

FIVE STEPS
TO POSITIVE
POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Steps

About the 5 Steps Series

The books in the 5 Steps Series are useful for anyone seeking bridge-building solutions to current issues. The 5 Steps series presents positive approaches for engaging with the problems that open up gaps and divisions in family, school, church, and society. Each volume presents five short chapters (or “steps”) on a single topic. Each chapter includes a relevant “excerpt”, “insights” from the author(s), and an “example” to consider. The “example” is a real-life story that illustrates how each step can be applied in daily life.

Topics include:

- Facing Suffering
- Living Christian Unity
- Effective Student Leadership
- Towards Great Parenting
- A Fulfilling Marriage

FIVE STEPS TO POSITIVE POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Insights and Examples

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Introduction

“**S**O WHAT SHOULD WE do?” My friends were almost in tears. It was the summer before a presidential election, and the emails were flying. People who had been very close friends, committed to supporting each other in their efforts to live the gospel, found themselves trapped in the polarization that was also ripping apart many other communities. Multiple questions and fears arose. Are my misguided friends being inadvertently duped into making sinful choices by political machines? Are my misguided friends being inadvertently duped by political rhetoric that sounds good, but in practice produces no social change? How can I convince them otherwise? If we can't convince each other, where is our country going? If we can't have these conversations in a spirit of love and unity, where are we going?

My friends had come to me with their questions because I am a lawyer, and they hoped

that I might have some particular insight. At that point, I was not exactly sure what to think or how to move either. Their questions and our common commitment to try to understand and love each other across political differences prompted me to delve into the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on the topics of voting and citizenship.

In the years that followed, I had many opportunities to explore the nature of political life and political choices with people from across the political spectrum. An especially enlightening point in the journey was a weekend workshop devoted to developing tools for dialogue about politics. As my own perspective continued to emerge, I published a series of articles in law journals and in *Living City*, the Focolare's monthly magazine of religion, culture and dialogue. Much of the material in this book is based on those works and modified to fit this book's format.

I wish to thank the friends who have courageously explored how their commitment to a gospel-based lifestyle of mutual love can be lived in political life, especially amid political disagreement. Our common efforts are a hopeful sign that the polarization dividing our communities, our churches, and our country as a whole can be bridged. It is a tiny seed just beginning to sprout, full of life and potential. I look forward to its continued growth.

Steps

Step 1

Believe

**that a Positive Vision
of Politics is Possible**

POLITICS. THE WORD ALONE seems to evoke negativity, frustration and fatigue. Why didn't I get that promotion or job opportunity? Politics. Why can't our national, state or local government ever seem to get anything done? Politics. Being "political" or labeled a "politician" is often a code word for someone who uses manipulative or underhanded tactics to advance a partial or personal agenda.

How might this negative mentality towards politics be transformed? Just opening this book and moving beyond the first paragraph is a sign of hope. The desire to reflect on one's own perspective on politics is a step in the right direction.

The very origins of the term "politics" suggest a seed for positive change. The word originates in thinkers like Plato and Aristotle, who outlined their vision for the ideal *polis*, the city or community as a whole. Acknowledging how the broad dimensions of politics touch our everyday lives lets us recognize that whatever our task in society, we share in the responsibility for the life of the community as a whole. What may seem small gestures in our daily lives as citizens—following traffic rules, serving on a jury, informed voting, communicating ideas and concerns to elected representatives—are possibilities to add our own tile to the mosaic of a healthy body politic.