

25 Traits of the Beloved Community

"Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love." **Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Dr. King's *beloved community* exhibits agape love, which, as the love of God operating in the human heart, seeks to "preserve and create community." Christ's mature followers love each other as well as those who persecute or do evil against them. Christians confront hate with love because agape love derives its essence from the cross of Christ, which brings redemptive power. This love does not accept injustice or evil as acceptable. Rather, it loves by way of justice, which ensures equity in access, participation, and flourishing for everyone.

Some Christians might view the *beloved community* as a euphemism for the Kingdom of God. In this way, people interpret the *beloved community* as something that is achieved in the future, but Dr. King's words were for the present age, both national and global. For him, the human community meeting the basic needs of every person becomes beloved. Comprehensive healthcare, safe streets, affordable housing, nutritious food, strong schools, access to jobs, and meaningful employment are necessary for the *beloved community*. God prompts us to remake our hostility-filled communities into those where justice and love reign true. This also applies to the Church. What would The United Methodist Church look like, feel like, and be like if the *beloved community* became real for us? What would your local church be like?

The *beloved community* manifests and protects agape love as its guiding principle and is expressed in the following ways:

1. Offers radical hospitality to everyone; an inclusive family rather than exclusive club;
2. Recognizes and honors the image of God in every human being;
3. Exhibits personal authenticity, true respect, and validation of others;
4. Recognition and affirmation, not eradication, of differences;
5. Listens emotionally (i.e., with the heart) – fosters empathy and compassion for others;
6. Tolerates ambiguity – realizes that sometimes a clear-cut answer is not readily available;
7. Builds increasing levels of trust and works to avoid fear of difference and others;
8. Acknowledges limitations, lack of knowledge, or understanding – and seeks to learn;
9. Acknowledges conflict or pain in order to work on difficult issues;
10. Speaks truth in love, always considering ways to be compassionate with one another;
11. Avoids physical aggression and verbal abuse;
12. Resolves conflicts peacefully, without violence, recognizing that peacefully doesn't always mean comfortably for everybody;
13. Releases resentment and bitterness through self-purification (i.e., avoidance of internal violence through spiritual, physical, and psychological care);
14. Focuses energy on removing evil forces (unjust systems), not destroying persons;
15. Unyielding persistence and unwavering commitment to justice;
16. Achieves friendship and understanding through negotiation, compromise, or consensus – considering each circumstance to discern which will be most helpful;
17. Righteously opposes and takes direct action against poverty, hunger, and homelessness;
18. Advocates thoroughgoing, extensive neighborhood revitalization without displacement (this also applies to the Church – working toward responsible and equitable growth, discipleship, and worship);

19. Blends faith and action to generate a commitment to defeating injustice (not forgetting that injustice can also be found *within* the Church);
20. Encourages and embraces artistic expressions of faith from diverse perspectives;
21. Fosters dynamic and active spirituality – recognizes that we serve a dynamic God who is not left behind by a changing world or people, and that a passive approach will not work;
22. Gathers together regularly for table fellowship, and meets the needs of everyone in the community;
23. Relies on scripture reading, prayer, and corporate worship for inner strength;
24. Promotes human rights and works to create a non-racist society;
25. Shares power and acknowledges the inescapable network of mutuality among the human family.

Next steps: Living Into the Beloved Community: Making the Beloved Community Real
Use this resource to engage in exercises that help you take next steps in living into the beloved community.

This resource is written by Dr. Arthuree Wright