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Amen, Sister!

One glare from Sister Veronita or Sister Robertus could silence a room and make the toughest students behave like members of a church choir. These nuns were among our teachers at Flint St. Michael High School in the 1960s.

Their order was the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM), which made them sound less terrifying than they actually were to us. They took no guff and tolerated no nonsense. But they were there for us 24/7/365, and looking back, most of us would not trade our years at St. Mike's for anything. There was a lot of love and respect in that building.

I thought of this when I saw a letter to the editor from an IHM sister, Sister Mary Jane Herb, in last Sunday's Detroit Free Press. It was such a compelling letter about today's political atmosphere that I sent it to all my classmates (Class of 1965). I received several replies, with the most common comment being "Amen, Sister."

I agreed with classmate Mike, who has written a book about the state of American politics, "This is Your Government on Drugs" (www.guvondrugs.com). He suggested, what today's politicians need is "Sister Veronita upside their heads." I gave him an "Amen, Brother."

I also heard from classmate Jean Ann, an IHM sister who lives at the IHM motherhouse in Monroe,

Michigan. She told me: (Sister Herb) "...is the current president of the IHM Sisters and it's amazing all the things she does, in her quiet, dedicated way."

This is what the letter said: "With the campaign season upon us, the IHM Leadership Council joins the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in calling for civility and decency in our political discourse.

We are a nation characterized by a variety of beliefs and experiences. Our disagreements have the potential to challenge us to abandon easy certainty and seek a fuller truth. However, the way we handle our disagreement spells the difference between building the common good and destroying the bonds that bind our nation together.

The need for courageous leadership has never been greater. But let's refrain from language that disrespects, dehumanizes or demonizes another. Instead, let's engage in careful listening and honest questioning. Let us honor the dignity of those with whom we disagree and treat them with respect." — Mary Jan Herb, President, IHM Sisters of Monroe.

"Amen, Sister!" I am old enough to recall elections



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where an honest difference of opinion did not split families and cause neighbors stop speaking to each another. I remember in 1952 and again in 1956 the houses of boyhood friends Ronny and Tommy displayed placards for Dwight D. Eisenhower while the placard in my family's front window was for Adlai Stevenson. That did not stop our mothers from having coffee together, our dads letting us play Wiffle ball in the front yards or all of us kids having what amounted to three sets of parents. Big Ron and Big Tom remain my best friends to this day.

With all of that said, I would add one more topic to the discussion — increasing participation in the political process. When more people vote, more power is in the hands of the electorate. When fewer people vote, the power is in the hands of elitists.

A movement is gaining momentum in this regard — automatic voter registration. Instead of our current system that says you can't vote unless you register, this reform would default to registration unless you opt out.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice: "Automat-

ic voter registration makes two transformative changes to voter registration. Eligible citizens who interact with government agencies are registered to vote unless they decline, and agencies transfer voter-registration information electronically to election officials. These two changes would create a seamless process that will be more convenient and less error-prone for voters, agency staff and election officials. This reform has the potential to boost registration rates, clean up the rolls, save money, make voting more convenient and reduce the potential for voter fraud."

Five states have already approved automatic voter registration measures and 24 more are considering legislation, including Michigan with Michigan Senate Bill 735.

(<https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/automatic-voter-registration>)

None of these changes or behaviors will happen overnight, but perhaps if people come together for the common good, our children and grandchildren will look back on this sorry span of American politics as a never-to-be-repeated aberration of American history.

For more about the IHM Sisters, go to www.ihmsisters.org.

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