



January 4, 2020  
St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Even in our often secularized culture, many lament the rise of a digital “dystopia” where words are wielded with abandon and human dignity is a drive-by casualty. This presidential election year whose entr’acte coincides with the Iowa caucuses and extends through November intensifies the stakes and the passions that can poison the well of civic friendship and mutual respect for our neighbors, regardless of their religious, political, or other affiliations.

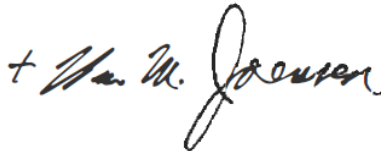
As Catholic Christians and persons of good will, we recognize how easily we, too, can be drawn into the contentious climate and fall short of basic charity in our attitudes and our speech. St. Peter cautions the early Christian community: “Rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, insincerity, envy, and all slander” (1 Peter 2:1). And St. Paul likewise counsels: “Therefore, putting away falsehood, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, for we are members one of another” (Ephesians 4:25).

With a desire to lift up society in accord with our “better angels,” the Diocese of Des Moines is collaborating with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops by participating in a campaign that transcends partisan sentiment: “Civilize It: Dignity beyond the Debate 2020.” The hope is to encourage greater **civility**, **compassion**, and **clarity** in dialogue and engagement that will deepen our appreciation for varied voices, grounded in the belief that each of us by nature is inclined toward the true, the good, and the beautiful. None of us has a monopoly on the truth, but all have been leavened with “seeds of the truth” that we cultivate by forming personal conscience and through communal conversation so we can bear fruit in civic friendship and achievement of the common good.

Our “Civilize It” campaign is not an exhaustive, time-consuming parish program; it is more about cultivating the “how” and the dispositions of dialogue that will free us to discern and affirm the “what” of ordered goods that reflect our priorities and decisions as a political society. This year-long effort begins in earnest the weekend of February 1-2, 2020, and concludes after the U.S. general election on Tuesday, November 3, 2020.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I sincerely hope you will join me in promoting this initiative and most importantly I pray that we might meet our neighbor with civility, compassion, and clarity during this election season.

Faithfully in Christ,



Most Rev. William M. Joensen, Ph.D.  
Bishop of Des Moines