Repair the World



MLK WEEKEND OF SERVICE

As we honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., we reflect on his vision for a just society united by a shared commitment to each other's well-being. MLK Day is a call to action, using service to address the injustices he fought against. Though it took until 2000 for all states to recognize the holiday, his struggle for justice continues. Dr. King's "three dimensions of life"— the inward drive for personal growth, the outward concern for others, and the upward reach for justice—remind us that a meaningful life requires engagement on all fronts.

This guide provides opportunities to reflect, take action, and explore how service can bridge divides and contribute to the ongoing journey for justice.

Planning an MLK Weekend of Service program? Our Program Planning Template is designed to help you create a dynamic, impactful MLK program that fosters connection, learning, and action. From setting clear goals to preparing supplies and activities, every detail matters in shaping a program that leaves participants inspired and equipped to make a difference.

Facilitator Share: MLK Day invites us to reflect on the values of justice, courage, and persistence, as well as the work of building bridges across lines of difference. These values underpin the ongoing struggle for equity and remind us of our collective responsibility to foster unity in the face of division. The sources we are about to engage with emphasize the interconnectedness of justice, courage, and action. Together, these voices offer a vision of justice that is dynamic, communal, and persistent, urging us to work across lines of difference to create a more inclusive and equitable society.

1. **Facilitator Share**: Our first source, Malbim's commentary on Amos 5:24, provides a foundation for understanding that justice is a force that radiates outward and impacts our communities. At the same time, righteousness must be cultivated and indicates a personal commitment to moral growth. Together justice and righteousness call us to engage deeply with both ourselves and others.

Malbim on Amos 5:24:1, mid-to-late 1800s

Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser, better known as the Malbim, was a Ukrainian rabbi, master of Hebrew grammar, and Bible commentator. In this source, Malbim is commenting on the Book of Amos, one of the minor prophets.

Let justice well up like water, as it is written "the acts of justice and righteousness are more treasured to God than the offerings." Justice refers to the manner with which humans interact with one another, righteousness refers to the manner with which humans interact with God.

Justice is implanted within the mindset of every human being. Knowing that humans seek justice by their very nature, it is an essential ingredient in the sustainability of every moral society. Therefore, justice is compared to a well of water, whose source is internal and whose impact on the surroundings is incredible. Likewise, the source of justice is within each of us and we are meant to radiate that justice outwards.

Righteousness, in contrast, is not ingrained within every human, rather we nurture and develop that trait through our experience and relationship with God. This is similar to a stream, whose waters are not internal in nature, but rather gather there from the mountains and other external sources. Likewise, the source of righteousness is from without. Additionally, the waters of a stream are not expected to be the source for other bodies of water, rather they remain internally focused. Similarly, righteousness is meant to be developed and expressed as a form of one's personal religious journey...

Facilitator Question: Malbim describes justice as a well of water that flows from within us and radiates outward. How can this understanding guide us in building connections with those whose perspectives or experiences differ from our own?

Facilitator Question 2: Malbim distinguishes between justice being inherent within us and righteousness being something external we need to develop. Does this framing resonate and if so, in what ways can service speak to both frameworks?

Reflection Question: Think about a time when you saw your actions create positive change for others. How did that experience make you feel, and how does it influence your approach to service now?

2.

Facilitator Share: In social change work, we must act with both persistence and hope. We must remind ourselves that our service-learning efforts contribute to a larger, ongoing journey toward a more just and equitable world. Theodore Parker's words below, which may be familiar to you from a later speech given by MLK, have inspired many to persist in their search for justice.

Tension reflected: Tradition/Renewal-what are we born with and what do we need to cultivate outwardly

Theodore Parker, Justice and the Conscience, 1852

Theodore Parker was an American transcendentalist and reforming minister of the Unitarian church. His words and popular quotations later inspired speeches by Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr.

I do not pretend to understand the moral universe. The arc is a long one. My eye reaches but little ways. I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by experience of sight. I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends toward justice.

Facilitator Question: How can this long-term perspective shape how we approach relationships and dialogue across differences? How do you sustain hope and energy when the progress toward justice feels slow or imperceptible?

Reflection Question: How can you personally contribute to bending the "arc of the moral universe" towards justice, even in small ways?

Reflection Question 2: When those actions aren't "immediately visible" how do you keep persisting?

Tension reflected: Repair/Brokenness-Knowing the difference between what we can fight for vs. what feels unsustainable

3.

Facilitator Share: Dr. King's words in the quote below challenge us to choose courage over fear, reminding us that taking a stand for justice often means stepping into discomfort and acting not for convenience or popularity, but because it is morally right. This courage is essential for bridge-building—creating connections with those who may not share our perspectives or experiences.

The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr, 1998

Martin Luther King Jr. was an American Baptist minister, activist, and political philosopher who was one of the most prominent leaders in the civil rights movement from 1955 until his assassination in 1968.

Courage is an inner resolution to go forward despite obstacles; cowardice is submissive surrender to circumstances. Courage breeds creativity; cowardice represses fear and is mastered by it. Cowardice asks the question, is it safe? Expediency asks the question, is it politic? Vanity asks the question, is it popular? But conscience asks the question, is it right? And there comes a time when we must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but one must take it because it is right.

Facilitator Question: MLK speaks about taking a position because it's right, even if it's unpopular. How can bridge-building require this kind of courage, and what might it look like in your community?

Facilitator Question 2: Can you share a time when you took a stand for justice in a way that required courage? How did that experience shape your understanding of working with others?

Reflection Question: What is a belief or value that drives you to act, even if it's not convenient or easy?

Tension Reflected: Pride/Humility and Responsibility to ourselves/responsibility to others-What are you willing to fight for?

4. **Facilitator Share**: The future is not predetermined but crafted through persistent action. Justice is not achieved in a single act but is an ongoing process of refinement and dedication, requiring us to fight for the world we envision repeatedly, even when faced with systemic challenges.

Amanda Gorman, Practice Makes People (excerpt), 2021

Amanda S. C. Gorman is an American poet, activist, and model. Her work focuses on issues of oppression, feminism, race and marginalization, as well as the African diaspora.

The making of plans,
When this is over
The We can't wait,
Really our knuckles rapping
Against the future, sounding
Out what lies beneath its hull.

But tomorrow isn't revealed,
Rather rendered, refined. Wrought.
Remember that fate isn't fought
Against. It is fought for. Again
& again.

Facilitator Question: Gorman suggests that the future is "rendered, refined, and wrought" through persistent effort. What small, consistent actions can we take to bridge divides and fight for a more just future?

Facilitator Question 2: How does working across lines of difference help us to refine and expand our understanding of justice?

Reflection Question: What does it mean to you to be a "fighter" for the future?

Tension Reflected: Justice and Peace ‣ The need to fight for what we believe is right, to not give up, and to stick to our principles versus the need to also embrace compromise and peace and to find beauty in the posture of peace and acceptance.