

Transformative Conversations to Bridge Divides

After reflecting on “where” and “why” we are called to work during this election season, now we turn to the “how.” By finding our own moral foundation and then connecting with others’ own values and morals, we can encourage them to join us in supporting policies that mend the gaps.

Advancing the Common Good through Moral Reframing

The central question to ask ourselves now is “How can I bring others to support policies and candidates that mend the gaps?” Whatever role you are called to play this election season, whether you are working in person, digitally, or a combination, it is crucial to have *transformative conversations* with those who you don’t agree with, instead of the same dead-end ones.

When having a transformative conversation, it is important to remember that the person you are talking with often has very different experiences, psychological makeup, social background, motives, and even values. People make decisions based on values and emotions, and if they feel their values are threatened, they will respond negatively. Difficult conversations tend to not go anywhere and people will agree to disagree is because we can’t speak each other’s language. [Prominent research](#) from political scientists Matt Feinberg and Robb Willer indicates that if you want to persuade people, you should attempt to frame your argument using your counterpart’s moral framework. This is known as moral reframing.

Without moral reframing, people tend to fall back on the moral frameworks of their own side when making arguments. When you can frame the discussion in such a way that also speaks to your counterpart’s moral framework, you are far more likely to persuade them on a particular policy issue. Values others might hold include: care for people and creation, fairness and equality, liberty, loyalty and patriotism, authority, and moral purity and sanctity. Once you have identified one or more of the values another person holds, try to demonstrate how a mend the gap policy supports that value.

By being in relationship and conversing with people about their beliefs and backgrounds, you can begin to understand their moral framework and, in turn, construct the conversation in a way that appeals to their values. When paired with compelling arguments for policies that support the common good, moral reframing is a powerful tool to help us mend the gaps in our nation.

This information comes from NETWORK’s [Transformative Conversations to Bridge Divides](#) resource, which can be read in full at: www.networkadvocates.org/transformativeconversations.

Reflecting on Dr. King in 2020

By Bishop John Selders

This reflection was published for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in January 2020.

As I reflect on this year’s installment of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday, I am reminded of what Professor Michael Eric Dyson wrote in his book, “I May Not Get There With You,” a number of years ago. He said, “A private citizen who transformed the world around him, Martin Luther King, Jr. was arguably the greatest American who ever lived.” His life and work, we lift up annually now

is living testament to be celebrated by all who'd claim to stand under the freedom fighting banner. And I, personally, am keenly aware I stand in the midst of a historic legacy of faith leaders who stake out a moral position for righteousness and morality that transcends the partisan nature of discourse so familiar in today's polarizing rancor.

It is with this backdrop that I'm compelled to offer brief words of reflection on this observation of this man of faith who symbolizes so much of what many of us are attempting to live up to. This radical spiritual prophet and theorist of change, on the evening of Dec. 5, 1955, in the aftermath of Rosa Parks' arrest, addressed 5,000 people gathered at Holt Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, AL. Folks filled the sanctuary, the basement auditorium and even spilled outside to hear the newly elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His stirring speech advocating action without violence gave rise to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In his summation, Dr. King said, "If you will protest courageously, and yet with dignity and Christian love, when the history books are written in future generations, the historians will have to pause and say, 'There lived a great people — a black people — who injected new meaning and dignity into the veins of civilization.' This is our challenge and our overwhelming responsibility."

I believe his words hold powerful meaning for us today. In light of the fierce battle that is raging today in our towns, cities and nation, the war of propaganda and words, of many both on the left and the right. It is clear to me that the position that lifts up the legacy that we've been gifted with is the position that points to what is right and what is wrong. **And do we have the moral fortitude and courage, the internal core strength to square our shoulders, stand upright and seek what is right while facing down the pushback that comes from wrong?** Are we willing to take hold of the baton passed to us to live faithful lives of reflection and action to this witness? The life of this fallen prophet demands our response.

On the night of Dr. King's assassination, his mentor, Dr. Howard Thurman offered this expression so meaning-filled. Thurman spoke, "Tonight, what many of us are feeling is that we, all of us must be the conscience, wherever we are living, functioning and behaving. Racial prejudices, segregation and discrimination were not regarded by him as merely un-American and un-democratic, but as mortal sins against God. For those who are religious it awakens guilt. For those who are merely superstitious it inspires fear. And it was this fear that pulled the trigger of the assassin's gun that took his life."

I declare I'm committed to the life lived with deep abiding love. The kind of deep abiding love that continues to regard and respect while holding, supporting and centering the least, the marginalized and the disinherited. This is the central framework that upholds our work. May we lift and live up to this profound mission.

Thank you, Dr. King!

Bishop John Selders is an ordained minister serving in the United Church of Christ and one of the founding members of Moral Mondays CT. This reflection was originally published at:

www.moralmondayct.org/2020/01/20/reflection-on-dr-king-2020.

We Pray

Divine One,

In the midst of all that surrounds us, concerns us, troubles us. The times are calling for us to be more heartfelt, more thoughtful, more courageous. Our differences are being exploited to separate and divide while so many are hurting and fearing retribution. It is with this in mind that we appeal to you, Great God!

Help us to see more clearly the reality of our commonality. Help us to sense your Holy presence ever present in our lives like rod and staff for comfort and assistance. Help us to be faithful to the task given to us to love more nearly and dearly.

We want to serve and please You. We want to honor and witness to Your mighty power. Power to move and create. Power to lift and restore. Power to hold and embrace.

In the midst of all that surrounds us, concerns us, troubles us, this is our prayer.

Amen

Written by Bishop John Selders

Take Action

Let's practice using moral reframing. Here's an example; when talking with someone about immigration who values patriotism and loyalty, you might say:

Refugees and immigrants who are coming to the United States are like our ancestors who came to achieve the American dream and find a better life. The American dream is what drives people from across the world to come to this land, a land of opportunity. This dream is what our nation was founded on, and it's this dream that immigrants and refugees want to be a part of, just like our grandparents and great-grandparents.

Now, do your best to use moral reframing when talking to someone about one of NETWORK's other "Mend the Gap" issues (Tax Justice, Living Wages, Family-Friendly Workplace Policies, Housing, Democracy, or Health Care). Write out what you could say below:
