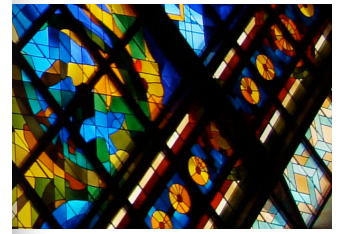




# 40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on *Anti-Racism*



DAY 5

## Building Beloved Community

*Dianne Hope*



### Learning

“Beloved community.”

I recall being captivated by these words when I first heard them from the pulpit of my local United Church. The words conjured up visions of communities where all people are viewed as beloved children of God, living in harmony; where peace, equality and cooperation prevail and scourges such as racism do not exist. What an aspirational vision! Was this really what Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. meant when he spoke of the Beloved Community? Could this be achieved by simply wishing, praying, and waiting for it?

Martin Luther King Jr. said: “Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives”. I think this illustrates the fact that MLK’s vision was not merely a sentimental one but rather a more realistic vision that encompassed a change in how individuals and communities regarded each other, and a substantial change in the living conditions of Black Americans.

When viewed through an anti-racist lens, what could this qualitative change in our souls mean? How would it be demonstrated? For me, it would be like this: Black male children and youth would have positive and life-affirming experiences when encountering police and other law enforcement officials. Indigenous and racialized students would thrive in well-equipped elementary and high schools, with teachers who nurture them and their educational achievements. Athletes would compete in encouraging environments without experiencing racial taunts and slurs. Indigenous peoples could seek health care without discrimination. Asian and Muslim Canadians could move in their communities with ease, experiencing non-violence and peace. And in our churches, congregants of different racial and cultural backgrounds would feel free to share and express diverse and intercultural worship styles.

So then, what is the meaning of a “quantitative change in our lives”? I believe King meant that true Beloved Community could

These are but a few examples of how freedom from racial prejudice, stereotyping, and a White supremacist worldview could impact the lives of non-White Canadians. The changes needed for this to happen will require significant soul searching and a coming to grips with our individual biases and levels of privilege, and the power we hold as individuals and members of different social groups.

only be achieved when African-Americans were freed from grinding poverty and discrimination in housing, education, health-care, and other social structures. Without such changes, barriers would still exist between those who were materially better off than others. Even with a change in our souls, true peace, equality, and cooperation would certainly be undermined if there were vast inequities in income and opportunity.

In Canada, Indigenous and racialized people have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, in part because of the high numbers of racialized essential workers who were constantly exposed to the virus in their workplaces. Other systemic inequities, such as poverty, lack of clean water, and inadequate housing, are also linked to colour of skin in Canada --just as they were in Martin Luther King Jr's America. Ongoing and intentional work to challenge systemic inequities by examining them through an anti-racist lens is one way to work towards creating a beloved community.

To me, Martin Luther King Jr's vision of a Beloved Community



## Faith Reflection

Read the prayer "[Disturb Us, O Lord](#)" by Desmond Tutu. After reading, reflect on these questions.

- What dreams do you have about racial justice?
- How might God be inviting you to be brave or bold in engaging with anti-racism work?
- How might your efforts help move towards building a new earth?
- As you reflect on anti-racism, what disturbs you? What stirs you?
- What would you offer as a prayer about anti-racism?

is aspirational. To come even a few steps closer to meeting these aspirations, we must examine the prejudices and stereotypes we hold about each other. We also need to address the structural and institutional barriers that keep certain members of our society in

circumstances of deprivation and despair. Drilling down to find the role racism plays in perpetuating these circumstances, and a commitment to do better, is essential for us to begin to see glimpses of Beloved Community.



## Children's Activity

Play any game that emphasizes cooperation. There are many ideas online. Here is an example of an active game where all participants have to work together.

### Balloon Up

Objective: Keep the balloon off the ground without breaking the circle.

- Participants form a circle and hold hands.
- One person throws a balloon into the circle. The group tries to keep the balloon from touching the ground as long as possible without letting go of each others' hands.
- The facilitator can set a time, or add more balloons. **Remember:** Do not let go or let the balloon touch the ground. If you do, the whole group starts over!



## Group Commitment

*Alana Martin*

Part of creating beloved community is analyzing and reflecting on your community—its strengths, weaknesses, resources, assets, gaps, and more. Asset mapping can uncover solutions to gaps

within the community, or in this case, discover how to live into beloved community more deeply.

There are many different tools online to use to do this. Here is just one suggestion.

First, decide in your group if you are choosing to do this activity based on a geographic map or a non-geographic community.

Create a list of:

- Demographics
- Local businesses
- Institutions (schools, public buildings/services, museums, cultural centres, etc.)
- Physical spaces (gardens, parks, playgrounds, transit, etc.)
- Associations (groups)
- Stories (history)

Map it out:

- Once you have your list, see how the demographics of your community links to the other categories.
- Does this reveal any gaps in services to certain demographics?  
As a group, brainstorm what beloved community looks like in your context.

Compare your community assets to your definition and dream of beloved community. Doing this should reveal the areas that must be addressed in order to live into this dream. Begin to research and reach out to potential partners, and to get other community members on board.



## Advocacy

*Alana Martin*

In [The Rev. Michael Blair's Gandier Lecture](#) at Emmanuel College in 2021, he referred to allyship as having no cost to the privileged ally, furthering power imbalances in our communities. Instead, he speaks of living in true beloved community where one person's or group's oppression is the oppression of all. Therefore, allyship without any cost to the person or group with power is of no help to

eradicating a problem. True discipleship, as Blair notes, is about risk.

To live into the dream of beloved community, we must live into the dream God has of this world; one of reconciling, redemption, love and justice – that participates in what God wants to do in God's world to bring healing, wholeness and the fullness of life.

With that knowledge in mind, commit to taking risks.

Make a list of 10 things that need to happen in your community (however you define it) in order to live out beloved community. Once you see that list, choose one risk you can take in order to get your community closer.

Commit to risk being a part of your daily life.

## Resources

View the Forum for Intercultural Leadership and Learning's webinar "[A Seat at the Table: Journeying to Beloved Community](#)"



**Dianne Hope** is a retired elementary school educator. She has been a member of The United Church of Canada for 40 years, and has provided lay leadership on a variety of

committees and initiatives. Dianne is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the Forum for Intercultural Leadership and Learning (a reference body of the Canadian Council of Churches), and Peel Region's Black Youth Student Success Initiative.



**Alana Martin** is a Diaconal Minister in The United Church of Canada, and is the Minister to The GO Project, a ministry that inspires children and youth to put their faith and love into

action in the world. Alana feels a deep call to creating accessible resources for young people to discover and deepen their faith in a way that compels them to follow in Christ's model of love, anti-racism, humility, and respect.

