

The Beloved Community

by Adina Reynolds

What I love about being a senior citizen is rediscovering the childlike quality of surprise and wonder in learning new things. And they are not necessarily new things. Many are old things, forgotten things, overlooked things, rejected things, “Cracked Open” things. But voila! There they are: new again!

Take for example, the Beloved Community of St. Matthew. Like discovering a new planet, here is a new way of thought, new words and definitions, a new landscape, new purpose, and new friends, yet this ministry feels, at the same time, warm, familiar, and imbued with right action toward social justice and equity for all. Wow!

I heard about the Beloved Community when I joined the vestry in 2021. Fr. Kendall asked if someone wanted to be a Vestry liaison with a ministry led by Lorina Goodjoint, called “The Beloved Community Team”. My hand shot straight up and wiggled excitedly. “Me! Me!” At that time, I didn’t know what a Beloved Community was, but I instantly knew I wanted to be a part of it.

Since 2020, all Vestry Persons have been asked to take some Anti-Racism training through a group called Crossroads. Following the initial rounds of training, some of the participants began to meet to discuss the well-publicized social justice issues of 2020, as well as share their own personal journeys with *Black Lives Matter*, the murder of George Floyd and others, and the ever-evolving American consciousness around race. Our very own Elsie Dennis suggested the perfect name coined by The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: “The Beloved Community”. And the new ministry was born.

After taking the Crossroads class in early 2021, I became a part of the Beloved Community Team. During this time, the Team was formulating the Mission and Action Statements, as well as seriously bonding and becoming a “Team”.

Our Mission Statement reads (this is who we are):

“Fostering a space to tell our stories and our truth about racial and social injustices, to begin to understand the past and present effect of racism in our society, and to create a community of healing and reconciliation.”

Our Action Statement (and this is how we do it):

“To proclaim the way of Jesus Christ through love, forgiveness, and justice to the St. Matthew community and beyond to take action to resolve social injustice.”

Within that framework, we began planning to share what we have learned about being a “Beloved Community” by presenting the book: *The Church Cracked Open, Disruption, Decline, and New Hope for the Beloved Community* by Stephanie Spellers to the whole congregation as a Lenten/Easter book/bible study series, which continues on Sundays at 11:30 AM until May 22nd.

The Beloved Community and Team: the What and Who of it all.

As a member of St. Matthew, you are automatically part of the Beloved Community. The Beloved Community is one that strives for racial equity and justice for all. To become more intentional with your role in the Beloved Community, you are invited to become involved with the Beloved Community *Team*. You can begin by attending community events sponsored by Beloved Community Team such as the Book Discussion on Sundays at 11:30 AM either in-person or via Zoom. You can come to the Ascension Day Dinner on Thursday, May 26th at 6 PM, followed by Holy Eucharist at 7 PM where themes of Beloved Community will be preached and prayed over. You can come to one of the Team’s meetings via Zoom on Thursday evenings at 6:30 PM where we will soon begin planning summer events.

You can also easily follow the Team by going to the parish website www.neighborhoodparish.org and click on “Beloved Community”. A world of information awaits you, including who to contact by phone/email or how to join our Zoom Meetings, our meeting notes, and a list of our Team members. There is also an “Anti Racism” page filled with wonderful resources.

Take action today and continue the journey with us by becoming a ***Beloved Community Team Member***. It’s easy to be involved and extremely life-giving! Ask to be a member of the team, or just show up at a Team meeting where you can help plan and participate in the building of our Beloved Community. In childlike wonder and surprise, let us all awaken to the Beloved Community here at St. Matthew!