say to me: "Well, Simone, that's what I think. Why are you shocked? It's true. They are dumb." Oh no!

And I came to think that in our gerrymandered relationships, when we don't know the humanity, the reality, the basic spirit of folks who are different, we create judgments in our head. We encountered a fair amount of supporters of the president in this process. We didn't talk politics; we just talked experience. But in the process, it would come up; and what I discovered was that, most of the folks we talked to did not know or identify with any policy promoted by the president. What they identified with was his anger. Because, they were angry at being disregarded, being disliked, being left out – sigh! And so our effort is to shine a light of connection, of being seen, so they can let go of some of the anger; because, until we have let go a bit of that anger that is currently driving this gerrymandered reality - I have a hunch - we are going to continue the polarized gerrymandered political reality where we just call each other names. I heard that last night's debate was quite interesting for that factor. I was on an airplane, and I was spared; but for those of you that watched it, I think we have got to find another way forward. Okay? So, the rural roundtables opened my eyes to curiosity. But they also opened my eyes to a different level of the immigration story. And the immigration story, which is not told that often is how rural communities rely on immigrant population. They rely on immigrant population for farm labor, for increasing the use in rural communities, and for doing the basic services in rural communities.

We were up in Wabasha, Minnesota about a year ago, and there was 4 feet of snow on the ground. I thought, "This really is Minnesota." But there we met with a hospital administrator from a 25-bed hospital. And he said he was really worried. He had 450 employees; but more than half of them were over the age of 50; and what was he going to do to keep his hospital open when they had declining youthful population? But what he had discovered was, the immigrant population working on the dairy farms provided potential, if we could only regularize the immigrant status. It made me realize that on the immigration front, we have got to get business speaking up for their needs for immigrants in our nation.

We do it from the humanitarian, from the human, from the family dimension, but we need new allies. And some new allies can be business. Did you notice this, that there is also a fair amount of racism around in our country? You didn't notice that? And that the black/white issue is an issue, but the white people of color, period is an issue. And we have got to find a way to bridge those divides.

We met with Congresswoman Lawrence's staff this morning to talk about some of the issues. Last week, I got to testify in front of her on the Government Oversight Commission. It was great! They were doing a hearing; and she was great. But to discover that she is the only African American in the Michigan congressional delegation was a little surprising. But then, how do we who walk in white skin, and have a fair amount of privilege? How do we create space, room, connection, understanding? And I want to lift up a program. Where's Catherine? Catherine, stand up. Catherine is one of my teammates at NETWORK. She is helping do organizing here in Michigan, where we have a racial wealth income gap experience. We call it RWIG. But the racial wealth income gap experience, to learn about 13 laws passed by Congress that created the wealth gap, it's really interesting, really exciting. If you want to have Catherine come and do it with you all. It's an experiential piece. But the thing that we didn't know is, so often, those of us who walk in white skin think about it as personal. Racism is personal. Did I say something wrong? Was I insensitive? Oh no, we've got to get over that fragility, because it's about structural issues in our society that perpetuate it. That Elephant has been named in the living room as racism that we have got to deal with.

But on the immigration side, racism runs into that. And the arrogance of keeping people in an undocumented status so they can be exploited for businesses' gain. That's wrong! I'd like to say it's un-American; but it seems like we repeat that a lot; so, I'm not sure I can say it. It's certainly not Christian; certainly not in keeping with Catholic social teaching; certainly not in keeping with what Pope Francis says.

Okay, so we have this huge divide. We got individualism. We've got a Church that is divided. We've got people that are hungry. We've got folks feeling dissed. We've got a politics that is breaking apart. So, what in God's green earth do we do? "Cause we're doers, right? We like to DO things. Even if we are getting gray hair, we can still do stuff. It's the benefit of being older; we have more time for this stuff. But what I would like to urge on us is, that we need to develop a strong, contemplative roots that sink down into the truth of God's loving presence in our midst, so that we can be rooted for these terrible times. We are made for these times, but these times require strong roots in a faith that is deeper than a doctrinal assessment, than a check list, than an observance of some rules.

Oh dear! Lent is coming; I have to remember the days of fast and abstinence; and what's the difference makes me nervous. Most of us are way beyond that, I'm sure; but I think it's got to be lifted up, that I don't believe our nation, or our Church can change until there is a dramatic contemplative renewal.

And that contemplative renewal knows at our guts that the Spirit is alive, and well, and making mischievous and the divine, creating us at every moment, that God is not sleeping in the bottom of the boat. God is humming us into being at every moment; and trusting the intuition and instincts and movement that we have.

For me the bus, our little bus, was so fabulous; but it was a gift of the Holy Spirit. You have to know, 4 days before the Vatican censure, we had held our 40th anniversary for NETWORK, and the big question was: how do we get our name out there? How do we let people know we've been working on Capitol Hill for 40 years for Catholic social justice? What did we do when we had all these little ideas? We had no money; so, we said, "Well, we could get a couple of Google ads, because we couldn't get a printed ad. And we could have a member get a member; and there are flyers in the back if you're not a member. If you don't know us, pick one up. We still do that but what happened 4 days later is: the Vatican named us as being a bad influence on Catholic sisters, because we promoted radical feminist themes incompatible with the Gospels. And we worked too much on the issues of poverty, and not enough on the issues of gay marriage and abortion. (laughter) Well, since our mission was to work on the issues of poverty, I thought, "Well, that was kind of a badge of honor; they noticed." How nice! But then, with all of the media attention that went with it, then my prayer became, "How do we use this moment for mission?"

And as a result of that prayer, the only thing that came to me was that story of the Samaritan woman at the well. Remember that? Jesus is in a strange land, middle of the day, hot as blazes. This woman, an outcast, comes to the well. He's a Jewish man, not suppose to talk to a Samaritan, and men weren't supposed to talk to women. And he does both. He not only talks to her, but he asks her for help. And where that story let me was, to ask our secular colleagues for help. And in an hour and a half meeting in our office on May 14, 2012, it came up: "We have to go on a bus." You have to go out and lift up the work that the Catholic sisters have worked on, to push back that Ryan budget, which we had been doing. And they said that we had to go in a wrapped bus. Now, I have to tell you, I didn't know what a wrapped bus was; and I was very nervous that it had something to do with rap music. (laughter) But then, I discovered that it was wrap not rap. Thank heavens, because I don't like rap music.

But it was a gift of the Spirit in that moment, and a contemplative stance just allows for those moments to bubble up, be recognized, and then sail off, do it, try it. Couldn't have been worse than we had already, with the Vatican telling us we were a bad influence. And kaboom! Wasn't it a gift of the Spirit? Those of you who know about it. It was amazing. But it was so far beyond anything that we've done. It was God alive in our midst, in a time when we really needed it. So, I believe in this contemplative rooted space, we will find the renewal that we need to know we are all connected; to know we are one body; to lift up the best of who we are; and that we are not alone, rural Americans, city Americans, suburban Americans, immigrants, everybody is one body.

But we have to know that in our bones; and we have to be curious about each other. And in that holy curiosity, then, we can find out the stories of each other, and let our hearts be broken open.

The breaking of a heart is, I think, critical to the Christian life. And, I believe, one of the Elephants in the Room is that we try to avoid pain. Have you noticed all those annoying ads for drugs that are on every show, that probably demographics say are watched by folks in our age section, right? Oh! my glory, I don't even know what those pills are for; but, you know, it sounds good to me, that the people in the ads look so happy. Isn't that good? (laughter) Well maybe part of what the Elephants need to begin talking about is, some sacredness of pain and struggle, the value that you found in your lives from your struggles. What would happen if you shared with the next generation, for those of you who have kids, you probably can't talk to your kids about this, but you could probably talk to your grandkids about it. It's a generation skipping phenomenon. About the benefit of pain, what do we learn? How do we grow? I just had daffodils that I picked up. Do you have Trader Joe's up here? Oh, ok, they have these daffodils that come in buds, and you cut off the stems a little bit, and you put them in water, and they open up. But what I discovered is, if you help, them they don't open up so well. (laughter) You've got to be patient, let them break through, let the struggle happen. But isn't that true for us? And there is no messaging abroad in our society at all, that we need to struggle to make community, to be connected, to know the deeper truth.

We've got to name that Elephant, and let our hearts be broken open, and risk the pain of a broken heart; because it is then our hearts have room for everyone. When my heart is sealed up, then I only have room for a few. But when it's broken open, you all come. That was from my Mississippi rural roundtable I picked that up. So, we need to let our hearts be broken open; and in that breaking open then, I believe our contemplative curiosity can go further, because we are not afraid to ask a question and listen to an answer.

And that leads me to where I really think the biggest challenge for me is, and maybe for you. And it all happened on a retreat with a spiritual director. Some of you have heard me say this, but I vastly prefer spiritual drift to spiritual direction. (laughter) I like just bobbing along, you know? Well, on retreat one time, this was a couple of years ago, this retreat director pushed me to, I said I was working on acceptance of some people that I find it difficult to accept. At that point Paul Ryan was at the top of my list. (laughter) I miss Paul Ryan now. (laughter) It's not nearly as much fun to go after Kevin McCarthy, it just isn't; but what I came to see with radical acceptance was to learn inside that, if I am at odds with the God in them, I am at odds with the God in me. How annoying! And then we apply it to the president. This is my question; this is not put out there, but since we are talking about Elephants in the Room, how do we have any compassion for that level of bigotry, that level of hate, that level of destructive fascist, whatever you want to call it?

But what I have come to believe is that, if we tell the truth about the actions that frees me to have care for the crippled spirit under it, and that if I hold back from being critical of his actions in some sort of compassionate way, if I hold back from that, the hate and anger builds up in me, and I become less in the process. Does that make some sense?

We'll have a question and answer time, so we can talk more about that. Because it is hard to get, and it is so annoying, we have to love even him? (laughter and "yep") Yeah! Oh man, that's the answer, isn't it? Yes! And did you see what he did at the prayer breakfast? That he was preceded by, I forget who it was, that gave the talk about loving your enemies; and the president starts off saying, "Oh, I'm not doing that; that's wrong. You just can't do that." Sort of dissing Jesus. The whole point of a prayer breakfast - oh dear - but anyway. But what I discovered is, if I can say that that is totally out of touch, if I can describe that action, then I can hold some compassion on the good days for the crippled spirit underneath. And holding compassion for the crippled spirit underneath, changes me, because I have less anger, less hate, and more energy to engage. So radical acceptance. Ew! what a bummer. It's what Jesus did.

And the second piece is, after I got to radical acceptance; actually, on retreat the hardest one for me to come to radical acceptance with was Mitch O'Connell, because, I really thought he was a mistake of God; because, did you ever notice, he doesn't have lips. (laughter) It was a model not to be repeated. God had an off day. But once I came to radical acceptance of even Mitch, who knew I would have to stretch for the president, that retreat director pushed me to say, "Well now add in fighting." Fighting? Fighting? I just got to radical acceptance, what do you mean, fighting.

He sends me off to go meditate. And what I came to realize is too often what we do is fight against. We often in DC say we are going to push back against something. The Women's March, we're pushing back against the patriarchy. And the Church, how often do I push back. And what happens in pushing back, is that it reinforces the thing you are pushing against; and we both get stuck. So, I've come to try to remember on the good days, that rather than pushing back, fighting against, what we are called to is to fight for a vision, to fight for an alternative, to fight for what we hunger for. And Pope Francis is the best in articulating for me, that fighting for; that fighting for means that we've got to hold on to the vision; and in our traditions, it's *Gaudium et Spes*, Church in the Modern World, the founding principles of NETWORK, the whole engagement. It's the Gospel alive. So, if we are going to have radical acceptance and fighting for a vision, then Elephants, I would like to have a conversation with you about what's in this living room, in this moment, besides our president.

I'd like to mention the word abortion. It's something most of us don't talk about. I don't talk about. I've just written a book; it's going to come out in September; and I have a whole chapter on this, because I confess my sin.

My sin is, I never talked about abortion, because I didn't want to be identified with the far right, and I had some differences with the far left; and they both made me mad, because they were just hyper organizing, cold and so. And the other piece, bless me brothers, I don't think this is a sin; but, sorry to say it, but since we are dealing with Elephants, have you ever noticed that many of the folks who advocate this really strict abortion stance are older white men? Did you notice that? (applause) Just saying. I got lobbied a couple of months ago now, 5 guys, Evangelicals and Catholics, they come to me, I get lobbied these days it's pretty funny, so to join them on doing stuff. So, these 5 white guys come to lobby me on abortion. I was like, "Guys, when you bring an equal number of women with you, I'll listen. Let's talk about other stuff." They haven't been back yet, but anyway, I'll let you know.

But here's the challenge with abortion. Abortion has been hijacked in our nation. It's been hijacked by the far right and hijacked by the far left; and neither extreme wants to settle this issue, because it is the organizing principle for the far right and the far left. And so, I have an atonement for my sin of silence, I am trying to talk about: let's care for women; let's care for the needs of moms; let's care for families. Do you know in France, they have a much more liberal abortion law, and a much lower abortion rate? Why is that? Hmmm. Pregnant women have access to medical care from the very first trimester. They not only have access to medical care, new moms have access to classes, and supportive services, and nutritional supplements, and support in the community. And after the baby is born, they have a year's paid leave from their jobs. They have affordable childcare subsidized by the government. They have access to in home supportive services during the first year of an infant's life. They have paternity leave so dads can be involved in the early care for their kids. What a radical thought. We should support families. How? We could do it differently. It's not about allowing abortion. It's about caring with compassion for young families, many of whom are struggling in this economy, because they are working low wage jobs. So I am trying to break out of my silence and talk about an alternative: caring for families. What a thought.

I also believe, I don't think outlawing abortion is gonna make a hill of beans of difference. Some of us in this room are old enough to have heard the stories of back room abortions, when it was illegal, and to know that desperate women will do desperate things. We've got to be real about this; and where is compassion for struggling families? So, the Elephant in the Living Room is we don't talk about it. We skirt it. But, I believe, that in these very polarized times, we've got to begin to at least whisper about the center of concern and care. And risk speaking out. Now some of you might say, "Oh, that is easy for you to say, Simone." Well, actually, it's not. I fear the price, because I am a Catholic sister. I'm past childbearing age. I took a vow that took care of that. So, in a way, it's not my issue either. But how can I not stand with women that I know who struggle. So, abortion.

The second piece that I want to say that we don't talk enough about is about the teaching of Pope Francis, about the economy and the environment - the environment a bit more than the economy. But, at NETWORK, we work on the economic disparities.

And I want to lift up the fact that Pope Francis says trickle-down economics has never been proven; it's never been realized; and it won't work for the future. And we have to begin talking about it. Trickle down doesn't work. If money is the measure of winning, it's winning for those at the top. And they gotta have their measure. We have got to change that measure of winning, and share the story of what Pope Francis says. Pope Francis says it's about how we all share together. How are we included? How do we think of the we in our community? What if our measure of winning was - let's just think of something - was how many people in our community knew each other?

On the Bus in 2015 we were in Little Rock, Arkansas; and we were sitting around at roundtables, and this one group of 10 people sitting around a roundtable discovered they were all from the same neighborhood, but nobody knew each other. And they were like, what? "Oh, my heavens, this is a scandal." And so, they spent their time trying to figure out why they didn't know each other. They lived within 3 blocks of each other. Well, as it turns out, they decided that it was because everybody had an attached garage to the house. They all had automatic garage door openers; that they had air conditioning in their house. And many of them had their own back yard swimming pool. So, there was no reason to be outside. So, their resolution coming out of this mend the gaps thing, was they were going to sit on their front lawns, because most of them didn't have front porches anymore; and they were going to sit on their front lawns, and just wave at people as they went by. (laughter) I have no idea if they ever did it, but it made me realize how in our wealth we've preferred insularity. And what can we do to break out of that? How can we think of this in some new ways? Where is the Spirit leading us to break through the curse of our wealth, to be in relationship that's bigger?

So, I am advocating a whisper campaign on Pope Francis' economic teachings. And we can start it here. Did you know the Pope said our level of economic dominance is hurting the world? Did you know that the Pope says, "Jesus wouldn't like it?" Did you know and if we start a whisper campaign, maybe that will take off, because we don't have money for big ads on television the way Bloomberg does; so what we got to do is find an alternative way to break through, right? So, I think whispering could be it. All right! So, for this campaign for those who are left out, breaking open the issue of abortion, being willing to whisper Pope Francis' truth.

I urge on you also to pick up Pope Francis' characteristics of holiness for your practice for Lent. Now, how many of you have read his Exhortation on Holiness? Hands high. The rest of you have a treat in store for you. Now, I rarely say that about a Vatican document, but this is great. He says the examination of conscience should be the Beatitudes, which we heard in the reading; and then he says these are 5 characteristics of holiness in the 21st Century. So, I want to urge these on you for your Lenten practice. Okay?

So, the first one he says is perseverance and meekness. And I have to confess, meekness made me mad at first, because I thought it was like – “Oh humble me. I won't say anything.” No! No! No! He says meekness is the gift of being willing to learn from others, to know I'm not complete. And I just call it holy curiosity. Persevering, because Lord knows we've got gray hair, and we've been at this for a while, and I'm really glad that Bishop Gumbleton, you go before us, leading us in all this, so we can stick with this. It's really important. So persevering and meek, even when we want to wake Jesus up from the bottom of the boat and say, “Help! Help! We're gonna drown.” Persevere and meek.

And the second he says is almost my favorite. The third is actually my favorite but the second he says is to exhibit joy and a sense of humor. Now, have you noticed how those of us who comes to meetings such as this can get a little serious? A little down? A little depressed? A little outraged? And then we say to our friends, “Come join us.” (laughter) Right? Joy and a sense of humor, because that is a sign we know that the Spirit is alive in our lives, and it is beyond us. We are not in charge. Joy is about the fact we are in relationship. Joy is a communal virtue that we can only be joyful together. And if you haven't been joyful in a while, I ask you to look to see, “Am I not connected to enough people?” Perseverance and meekness, learning from others, joy and a sense of humor.

And the third one is my favorite: passion and boldness. Passion and boldness. This is not a time to hold back. I'm saving myself for the big moment. No! This is the big moment. We need passion and boldness. We also, those of us of our age, we also need to make sure that we don't discourage young people from being bold in the process. “Now! Now! We tried that back in 1945; it didn't work then; not going to work now.” Right? Try it. See what happens. “I will be with you.” Passion and boldness, which I will be with you, leads to ...

The fourth characteristic of holiness is that we do it in community. We do not do this journey alone. We do it together. Holiness is all about our communal relationship, our connections. Those of us who are members of religious congregations, I mean, I don't even know what I would do without my religious community. It is like at the core of my being. So, cuddle up with a sister; that's all I can say. (laughter) But it's all about being in community. It's about coming to the Elephants in the Living Room. It's about knowing you are not alone. It's about being our best selves together. Jesus always sent the apostle out at least two by two. He knew that one of them was going to have a bad day, and the odds of both of them having a bad day on the same day were smaller. At least somebody could pick it up. Do this in community.

And the last piece that Pope Francis says is the characteristic of a community that lifts up the sense of prophetic imagination that can indeed be what our time needs is that we live in constant prayer. Living is constant prayer is not hiding out in the chapel all the time. This could be a safe haven for a little bit, but constant prayer is being in the boat. It's being out on the street. It's being in relationship at the dining room table.

It's being with folks you don't know. Being in constant prayer is knowing that when you say, "Help! Help!" and we wait, helps there. Helps always there, I just have to have eyes to see it.

So I urge on you my friends, as we name these Elephants we don't want to talk about in our Church, and in our society, do it with a modicum of holiness as lifted up by Pope Francis; and then, we will be this community that perseveres, this community that at its heart is joy, and a sense of passion and boldness; that our community will be broad enough to include all. And finally, that by living in constant prayer, we too will become a Pentecost people, where we live in the spirit, and speak to those who have such need in this time. Thank you. (*applause*)

Transcribed by,

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