

Lori Bronson  
Reflection  
MLK Prayer Service  
January 21, 2025

Good Afternoon,

I offer my gratitude to the IHM Sisters, who through their devotion and dedication, have, for many years, passionately advocated on behalf of those who are marginalized.

Thank you for hosting this annual Dr. Martin Luther King Prayer Service and for keeping his dream alive!

I begin by reading an excerpt from a paper of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
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**“I am convinced that love is the most durable power in the world. It is not an expression of impractical idealism, but of practical realism.**

**Far from being the pious injunction of a Utopian dreamer, love is an absolute necessity for the survival of our civilization.**

**To return hate for hate does nothing but intensify the existence of evil in the universe.**

**Someone must have sense enough to cut off the chain of hate and evil, and this can only be done through love.”**

Our world is fraught with division. We just need to turn on our televisions or read the news to know how deep these divisions lie. Witnessing the frequency of divisive language, promises of political violence and revenge can leave us feeling hopeless. *What can we possibly do to combat this? What power do we have, do I have, to make any impact on what we continue to witness?*

Dr. King insists that SOMEONE act in reversing this – and that SOMEONE is us. He was a man of ACTION in a time that was equally dis-eased with racism, violence and division!

And still today 67 years after he penned this paper, he continues to summon us to be agents of change; bearers of radical love and loving a new order into being. He calls us to *persevere* in reversing injustices.

Like MLK Jr. we must never be afraid of being a sign of contradiction for the world and summon into being a new creation - one grounded in respect and love for each person; one recognizing and honoring the reality that there are certain inalienable rights owed every person. We are the SOMEONES he is beckoning forth!

Martin Luther King Jr., a pastor deeply rooted in Scripture and a knowledge of salvation history, demonstrated through his words and actions the methodology of “See, Judge and Act”.

Seeing the evil and knowing that returning hate for hate does nothing but perpetuate and intensify the existence of evil, he *judged* that this was not in accord with the mandates of Christ.

And then he ACTED through his words and actions, proclaiming that the chain of hate and evil can only be cut off through love *and* a community that espouses itself to nonviolence. He embraced and fostered the dream of actualizing a Beloved Community.

Dr. King dreamt that in this Beloved Community, racism, and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice would be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood.

This community, he envisioned, would be grounded in the core virtue of agape love; the love of God operating in the human heart; a love that does not begin by discriminating between worthy and unworthy people, but rather begins by loving people for their sakes – a love that is an avenue to peaceful reconciliation of differences and upholding the unique dignity of every human life in all of its stages.

I. Dr. King envisioned and identified this as “The Beloved Community” – born out of prayer, courage and love - it is a Pentecost moment where a possibility unites with God’s grace and something life-giving and beautiful comes into being!

II Modeling the life and teaching of Jesus, Dr. King’s words and actions became a liberating guide for the world on how to create and foster Beloved Communities with its goal being transformative social action and justice through nonviolence.

III. Believing that all are created in God’s image and likeness, Dr. King, passionately advocated for the tenets of nonviolence: a love centered

way of thinking, speaking, acting and engaging that has the potential for social change.

IV. From this conviction of the necessity of building a community whose base is nonviolence, came Dr. King's dream and a belief that this Beloved Community could be achieved. He knew that prayerful attentiveness, courage and awareness were avenues to eradicating root causes of societal injustices while fostering the planting, and growth of the seeds that would blossom and flourish into this Beloved Community.

He preached about the Kingdom of God and invited those on the margins of society to participate in the co-creation of a radical new reality – this Beloved Community. At the heart of his dream and prophetic vision are elements of Jesus' teachings and the principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

Like Jesus, Dr. King could see within each person a divine being capable of manifesting God's love and justice in the world. As SOMEONES, this liberating vision should define us – a vision that awakens us to possibilities as we surrender to God and allow God to do abundantly powerful things within and through us that uphold the dignity of each person's life, no matter their background, their citizenship or documentation status, their bank account, nor their skin color.

VI. I believe that Dr. King utilized this method of “seeing, judging and acting” as he advocated for the Civil Rights of all people.

He had a dream and firm belief that people and nations could and would live in harmony settling their disputes through nonviolent means.

He had a dream that all would be treated fairly and justly, and that each person could grow in holiness and virtue.

His dream fostered hope and promise as it “sets us free, liberating us from those chains of hatred and evil.”

VII. As those SOMEONE's we are called to be voices for the voiceless, liberators of those chained in the throes of hatred and evil, advocates for justice through legislative action, educational opportunities and grass roots movements that embody a new and liberating love rooted in justice.

VIII. May we have the courage to open ourselves to see, embrace, be defined by and appreciate God's love each day. Let us pray that God's Holy Spirit may liberate us from our fear and infuse us with the grace to surrender to God. . . . so that we may be visible witnesses to all that God calls us to be - beacons of hope in a world scarred by evil and hatred.

IX. In this Jubilee Year of 2025 Pope Francis has asked that it have as its focus our call to be "Pilgrims of Hope". He said that this Jubilee Year will be a Holy Year marked by the hope in God that does not fade. It will be a time for all of us to reestablish a proper relationship with God and with one another. He said that it is "our task to promote the dignity of all persons and respect for God's gift of creation."

X. While societies have taken many steps in forming Beloved Communities, there is still much that needs to be done to root out injustices that lead to disparity and poverty.

Let us recognize that each of these steps forward, no matter how small, are building blocks in our quest for creating a just and loving society.

We, as Pilgrims of Hope must celebrate those efforts that move us in this direction for creating and strengthening Beloved Communities.

This call is challenging - it can be especially challenging when we may feel slightly devoid of hope. I sometimes struggle with how to best respond to our call to be beacons of HOPE or to envision the possibilities of how this Beloved Community can thrive.

Recognizing each of our individual gifts can guide us on how best to respond. Some of us are gifted organizers and can connect and galvanize groups of other social justice minded individuals. Some can write offering informative and challenging options to educate and bring light to social injustices in our country and communities. Some can use our professional training to help others. Those with legal backgrounds and knowledge can help with necessary legislative matters to benefit those in most need. Each of us can all SEE, JUDGE, and ACT.

I recently found inspiration and hope seeing my 16-year-old granddaughter start a chapter of "Strangers No Longer" at her high school. Strangers No Longer is a motivated group incorporating Catholic Social Teaching to advocate for a comprehensive and humane immigration policy.

Equally inspiring have been interactive Hunger Banquets and Fair-Trade Festivals that offered perspectives regarding the discrepancy of resources for those in different areas of the world with varying levels of income. These events challenged participants by temporarily immersing them into the reality of those living in low income, middle income and high-income communities.

These experiences awakened them to the realities of other people's struggles and offered a way to make a difference. One of these means is using our buying power to purchase Fair Trade goods, such as coffees, teas, clothing and crafts. This international movement seeks to create greater equity by ensuring that producers in developing countries receive fair compensations and humane working conditions for their labor. The economic effects of Fair Trade have helped to realize a better quality of life in developing countries. This is Hopeful for all!

Another piece of this puzzle in creating Beloved Communities, and one with which I am very deeply involved is "In the Spirit of Giving", a charitable outreach to the homeless and working poor.

This local ministry invites donors to share their no longer needed furniture and household items, which in turn, are freely given to agency-referred Monroe County residents. "In the Spirit of Giving" has been a true community effort and utilizes the support of many Monroe County residents as well as faith-based groups, including the IHM Sisters, who have welcomed and housed this outreach on their campus for many years.

Because of the generosity of so many, the Beloved Community is strengthened through the outreach of "In the Spirit of Giving" its work thrives so that the goal of affirming the dignity of each human is realized and provides an avenue to uplift those who are "starting all over" due to varying circumstances.

XI. All these efforts already pursued, as well as the MANY other initiatives yet to be realized are the building blocks for Beloved Communities.

However, I believe that the most *vital* part in the realization of these Beloved Communities is the corner stone of PRAYER.

We cannot minimize or negate the transformative power of prayer, of being changed bit by bit in taking on the persona of Christ in our world. We are chosen to be collaborators with God, and it is only through our unity and

cooperation *with* God, that each SOMEONE becomes a Pilgrim of Hope, whose mission is to restore the earth, transforming it into a place where its original justice is realized.

As a Beloved Someone of the God who created us, who intimately knows us and Who deeply loves each of us, let us together continue the sacred and liberating mission entrusted to us for the reconciliation and redemption of all God's people. It is a holy and vital work to which we have been called.

We can all SEE, JUDGE and ACT -- and this call is needed even more now to bridge division and foster Beloved Communities of HOPE.

The question is: *How* will we respond to the call of this empowering work of love?

Will we say "Yes" to this invitation and invite others to join us in bringing about a radical new reality?

Will we say "Yes" to teamwork in fostering the peace and community that Christ came to establish, a peace that, like MLK shared, is our responsibility and vocation.

What do we see?

Through the moral lens of our faith, how do we *judge* the actions we see?

And finally, *how* are we called to act in reversing injustices that we have seen and judged?

St. Mother Teresa said: "Everything we do is a drop in the ocean, but if we don't do it, that drop will be missing forever."

May our efforts be that our drops in the ocean, no matter how small, will create waves of justice and freedom for all!

Let us go forth as renewed Pilgrims of Hope, committed to creating and sustaining thriving Beloved Communities where all life is revered and protected!