



2016 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Art, Writing, & Multimedia Contest

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Imagine a poverty-stricken inner city. What do you envision? Do you see what the majority of people assume--violence, crime, drugs, and gangs--or do you see what I think of--lively African-American children grinning from ear to ear, despite the less than ideal situations they have faced? I view this circumstance through eyes of love, rather than through eyes of judgement and apathy. Martin Luther King Jr.'s perspective of the world was through eyes of love. He did not turn his back to those in need. He did not shrug his shoulder at the suffering. He did not turn away from the problem of racism; he turned toward it. He loved. I, like Martin Luther King Jr., aim to help, aim to make a difference, aim to love. I aim to love not only those within my own community, not only those within my state, not only those within my country, but those of our greater worldly community. King did not have goals pertaining only to the community in close perimeter to himself; he thought of the community of the country as a whole. King did not dream small, and neither do I. As Gandhi connotes, I strive to "be the change I wish to see in the world," and I can accomplish this through a singular power: love.

Rather than ignoring serious issues, I consider how others are affected by those issues and ways in which I can relieve those who are struggling. While I may not have thousands of dollars to donate, I do have the power to spread love, and that is a power I will possess until the day I die. I am fortunate to be accompanied in my quest to help those in need. My youth group provides innumerable opportunities to serve and love others. Because of this, I have the privilege to call inner city Columbus my home away from home. "Privilege?" you might ask, wondering why I am honored to consider a place filled with crime and poverty my second home. To this I concede that one must experience this first hand in order to understand. One must see the smiling kids running from their homes to embrace you the moment you arrive. One must converse with a child about his hopes and dreams, and how he plans to overcome his situation to achieve these goals. After experiencing those situations first hand, it is simple to understand how close this community is to my heart. Admittedly, the first time I departed from the church parking lot to serve in the inner city of our state's capital, I was hesitant and unsure of what to expect because I had been told about the gangs, and the violence, and the crime, and the poverty. However, upon arriving at the Urban Connections [UC] ministry house, I was welcomed by both the interns of UC as well as the members of the community. A little, energetic girl named Mykaela won both my attention and my heart as soon as I arrived. On our first trip to Columbus, Mykaela was seven years old; she is now ten, and she never fails to recall my name in an instant. Rather than turning their backs to the poverty present in the community, Urban Connections shows their neighbors love, and aims to develop a "beloved community" alongside the residents. Urban Connections is a "good neighbor" according to King's Strength to Love speech because the interns "look beyond the external accidents" and show love to their neighbors and their community regardless of these neighbors' current or past lifestyles. Each time I return to inner city Columbus, progress is made, and new people are reached. Because of the opportunity to know and love the residents of this poverty-stricken community within our own state, my perspective of the world has broadened and my passion for loving others has increased.

Our youth group presents opportunities to better communities both a short car ride, as well as a lengthy flight, away. Last summer, I was given the chance of a lifetime: to travel to the Dominican Republic to do missions work. This was unlike any experience I had ever encountered. Yes, I had travelled out of the country. Yes, I had gone on missions trips. This, though, was the first time that these two experiences converged into one. Before leaving, little was known about the trip except for three challenges: it would be scorching hot, I would stay in a poor, rough area, and the people would speak little English, if any at all. While knocking down and rebuilding cinder block walls of an eventual church while being engulfed by 116 degree heat was strenuous, this work was rewarding because of the blessing it was to the community. After laboring and sweating for 6 hours a day, I helped with Vacation Bible Schools at which children from each community crammed into a generous neighbor's backyard or a run-down building, and they were thankful for each and every second of it. Regardless of the language barrier, communicating with the children was facile. A simple hug or a smile was all that was needed to show the children of the poor community that they were loved, that they were cared about, that they mattered. Despite the terrible conditions in which these children live, I do not recall a time that I looked upon one of their faces without receiving a grin in return. The love one can share with people that speak a different language is incredible; the language of love is an universal one.

As the power of love is stronger than the language barrier in foreign countries, it also overcomes the language barrier in our own town of Dover, Ohio. Our city's Hispanic population has increased dramatically in recent years, and the majority of the immigrants have no English knowledge upon arrival. Despite this obstacle in communication, it is possible to show love to our new Hispanic neighbors. As the Hispanic population increases, as do the number of opportunities I am given to reach out and show love to Dover's Hispanic residents. For example, I am a part of an after-school tutoring program in our community for elementary aged Hispanic children--Camp Imagine If. Throughout my three years of high school, I have tutored two third graders, Laura and Paulina. Walking into Camp Imagine If every Thursday puts an immediate smile on my face, and while I am there to tutor the kids, I believe that I am the one who has been taught the most because of their positive attitudes and ambition. It is an honor to receive notes from Laura and Paulina that range from "we love you" to "you're the best tutor ever," and I aim to live up to that each week. Showing love and patience to these Hispanic children who receive little encouragement from teachers with low expectations based on racial prejudice is simple to do. Creating a "beloved community" is enjoyable to both the givers and the receivers of love.

Whether one is giving love to his community, or he is receiving love from his community, both parties reap benefits. My goal is to make King's "beloved community" a reality; a beloved community that not only encompasses the community of Dover, not only the community of Ohio, not only the community of America, but the community of the world. As King made evident in his role in the Civil Rights Movement, community encompasses a much larger perimeter than the trivial community that one is directly surrounded by. I may be a mere teenager; however, I have the "most durable power in the world" on my side: the power of love. With love comes the means to overcome any challenge. Love overcomes poverty; love overcomes racism; love overcomes hatred; love overcomes all. Although my work in the Dominican Republic does not seem to have a direct effect on the small town of Dover, it affects all because as King claims, "we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny."

Beloved Community

