

## Interfaith Conference sponsored by UIW Mission and Ministry

The University of the Incarnate Word Fifth Annual Interfaith Regional Conference was held October 13, 2018, at Oblate School of Theology. The theme was “*Building on the Dream*” using Dr. King’s “Beloved Community” as a blueprint. Interfaith work includes eliminating racism and examining ways to help the poor.

Rev. Trevor Alexander of UIW Mission and Ministry welcomed all and hosted the event. The opening was led by Advaitaacharyadas from the Institute for Applied Spiritual Technology, ISKCON.

The first panel was shared by UIW students, Norah Al-Ladhal, a Nursing student from Saudi Arabia, David Rodriguez, Business Management student, Deju Keys, a Criminal Justice student, and Zane Alsareinye, a Psychology student who is president of the UIW Interfaith Student organization.





The second panel had various faculty and interfaith leaders including Ron Washington, UIW Business faculty; Lopita Nath, UIW History faculty; Raymond Blanton, UIW Communication Arts faculty; Sarwat Husain, the San Antonio President of the Council of American Islamic Relations; Jim Pugliese, St. Edward's University Campus Minister; Rabbi M Yergin, Temple Beth El.

Raymond Blanton, an Assistant Professor of Communication Arts in the School of Media and Design at the University of the Incarnate Word, who holds an M.Div. degree from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia as well as a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Public Culture in the area of Communication Studies from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, delivered our keynote presentation.

In "Building on the Dream: Becoming the Beloved Community," Dr. Blanton explored various ideas and themes within the "Beloved Community" blueprint. Specifically, he contended that in order to *build* on the Dream, we must (1) acknowledge the pain, (2) confront the problem, (3) strive for perspective, and (4) persist on a forward path.

In detailing this progression, explicitly, Dr. Blanton argued that for generations, (A) the skies, (B) the sacred, and (C) song have been versatile means of recognizing pain - that we should reflect back, be cognizant of the present, and imagine and create new possibilities for the future in these areas. We should learn to see the world and the experiences and lives of others through their pain.

In essence, our inability and ineffectiveness in these endeavors has led to a problem and we must confront that problem. That is, particularly, racism, which is predicated on ignorance and hate. In this, Dr. Blanton explored the "heart of hate," looking at how the disregard of love in Genesis 4 amongst Cain and Abel sets the blueprint for what hate is and how it manifests unto violence, suffering, and death.

Given human pain and the need to confront the realities of hate that produce that pain and hardship, we must strive for the right mindset and perspective in order to begin the process

of becoming the Beloved Community. In his "Birth of a New Nation" sermon/speech, Martin Luther King, Jr., noted, "

"The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community. The aftermath of nonviolence is redemption. The aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation. The aftermath of violence are emptiness and bitterness. This is the thing I'm concerned about. Let us fight passionately and unrelentingly for the goals of justice and peace. But let's be sure that our hands are clean in this struggle. Let us never fight with falsehood and violence and hate and malice, but always fight with love, so that when the day comes that the walls of segregation have completely crumbled [...] we will be able to live with people as their brothers and sisters. Oh, my friends, our aim must be not to defeat [PERSONS] [but] to defeat the evil that's in them. We must come to the point of seeing that our ultimate aim is to live with all men as brothers and sisters under God, and not be their enemies or anything that goes with that type of relationship."

In this, Dr. Blanton explored the significance and importance of the Samaritan Ethic in King's civil rights and sermonic discourse. Exploring the book of Luke, where the parable is centrally focused, he focused on a series of questions that inspired the parable, looked at how King broadened those questions for our present time, and posed them to us to consider how we might respond. Referencing scholar Michael Osborn, Dr. Blanton noted:

[The Exodus] offers cultural, collective identity for black people, while the [Good Samaritan] deals with personal moral obligation. But more than just the counterpart of the Exodus narrative, the Good Samaritan story functions as its enabling condition. The Exodus myth will become reality; will carry listeners to the Promised Land, *if* they are willing to follow with full-hearted commitment the moral example of the Good Samaritan.

In essence, Blanton argued that the Samaritan Ethic permeated King's life and public discourse - it was the primary ethic and means by which he performed in public life. As such, with a recognition of the pain and confronting the problem of hate and racism with a new perspective, we must only persist on a forward path. In the words of King, we must "Stride Toward Freedom." Within this, Dr. Blanton contended for four things: (1) alter our attitude, (2) behold beauty, (3) commit to and cultivate conversations, and (4) determine to differentiate.

In sum, Dr. Blanton concluded with a series of quotes from central figures in history that emboldened the importance of seeing the world through the eyes of others; requiem and dream. These included Patrick Henry, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Kenneth Burke, John Durham Peters, and Martin Luther King, Jr., of course. His final thought came from Richard Hughes:

"There is perhaps no more compelling a task for Americans to accomplish in the twenty-first century than to learn to see the world through someone else's eyes."