



Are you a Mercy student or alumna/us who will be voting for the first time in 2020? We are looking for people to who want to share this important milestone by submitting an Op-Ed piece to local newspapers explaining how their Mercy education – and the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy – are informing their first votes.

Introduce yourself as a Mercy student or graduate who is preparing to cast your first vote in November. Write about how your Catholic, Mercy education has helped to guide your thinking, and how you have been inspired by the five special concerns of the Sisters of Mercy:

- **Earth** – care for the environment and support for legislation that addresses the issues of water and air quality and climate change;
- **Anti-racism** – work to recognize and dismantle institutional racism, and advocate for upholding voting rights and for a fair criminal justice system;
- **Immigrants** – reverence for the inherent dignity of each person, work for just and humane immigration laws, and a reduction in deportations that separate families;
- **Nonviolence** – advocate for peace through prayer, education, and personal and communal practices of nonviolence, work to prevent domestic violence and abuse of women and children, stop human trafficking and reduce violence in our communities;
- **Women** – address the specific needs of women in education, health care and spirituality, advocate for equal pay and for services for victims of domestic violence.

Your local newspaper, and people who live in your community, will benefit from hearing about how you are approaching your first time at the ballot box (or, in 2020, at the mail box).

When writing your op-ed, please avoid talking about political parties or particular candidates. Writing about ideas and policies is more compelling, and more persuasive. Also avoid writing about issues that are especially contentious. Write



instead about how your Mercy education has shaped your views and prepared you to vote, and why voting – especially among young people – is such a vitally important part of our democracy.

Please be sure to let us know if your op-ed is published in your local newspaper – we would love to share your work on social media! Please email a link to your op-ed to either Lauren Albright, lalbright@sistersofmercy.org, or Bob Keenan, bkeenan@sistersofmercy.org. Thank you.



Tips for Writing an Op-Ed

An op-ed is an opinion piece on a newsworthy topic. Op-eds (the name reflects that they are generally published opposite the editorial page in a newspaper) provide a chance for people interested in and passionate about a particular subject to provide valuable information and insight to others within their local communities, and hopefully to help to shape the public debate around particular topics.

Please feel free to reach out Bob Keenan, the marketing and public relations manager for the Sisters of Mercy, with any questions. He can be reached at bkeenan@sistersofmercy.org, or by phone at 202.320.3632.

Some tips for writing – and getting newspapers to publish – your op-ed:

- Develop a clear and focused message centered on one idea or argument and tell readers, in the opening paragraph, why they should care.
- Use strong, lively language – but please don't rant.
- Bold writing styles are more likely to get the attention of editors.
- Challenge ideas and policies – don't attack individuals.
- Acknowledge that people of good faith and intentions may come to different conclusions.
- Your op-ed is far more likely to be published if the topic is currently in the news – timeliness is key.
- Sentences and paragraphs should be short, simple and colorful.
- Write a forceful title (even though it will probably be rewritten if published, it's still helpful to create an attention-grabbing headline).
- Use facts and statistics to help make your point, but use them sparingly to avoid making your op-ed dry and data-heavy.
- Personal stories and examples help emphasize your points and humanize an issue.
- Graphics can be powerful when making your points.
- Don't use jargon or terms that are too technical; you want your piece to be accessible and you want readers to readily understand your points.
- Don't merely focus on the problem – also offer solutions.
- Finish on a note that reinforces your message.
- As a general rule, aim for a length of 650-750 words. Many publications provide a specific word count target, so it is important to check their guidelines. Op-eds that run above the suggested word count will be edited before publication; adhering to the correct word count will provide you more control over your message.



Some tips for submitting op-eds:

- Most newspapers and commentary sites post guidelines and addresses for submitting op-eds electronically. Paste the op-ed into the body of an e-mail. If you send the op-ed as an attachment, it will very likely never be read.
- Some publications ask for your picture; if possible, include a high-res image along with the piece.
- Submissions need to be exclusive to one media outlet, so don't approach a second publication until you've been declined at the first one.
 - It is okay to ask the editor if the piece will be published; if the op-ed is declined then you're able to send it somewhere else more quickly.
- Newspapers – especially those in major cities – receive far more submissions than they can possibly print. It's always worth trying the larger dailies, but you may have more success getting published in smaller market newspapers.
- Make sure to include your contact information – newspapers generally will not publish an op-ed if they can't confirm the identity of the author.