

All Souls Church Unitarian

Covenant Group Guide

September 2016

“Beloved Community”

UNDERSTANDING BELOVED COMMUNITY

Martin Luther King, Jr. Quotations

The way of acquiescence leads to moral and spiritual suicide. The way of violence leads to bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. But the way of non-violence leads to redemption and the creation of the beloved community. *Sermon on Gandhi*, 1959

Our goal is to create a beloved community that will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a qualitative change in our lives.

As June approaches, with its graduation ceremonies and speeches, a thought suggests itself... Whatever career you may choose for yourself—doctor, lawyer, teacher—let me propose an avocation to be pursued along with it. Become a dedicated fighter for civil rights. Make it a central part of your life. It will make you a better doctor, a better lawyer, a better teacher. It will enrich your spirit as nothing else possibly can. It will give you that rare sense of nobility that can only spring from love and selflessly helping your fellow man. Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for human rights. You will make a greater person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in. 1959

We have moved into an era where we are called upon to raise certain basic questions about the whole society. We are still called upon to give aid to the beggar who finds himself in misery and agony on life's highway. But one day, we must ask the question of whether an edifice which produces beggars must not be restructured and refurbished. 1968

The nation is sick; trouble is in the land, confusion all around... But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century. Something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee, the cry is always the same: 'We want to be free.' 1968

The Kingdom of God on Earth

God's plan of making peace is not merely to bring about an outward settlement between evil people, but to create people of goodwill.

When Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God on earth, he was not offering to make people more comfortable in their sins. He was calling them to a new life in the spirit and to citizenship in his beloved community, which alone is capable of peace.

The peacemakers, then, are the agents of the kingdom of heaven. Their assignment is to make "the kingdom of the world become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ" (Rev. 11:15)

Clarence Jordan in *Clarence Jordan, Essential Writings*, ed. Joyce Hollyday

The Vision of Black Lives Matter

Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.

We are committed to collectively, lovingly and courageously working vigorously for freedom and justice for Black people and, by extension all people. As we forge our path, we intentionally build and nurture a beloved community that is bonded together through a beautiful struggle that is restorative, not depleting.

Black Lives Matter website

The Next Generation: Lights to Equality

It's time to walk hand in hand,
It's time for a world of equality,
It matters not what you are,
or whom you claim to be,
You're you, and that's good enough for me.

Can't we see who we are,
Our hearts have strayed too far.
Everyone wants happiness,
No one wants pain.
But you can't have a rainbow,
Without a little rain.

5th grader Jeanie Hunyh's poem won a contest calling for poems honoring the legacy of Martin Luther King. Published in From N'DIGO at N'DIGO.com, January, 2014.

Dominator Culture and the Beloved Community

Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, reveling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community.

bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*

HOW TO CREATE THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

The Art and Discipline of Nonviolence

John Lewis: When I was 11 years old, I traveled one summer with an uncle and aunt and some of my first cousins from rural Alabama to Buffalo for a visit, for a trip. I had never been outside of the South. And being there gave me hope. I wanted to believe, and I did believe, that things would get better. But later I discovered that you have to have this sense of faith that what you're moving toward is already done. It's already happened.

Krista Tippett: Say some more... "And live as if?"

JL: And you live as if you're already there, that you're already in that community, part of that sense of one family, one house. If you visualize it, if you can even have faith that it's there, for you it is already there. And during the early days of the movement, I believed that the only true and real integration for that sense of the beloved community existed within the movement itself. Because in the final analysis, we did become a circle of trust, a band of brothers and sisters. So it didn't matter whether you were black or white. It didn't matter whether you came from the North to the South, or whether you're a Northerner or Southerner. We were one.

KT: You had made that vision real.

JL: For the struggle, for those of us in the struggle. But we studied. We prepared ourselves. It's just not something that is natural. You have to be taught the way of peace, the way of love, the way of nonviolence. In the religious sense, in the moral sense, you can say that in the bosom of every human being, there is a spark of the divine. So you don't have a right as a human to abuse that spark of the divine in your fellow human being.

From time to time, we would discuss that, if you have someone attacking you, beating you, spitting on you, you have to think of that person. Years ago that person was an innocent child, an innocent little baby. What happened? Did something go wrong? Did someone teach that person to hate, to abuse others? So

you try to appeal to the goodness of every human being and you don't give up. You never give up on anyone.

Following moral traditions rooted in our faith and the Constitution, we are called to stand up for justice and tell the truth. We challenge the position that the preeminent moral issues today are about prayer in public schools, abortion, and homosexuality. Instead, we declare the deepest public concerns of our faith traditions are how our society treats the poor, those on the margins, the least of these, women, children, workers, immigrants and the sick; equality and representation under the law; and the desire for peace, love and harmony within and among nations.

John Lewis was Krista Tippett's featured guest on *On Being*, Jan. 15, 2015

Guidance from Martin Luther King, Jr.

1. Meditate daily on the teachings and life of Jesus.
2. Remember always that the nonviolent movement in Birmingham seeks justice and reconciliation—not victory.
3. Walk and talk in the manner of love, for God is Love.
4. Pray daily to be used by God in order that all men might be free.
5. Sacrifice personal wishes in order that all men might be free.
6. Observe with both friend and foe the ordinary rules of courtesy.
7. Seek to perform regular service for others and for the world.
8. Refrain from the violence of fist, tongue, or heart.
9. Strive to be in good spiritual and bodily health.
10. Follow the directions of the movement and of the captain on a demonstration.

Dr. King's Ten Commandments from his book *Why We Can't Wait*, which he required each of the participants in the Birmingham protests to abide by.

A Moral Agenda for Our Nation

Together, we lift up and defend the most sacred moral principles of our faith and constitutional values, which are:

1. Pro-labor, anti-poverty, anti-racist policies that build up economic democracy through employment, living wages, the alleviation of disparate unemployment, a just transition away from fossil fuels, labor rights, affordable housing, direct cash transfers and other support for all families

struggling to get by, and fair policies for immigrants; and by critiquing policies around warmongering that undermine our moral standing and ability to address domestic issues;

2. Equality in education by ensuring every child receives a high quality, well-funded, constitutionally diverse public education, as well as access to community colleges and universities and by securing equitable funding for minority colleges and universities;
3. Healthcare for all by expanding Medicaid in every state, ensuring access to Medicare and Social Security, moving decisively towards a universal, transparent, and equitable healthcare system, and by providing environmental protection and protecting women's health;
4. Fairness in the criminal justice system by addressing the continuing inequalities in the system for black, brown and poor white people and fighting the proliferation of guns;
5. Voting rights, women's rights, LGBT rights, labor rights, religious freedom rights, immigrant rights and the fundamental principle of equal protection under the law.

We believe our moral traditions have a firm foundation upon which to stand against the divide-and-conquer strategies of extremists. We believe in a moral agenda that stands against systemic racism, classism, poverty, xenophobia, and any attempt to promote hate towards any members of the human family. We claim a higher ground in partisan debate by returning public discourse to our deepest moral and constitutional values.

Rev. Dr. William Barber et al.

The Higher Ground Moral Declaration provides a moral agenda for our nation. To affirm your agreement with this declaration, we invite you to do four things:

- Join community leaders, pastors, and scholars in declaring inequality, poverty, voter suppression, environmental abuse, racism and xenophobia immoral and unacceptable by signing this moral declaration
- Take this moral declaration to every candidate for President, the U.S. Senate, Congress and state Governor
- Sign a personal pledge to lead direct actions in your state on three consecutive Mondays in September to promote this agenda
- Pray for The Revival: Time for a Moral Revolution of Values

We are seeking a revolution of moral values. We declare yes to justice and equality.

Rev. Dr. William Barber, Dr. James Forbes, Dr. Traci Blackman, Sister Simone Campbell;
consider signing the declaration at www.moralrevival.org/signmoraldeclaration

For Reflection and Discussion

1. What associations does “beloved community” call to mind? Are your associations timeless or are they particularly connected to past, present or future?
2. Have there been moments or times in your life when you have experienced “Beloved Community”? What do you think of John Lewis’ idea that behaving “as if” Beloved Community exists now can help bring it into being?
3. Do you feel you have a role in the beloved community? What is your role in building the beloved community? What informs your understanding of your role?
4. How is All Souls doing in its attempt to model beloved community? How do you see your role within the All Souls community? Do these questions call you to action?
5. What nourishes your sense of beloved community? Are there songs--new and old-- that you associate with the Beloved Community? Is this nourishment a regular part of your life? Do these questions suggest changes you might want to make?

Prepared by Mary Beth Hatem, Aug. 25, 2016