

Understanding Race and Racism: Building A Beloved Community

As we all know, Saint John's is experiencing a period of transition. This includes the search for a new pastor and music director, dealing with the continuing realities of living with COVID, and trying to find ways to reinvigorate our church for the future. Transition usually involves reflection on who we are as a Christian community, and where we want to focus our energies.

A movement that has been resurrected in the Christian world is that of building a "Beloved Community." Originally conceived in 1913 by the American philosopher, Josiah Royce, a beloved community is one where all life thrives. It isn't a specific place. Rather, it is a shared belief whereby a group comprised of all races, backgrounds, ethnicities, genders, and classes come together in a relationship of love, mutual respect, and care in order to realize justice within a community and the world.

Sixty years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, centered much of his work on the concept of building a beloved community, a "global vision in which all people can share the wealth of the earth," thus creating a society where "racism, and all its forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood."

As Saint John's continues on its journey of transition, perhaps it is a good time to reflect on how we have become a beloved community that strives for justice in all its forms for all members of our society. All that membership in this community requires is "inner work," which takes place in our minds, where we let go of prejudice and greed, and learn how to love unconditionally, forgive, and offer compassion and kindness to all. Here are some guiding principles of the Beloved Community (Dr. Arthuree Wright, R2, Religion and Race):

- 1) Offer hospitality to everyone.
- 2) Exhibit true respect and validation of others.
- 3) Listen with your heart and foster empathy and compassion for others.
- 4) Acknowledge limitations, lack of knowledge and seek to learn.
- 5) Take direct action against poverty, hunger, and homelessness.
- 6) Blend faith and action to generate a commitment to defeating injustice.
- 7) Promote human rights and work to create a non-racist society.

In the letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians it is written, "It is through faith that all of you are God's children in union with Christ Jesus," and we are all equal and loved in God's eyes. Based on the guiding principles of a Beloved Community, how does our church look now? What challenges do we face moving forward? At a time when Saint John's is deciding where we are going, can we say we are a "Beloved Community?" Think about it.

If you have any questions or suggestions about this ongoing project, please contact Connie DeSimone at connied12@comcast.net, or Claudette Chmura at cdmchmura@aol.com.