



DEVOTIONALS: 12 - 18 FEBRUARY 2023

Achieving Beloved Community

Adapted from the General Commission on Religion & Race
(GCORR)

As we begin the month of February, the nation and Fifth Ave. UMC is prepared to celebrate Black History Month. It is an excellent opportunity to remind us that the work of the beloved community is as crucial today as it was in its origin.

The idea of having a time dedicated to Black history originated with Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950). Woodson said, “We should emphasize not Negro History but the Negro in history.

Years later, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a similar desire to address the ills plaguing America. In his first book, “Strive to Freedom”, Dr. King imagined the beloved community as a global vision in which all people can share in the earth's wealth. In the beloved community, poverty, hunger, and homelessness are not tolerated. Instead, an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood will replace racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry, and prejudice.

A beloved community can be defined as a group of people that could come together to solve any social issue, division or struggle.

Adopting a deeply rooted mindset of the beloved community, “we will lift our nation to a greater and more noble destiny. And with this commitment, we will see the dawning of a luminous new era of hope and opportunity; shared prosperity and brotherhood and sisterhood will reign supreme.” (Martin Luther King III)

But a beloved community and united nation are not created overnight or without effort.

MLK III continues, “creating the beloved community is about bridging the gaps between the haves and have-nots with real opportunities.” “It’s about creating more of that precious commodity that we call hope – real hope – for the forgotten, disadvantaged and marginalized citizens of our communities, regardless of their race.”

Beloved community: a community in which everyone is cared for, absent of poverty, hunger, and hate. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. popularized the term during his lifetime of activism and imbued it with new meaning, fueled by his faith that such a community was, in fact, possible. But he always acknowledged that realizing his vision would involve systems of law, education, infrastructure, health care, and municipal reform — no one sector, much less one person, could create it in isolation.

Dr. King’s beloved community exhibits agape love, which, as the love of God operating in the human heart, seeks to “preserve and create community.” Christ’s mature followers love each other as well as those who persecute or do evil against them. Christians confront hate with love because agape love stems its essence from the cross of Christ, which brings redemptive power. This love does not accept injustice or evil as acceptable. Rather, it loves by way of justice, which ensures equity in access, participation, and flourishing for everyone.

Some Christians might view the beloved community as a euphemism for the Kin-dom of God. In this way, people interpret the beloved community as something that is achieved in the future, but Dr. King’s words were for the present age, both national and global. For him, the human community meeting the basic needs of every person becomes beloved. Comprehensive healthcare, safe streets, affordable housing, nutritious food, strong schools, access

to jobs, and meaningful employment are necessary for the beloved community. God prompts us to remake our hostility-filled communities into those where justice and love reign true. This also applies to the Church. What would The United Methodist Church look like, feel like, and be like if the beloved community became real for us? What would Fifth Ave. United Methodist Church be like?

The beloved community manifests and protects agape love as its guiding principle and is expressed in the following ways: (<https://www.gcorr.org/>)

- Offers radical hospitality to everyone; an inclusive family rather than exclusive club;
- Recognizes and honors the image of God in every human being;
- Exhibits personal authenticity, true respect, and validation of others;
- Recognition and affirmation, not eradication, of differences;
- Listens emotionally (i.e., with the heart) – fosters empathy and compassion for others;
- Tolerates ambiguity – realizes that sometimes a clear-cut answer is not readily available;
- Builds increasing levels of trust and works to avoid fear of difference and others;
- Acknowledges limitations, lack of knowledge, or understanding – and seeks to learn;
- Acknowledges conflict or pain in order to work on difficult issues;
- Speaks truth in love, always considering ways to be compassionate with one another;
- Avoids physical aggression and verbal abuse;
- Resolves conflicts peacefully, without violence, recognizing that peacefully doesn't always mean comfortably for everybody;
- Releases resentment and bitterness through self-purification (i.e., avoidance of internal violence through spiritual, physical, and psychological care);
- Focuses energy on removing evil forces (unjust systems), not destroying persons;
- Unyielding persistence and unwavering commitment to justice;
- Achieves friendship and understanding through negotiation, compromise, or consensus – considering each circumstance to discern which will be most helpful;
- Righteously opposes and takes direct action against poverty, hunger, and homelessness;
- Advocates thoroughgoing, extensive neighborhood revitalization without displacement (this also applies to the Church – working toward responsible and equitable growth, discipleship, and worship);
- Blends faith and action to generate a commitment to defeating injustice (not forgetting that injustice can also be found within the Church);

- Encourages and embraces artistic expressions of faith from diverse perspectives;
- Fosters dynamic and active spirituality – recognizes that we serve a dynamic God who is not left behind by a changing world or people, and that a passive approach will not work;
- Gathers together regularly for table fellowship, and meets the needs of everyone in the community;
- Relies on scripture reading, prayer, and corporate worship for inner strength;
- Promotes human rights and works to create a non-racist society;
- Shares power and acknowledges the inescapable network of mutuality among the human family.

Friends, the beloved community is the answer to the vision raised by Carter G. Woodson. The beloved community could be the antidote to curing and closing the wealth gap, so there will no longer be the haves and have-nots. During National Black History Month 2023, we celebrate the legacy of Black Americans whose power to lead, to overcome, and to expand the meaning and practice of American democracy has helped our Nation become a more fair and just society. This country was established upon the profound but simple idea that all people are created equal and should be treated equally throughout their lives.

During National Black History Month, we honor and continue the work of Black Americans who have created a more fair and inclusive democracy, helping our Nation move closer to the realization of its full promise for everyone and the Beloved Community.

AGAPE LOVE

“The love of God operating in the human heart.... It does not begin by discriminating between worthy and unworthy people...It begins by loving others for their sakes... Agape is love seeking to preserve and create community.”
– Martin Luther King Jr.

The General Commission on Religion & Race - In 1968, General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) was established to hold the newly formed United Methodist Church accountable in its commitment to reject the sin of racism in every aspect of the life of the church.

GCORR will not rest in its work of challenging and equipping the church to complete its unfinished agenda of dismantling racial discrimination. We continue to do this by championing diversity, equity and inclusion; developing interculturally competent leaders; and catalyzing authentic community.

While racism remains our primary focus, our perspective and partnerships reflect a broader context, which includes poverty, nationalism, tribal conflicts, gender discrimination, homophobia, disability and generational bias—because we know all forms of oppression are connected, and they cannot be dismantled in isolation.

PRAYER & CONCERNS

- Our Sweet, Sweet Gentleman, **Mr. Allan Kieckhafer** who passed away on January 25, 2023 was celebrated with a loving, honorable and joyous Celebration of Life Service on 30 January 2023. We have stood on the shoulders of this saintly giant and we give God praise and thanks for all that Mr. Allan taught us, the amazing legacy of service he has left us to live into and the vital a role he played in helping us grow into who we are now. “Almighty Father, you have built up your Church through the love and devotion of your saints: inspire us to follow the

example of Mr. Allan whom we grieve his passing. May we, Fifth Ave. United Methodist Church, rejoice with him in the vision of your glory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.” We pray for Mr. Allan’s family and the community of West Bend. Amen.

- Words cannot begin to express the heartfelt sadness and grief we are experiencing for the passing of our beloved **Ms. Beverly “Bev” June Vogel**. To Ms. Bev’s family: “Always be assured that you have our full support, prayers and love.” May God grant us grace, that in pain we may find comfort, in sorrow hope, in death resurrection. Amen.
- **We still need YOU! We need leaders and volunteers to serve in various positions on committees and boards. You may not think you have the gift, talent, and/or time to serve, but all are called to work in the kingdom. We need you!**
- **Mr. Don Walters** is still experiencing several medical challenges. We’re keeping Ms. Joyce in our thoughts and prayers as well. Letters and notes of encouragement and love can be mailed to: Mr. Don and Mrs. Joyce Walters, 5368 Woodlawn Summit, West Bend, WI 53095.
- **Ms. Jeri Bowerman**, had cardiac stents inserted. Please send her your cards and notes of love, support and courage: Ms. Jeri Bowerman, New Perspectives Senior Living, 2130 Continental Drive, #322, West Bend, WI 53095.
- **Ms. Sandy Wamser** having been diagnosed with Epilepsy, is still working with her medical team to find the correct medications and doses to control the seizures. She is very grateful for your love, prayers and support. Special prayers for Mr. Pat as he cares for Ms. Sandy. Cards and notes can be sent to: Mr. Pat and Mrs. Sandy Wamser, 3742 Pleasant Valley Road, West Bend, WI 53095.
- **Mrs. Janice Liepert-Kempf**, appreciates your continued prayers for healing and strength as she continues to struggle with illness. You can send emails of prayers and support to: alankempf33@gmail.com; or cards and notes to Mrs. Janice Liepert-Kempf, 414B. South Pleasantview Road, Plymouth, WI 53073; phone number: 920.838.1830.
- **Bro. Bob Krell**, prayers for strength and continued healing. Please mail cards and notes of prayer and encouragement to: Bro. Bob and Mrs. Jean Krell, 804 Lenora Drive, West Bend, WI 53090
- **Mr. Chuck Rogge** is still on a journey of healing. He is grateful for the cards and notes of support. Please continue to flood the mailbox with love and support to: Mr. Chuck and Mrs. Sue Rogge, 5011 Hwy. P, West Bend, WI 53095
- **Ms. Nancy Whitson** is still admitted at The Pavilion at Glacier Valley. She requests your prayers and support as she continues to journey with health concerns. Please send cards and notes of encouragement to: Mrs. Nancy Whitson, 922 Hickory Street, West Bend, WI 53095
- **Mr. Dick Simmons**, diagnosed with acute leukemia. “Dear God, we place our worries in your hands. We place Mr. Dick’s sickness under your care and humbly ask for strength and comfort. Be near him in times of weakness and pain; sustain him by your grace, that Mr. Dick’s strength and courage may not fail; give him confidence in the power of your grace, that even when he is afraid, may he put his whole trust in you. We pray all of these things in Your name. Amen. Mr. Dick, Ms. Shirley and family, we are sending you love, hugs, support and prayers during this difficult time. Cards, notes filled with prayers and support can be mailed to: Mr. Dick and Mrs. Shirley Simmons, 2908 Valley Avenue, West Bend, WI 53095.
- **Mr. Len McGinnis, Jr.**, continues to quietly face medical challenges. Your cards and notes of support and well wishes for Mr. Len and Mrs. Shelia McGinnis can be mailed to: 1230 Vogt Drive, West Bend, WI 53095.
- Many of our **church family members and friends** are experiencing health concerns. Please join me in praying for their healing and restoration. Amen.

Prayer: O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pastor Clarissa & Bro. Martín