



GUEST COMMENTARY

The urgency of now

By Paula G. Cullison

It was an honor for me to have received the 2022 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Diversity Award from The Baha'i Community and Town of Paradise Valley. His life as a seeker of social justice was profoundly inspirational to me.

We can agree that now, like no other times in history, has the world had to deal with so many seemingly insurmountable problems; be they global, national or local.

Understanding the ramifications of urgency, Dr. King stated: "The time is always right to do what is right." Being an agent of change was the focus of his life. Fear was certainly an integral part of his journey, but his courage gave hope and inspiration to many. His words ring true to this day: "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."

Like MLK, we too can be change makers, if we have the courage to do so. It is not necessary to look beyond our own city, state or country, As Dr. King noted: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere".

Over the decades, my personal focus has been on women's rights, social justice, environmental issues, as well as peace advocacy (a world beyond war). Understanding the urgency of now and knowing that small charities operate on shoestring budgets, I decided to take action and create the Arizona Women's Partnership.

I use this as an example of addressing inequities. An all-volunteer philanthropic nonprofit, AZWP awards grants to qualified grassroots charities that assist a diversified demographic of disadvantaged women and children here in the state of Arizona. These charities address critical social justice issues: domestic violence, child abuse, foster children, youth at risk, child and adult literacy, homelessness, hunger, trafficking, needs of refugee families, welfare to work, etc.

As an all-volunteer nonprofit, AZWP relies on the generosity of many, be it donation of time, expertise or funds. As a grassroots nonprofit, we have been able to award over \$600,000 in grants to over 80 nonprofits, who assist a very diverse population of over 130,000 annually throughout the state.

Many of our volunteers come through our postings on www.volunteermatch.org. Some need projects for college credit or internships while others are retirees. Each is looking to make a difference in the lives of others.

Nonprofits need help with websites, social media, fundraising, writing grants and press releases, as well as with the services they provide. Due to funding shortfalls, schools are begging for volunteer tutors, especially in the areas of reading, writing and math.

A seeker of truth and social justice, MLK was a visionary who gave us hope, even as he faced many obstacles — primarily racial prejudice. In his words: “We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.”

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You too can be one of those change-makers, if you have the courage to do so. Therefore, I use my personal experiences as examples. As the daughter of Italian immigrants who realized the American dream, I understand how important it is for each of us to ‘give back / pay it forward’.

My parents were hard-working blue-collar tradespeople. Dad was a pressman for the New York Times; mom was a seamstress in the NYC Garment District. They understood the importance of education and of helping others. Years ago, this inspired me to volunteer with the Caesar Chavez United Farm Workers Movement. Needless to say, unjust labor practices continue. One need not look too far to correct a social injustice or inequity. The point is that if you want to make a difference — you can. Our society needs you now.

Dr. Martin Luther King lived a life of passion, meaning, purpose, and of service to others. He posed a challenge to each of us when he stated: “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’” Like Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. King urged us to be the change we wish to see in the world.

Please join us on Monday, Jan. 16 at 10:30 am for the Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration being held at Paradise Valley Town Hall, 6401 E. Lincoln Dr. If you can, please bring a can of food or a warm blanket for our food and clothing drive!

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