



ATD

FOURTH WORLD

**CREATING JUSTICE IN OUR
DEMOCRACY**

FALL 2020 NEWSLETTER



Dear friends,

There are few times in our lives that a year stands out because of the impact it has on our journey as individuals and as a country. 2020 is definitely one of those years. The Covid-19 pandemic and nationwide uprising against racism and police brutality lay bare the inequality and injustice of our social structure. The country is also unprecedentedly impacted by hurricanes and wildfires that have the most dire consequences on underserved communities. And, as if a game of fate, 2020 is ending with two high stakes events - the nomination of a Supreme Court Justice and the presidential election.

This election will surely be a decisive moment, and we are all bracing for it. But the fact that it culminates such an intense year, filled with stress, anxiety and fear is overwhelming. Being overwhelmed is sometimes a sign that I need to take a step back and look at what is happening through a different lens.

Through close relationships with people having the experience of poverty, I have come to an understanding that even a very well thought out democratic process leaves people aside and silences some voices. But I've also witnessed how people speak up and take action, as Patrick did when he stepped out of a meeting to invite someone in who at first had not dared join the conversation. This is also democracy. And it is built by people who, knowing what exclusion means, want to guarantee that those who are missing can participate in the decision making.

When our political leaders are aware and willing to do what it takes to include everyone, especially those most impacted by poverty, our democracy can better meet its challenge that all people have the opportunity to reach their full potential. We also know from experience that the solutions to the deep crises our country is facing will not trickle down from the top. They will rise up through the efforts of individuals in their communities, looking for the ways people with direct experience of poverty truly belong, participate and are adequately represented.

Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World, spoke to our time when he said: *"Those living in poverty are the very source of all human ideals. It is through injustice that humanity discovered justice; through hate, love; through contempt, dignity; through tyranny, the equality of all human beings."*

Dealing with the challenges faced this year has brought us to a critical point in the long-term systemic injustices present in our country. It has also led us to a deeper sense of justice. Let's use that. Elections are not the end of the journey nor the final expression of a democratic process which gains purpose and value through everyday actions toward equality, justice and dignity for all.

In solidarity with you on this journey,

Guillaume Charvon
National Director



Exercising Our Right To Vote

"Give me a paper and let me vote for my legislators. Let me see their names and their faces. Let me hear them, and I will vote, I will pick which one." A longtime ATD Fourth World activist from New York City expressed what many people also believe is an important way to participate in the democratic process that has an effect on our lives. The act of voting is valued, respected, for many because of the hard work and sacrifices of people who came before to make it a legal right of all people. A long time voter in New Orleans said, *"I'm trying to make sure that everyone I know is registered to vote so that they can go out and vote. Because I feel like people worked really hard to make sure we had a right to vote."*

As we've been hearing in the lead up to this year's November election, as we often hear just before consequential elections, voter turnout and the absence of voters from certain backgrounds, also has a huge impact on our political process, and the laws, rules, and policies that follow. But we don't all experience that impact, nor the ability to join in this political system in the same way. We spoke with people around the United States whose lives are directly impacted by the hardships of poverty about their approach to the upcoming election, if they feel the stakes are different this year, and about barriers they face in participating.

An activist in New York City explained the efforts she makes.

"I have issues at home - with my landlord, (my children's) home school, my own school, but that won't stop me. I will continue to do outreach, whether to set up a table or knock on doors to canvas the neighborhood to tell people about the urgency to vote and ask them to join up. I am working hard and am part of coalitions that teach others what we learned."

A friend in Southwest Virginia spoke about his strategy for choosing the best candidate for his vote.

"You have to do your research. You have to look into the real facts of what both candidates have done. You can't listen to the media, you have to do your own research. I have spent countless hours doing my own research. Not just looking through and listening to social media. ... And I think that's what makes this country great. Even with facts, people are entitled to their opinion, and what may work good here may be something different somewhere else. Another candidate may work best in another area for a different type of community."

For some, even though voting is highly valued, and they make efforts to exercise that constitutional right, the change it has on daily life is not always evident. An ATD Fourth World member in New Orleans said, *"It's going to be the same when they finish voting. Everything's going to be just like it was last year"*, while also affirming, *"I'm going to go out and vote! As long as I have my mask and gloves, I'm straight."*

The current social and health situations in our communities also impact participation. In New Mexico, a friend explained some challenges: *"The election this year is going to be different because it's confusing for some people. Like for me, I try to call the tribal offices, but they don't pick up in Window Rock (capital of Navajo Nation). ... Mis-information, missing information or where to contact for the polls for the early voting make it difficult."* It's the impact of elections in her hometown that motivate her to vote. Elected officials at the local Chapter House in Navajo Nation directly determine how resources are allocated, and for her the key issue is support of elders needing assistance.

We also heard from some people how barriers to voting have kept them from voting for so long that the expectation of their participation isn't felt. Or the complexity of figuring out how to register when you've moved often, don't have a permanent address, have a past court record, or simply have never done it, is overwhelming and doesn't happen. It's in these situations where we can understand that while taking part in our democracy in this way can be seen as a personal responsibility and right, it requires being included in a society that values that each person contributes. This is the society we try to build together, through our democracy, through our humanity, with all those who don't expect to be counted.



If we want to change the world, we need to vote.
It shows that you care and that you want to fix what is happening.



What makes this election different for me is we've got this virus going, number one. And a lot of people can't get out like they're supposed to. Like me, I'm one. The virus is stopping a lot of elderly people from voting.

