

WITNESS for JUSTICE

A weekly commentary from
the United Church of Christ

Issue #772 | January 18, 2016

Hold Space for Grace

by Traci D. Blackmon

Acting Executive Minister of Justice and Witness Ministries

Recently, I offered the pastoral charge at the installation of two Disciples of Christ colleagues. I chose to charge them to serve as both priest and prophet; to not shy away from truth-telling or abandon compassion; to always call “a thing” a thing, yet remember things can change; to hold space for grace.

Not cheap grace, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes, calls for reconciliation without repentance, for comfort without correction. This is not the space we hold; but rather, grace that calls us to confront one another with both conviction and compassion, for both are necessary for love.

I am reminded of this prophetic and priestly call as our nation commemorates the 87th anniversary of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, a cause to celebrate, but also a call to convict with compassion. It is a day to remember not only King the dreamer, but also King the living protest against oppressive processes.

To quote Dr. King, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” If we are to remember King, we must remember this.

As we celebrate King, we must also call out the injustice in Michigan of a governor authorizing cost-cutting measures that resulted in a toxic water supply for the residents of Flint, who are predominantly black and overwhelmingly poor.

As we celebrate, we must also call out our nation of migrants, for targeted removal orders issued to 17,000 Central American families who also migrated to the United States in search of safety.

As we celebrate, we must not forget that with less than 5 percent of the world’s population, our nation accounts for 25 percent of the world’s prisoners.

As we celebrate, we must also call out the hypocrisy of our so called “War on Drugs” that was really a war on people of color, resulting in nearly 80 percent of people in federal prison and 60 percent of people in state prison for drug offenses being Black or Latino.

God is still speaking,
**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



As we celebrate, we cannot ignore the hungry and the homeless around us.

As we celebrate, we must also lift up this growing collective of multiracial, multi-ethnic, multigenerational voices uniting to proclaim “**Black Lives Matter!**” — not to ignore or devalue anyone but, rather, to affirm the full humanity of everyone.

As we celebrate, we must not ignore people in power who refuse to support the Affordable Care Act not because of cost, but because of racist politics.

Yes, MLK Day is cause to celebrate, but we have become a nation adept at distancing our celebrations from our sins.

It is easier to embrace the King who invites us to dream than the one who challenges us to deconstruct our oppressive ideologies.

It is easier to quote “I Have A Dream” than to commit to our institutional memory the prophetic words, “This problem of spiritual and moral lag, which constitutes modern man’s chief dilemma, expresses itself in three larger problems ... racial injustice, poverty, and war”

We must resist the temptation to divorce the compassion of King from his conviction of this nation. We must resist the temptation to embrace the dreamer and ignore the dream. We must resist the temptation to memorialize the monument and marginalized Movement.

We must hold space for grace.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Traci D. Blackmon is Acting Executive Minister of Justice and Witness Ministries.

LEARN

ucc.org/justice

DONATE

bit.ly/jwmnin

ARCHIVE

WJ
f

bit.ly/witness4justice

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.