



Sister of Mercy, Mary Schmuck, serves with the Archdiocese of Louisville Catholic Charities Parish Social Ministry Department.

Striving to be Generative

In recent days I participated in a Mercy community gathering of our vowed members who are ages 62-68.

It was a great time of renewed bonding with women with whom I started out in community almost 50 years ago, but with whom I hadn't had a good conversation for decades.

There was a lot of reminiscing, laughing, empathetic listening about life experiences and lessons learned (with varying numbers of battle scars to show for the effort!).

Given we were the age of many grandparents, we demonstrated attitudes and concerns of many grandparents. We really know more now about what is truly important in life and what is much less so than we thought, in say the 1960s. We were also concerned about our younger and newer members, that they be and feel supported and loved.

Toward the end of our time together, someone noted how "generative" we had become—caring about younger people, the common good. A bit later someone further noted that we are becoming generative, but in a country that so often is apparently NOT acting in a generative manner. Some instances cited:

- So often it sounds like our beloved country is telling all who will listen that it is "our way or the highway!"
- Too often it sounds like we are claiming natural resources located in other countries as if it were ours pretty much alone (and meanwhile doing little to really wean ourselves from dependence on those resources).
- Consuming ever more by the day, year and decade, not giving nearly enough consideration to reports on trends in our environment.

I have been thinking about these two observations, and the latter gives me a lot of concern. Citing these instances of "self-centeredness" does not disregard the many ways the US has been generous over the genera-

tions or done good things in the community of nations. But it is a mistake to think that we are, therefore, doing everything right and nothing needs fixing and major trends don't need careful watching.

How does a society become more caring? The society—it is us, us living as good individuals, and us working together in organizations and through government entities.

Here's one close-to-home step each of us could take. Now that elections are over, we can reflect on our experience of candidates' campaigns, listing things we liked and disliked, and respectfully and constructively communicating these lists to all the candidates on our local ballots. (As for the difficulties we experience at election time, that song "I Never Promised You a Rose Garden" probably has some wisdom for us all!)

In all this campaign analysis I don't see how demonizing any public figure really helps—especially if we think demonizing somebody else lets me and us off the hook of responsibility to do our part to make life in community better for everyone, especially for people who are poor.

Some longer term tasks are needed, too: to work strongly with our US Congress to restore habeas corpus and to return control of our National Guard to our state governors, as provided by our Constitution. The genius of our form of government is the system of checks and balances among our three branches of government. It certainly seems to me that we have let ever so much power move over to one branch. All these civil safeguards are important for our younger generations of people.

Thinking about future generations and caring about them are good things. Us older folks, be encouraged; younger ones, take note!

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