



*A Joint Anti-Racism Venture*

## **These are the Times to Grow Our Souls:**

### **A Call to the Beloved Community**

October 30, 2004

"When I speak of love I am not speaking of some sentimental and weak response...Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality...Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies. We must find new ways to speak [and act] for peace and justice...If we do not act we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight...Let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter--but beautiful--struggle for a new world."

*Martin Luther King Jr., Riverside Church, April 4, 1967*

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Gathered together to imagine a loving community for our time, we write in love and thankfulness to those who have gone before us. We seek their wisdom and compassion in this time of grave dangers and hopeful possibilities.

Three years after 9/11 the wounds of people, inflicted upon one another and on our earth long before the Twin Towers fell, have clouded our minds and hardened our hearts. In the name of fighting terrorism we have made the world less safe. By meeting violence with ever-greater violence we have ended or ruined the lives of thousands of young people and tens of thousands of Iraqi children, women and men. Engulfed in a quagmire from which there seems to be no exit, we are a polarized people. The divide between rich and poor is greater than at any time in the past 60 years.

But this is also a time of great opportunity. From many quiet and often unknown places, people are gathering to explore other paths to the future. Questioning, sharing, praying, probing, acting, challenging ourselves and each other, people are

struggling to create new ways to secure our safety and to heal one another, our communities and the earth we share with all life.

Dr. King's words and deeds have inspired generations of people around the world to struggle for justice, peace and healing. He speaks to us now as we seek to transform war to peace-making, hatred to love, domination to shared community. We especially recall the last years of King's life when his vision broadened to identify the triple terrors of America: racism, militarism and materialism. He challenged us to find new forms of compassionate political action and connections that would enable us to transform ourselves as we worked with others to transform our world. Persistently he focused this spiritually-grounded vision in the call for us to move towards "the Beloved Community" loving our "enemies" as children of God and recognizing the power of non-violent action as the most creative force for change in the universe.

### **Dr. King challenged us to think about.**

***Love and the connections of the heart.*** We need to create new forms of struggle for compassionate change based on truth, love and the humanizing transformation of ourselves and our institutions.

***Bending towards Justice.*** Our freedoms and comforts have come at great and immeasurable injury to many peoples and to the Earth. We must find ways to live more simply so that others may simply live.

***Valuing life.*** We have come to value things more than people. Our technological development has outrun our spiritual development. We have lost our sense of community, of interconnection and of participation. We must ask not only how our choices affect ourselves but what they will mean to the seventh generation.

We believe that we can bring these vital challenges into our lives in this generation by coming together in our families, neighborhoods, places of work, worship and study, to

**Explore how to transform ourselves, our relationships with one another, with our institutions and with Mother Earth.**

**Listen patiently and respectfully to one another, especially those with whom we disagree.**

**Find creative ways to move from fear to hope.**

**Create settings where people of different generations, backgrounds, beliefs and experiences can come together to share stories and hopes.**

**Celebrate and support our creative visionaries who give us music, dance, poetry, drama, laughter, tears and new ways of seeing ourselves and our world.**

**Hold close to our hearts and minds the imagination, passion, energy and leadership potential of our young people, who have the greatest stake in the future**

**Read and probe the works of Dr. King, as "a voice, a vision and a way."**

**Use MLK day in January 2005 as a time to commit ourselves to the work of moving towards the Beloved Community in this generation.**

We call on all who read these words to join with those around you to create the ways of living and being that will give birth to a new, more loving, productive, and life-affirming country.

**Initiating signers:** Grace Lee Boggs (Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership), Vincent Harding (Veterans of Hope), John Maguire (Institute for Democratic Renewal/Project Change), William Aal (Tools for Change), Margo Adair (Tools for Change), Patricia Moore Harbour (Healing the Heart of Diversity), Rachel Harding (Veterans of Hope), Shea Howell, (Detroit Summer), Melanie Morrison, Cynthia Newcomer, Kathy Wan Povi Sanchez (Tewa Women United), Shirley Strong (Institute for Democratic Renewal/Project Change), Dorsey Blake (Church for Fellowship of All People), Mel Bricker (University of Creation Spirituality), Paul Kivel.

**Additional signers:** Diana Dunn, Joseph C. Hough, Jr. (President, Union Theological Seminary), Heather Ogilvy, Sandra Pacheco (St. Edward's University),

Merrill Skaggs, Cecilia Woloch, Philip Jackson (The Black Star Project). Affiliations for identification only.

\*This statement emerged from the conversations and engagement of a diverse group of scholars, activists, artists and religious leaders convened Toward the Beloved Community by the Institute for Democratic Renewal/Project Change, facilitated by Tools for Change, and hosted by the Fetzer Institute in Kalamazoo, Michigan, from September 30-October 3, 2004. We ate, sang, and struggled together. Some wrote poems, others wrote songs and some wrote this statement on behalf of the gathered community. For more information, contact us at [info@belovedcommunitynet.org](mailto:info@belovedcommunitynet.org).