

The Muslim Observer

Op-Ed by Rev. Michail Curro

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"We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.

In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late...

We still have a choice today; Nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation."

Martin Luther King, Jr.



In the stunning revelation that US forces had killed Osama bin Laden, we are all called to reflect on what this means and re-emphasize the necessity to lift up the importance of nonviolence as taught and practiced by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (and Mahatma Gandhi before him).

President Obama emphasized in his death announcement that, "we need to remember that we are one country with an unquenchable faith in each other and our future."

It would be great if we could put an end to cynicism about government, see rancor in politics disappear, have Islamophobia replaced by trust, and feel genuinely optimistic. Thankfully, through my work with the Interfaith Center for Racial Justice (ICRJ), I haven't lost hope and believe unity and working for the common good is achievable, but only if we use nonviolence.

Each year our Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Celebration of Macomb County draws over 1,200 people—gathering draws every sector of our county and demonstrating unity and common purpose. For one evening, this most diverse grouping of community leaders commemorate Dr. King and re-commit to working for a better tomorrow for all. It is a night where all seems possible to build unity and strengthen community while lessening bigotry, intolerance and racism. President Obama's vision and King's dream—both so eloquently articulated—seem shared and attainable during this celebration.

Still the challenge after each MLK Celebration (and today in the aftermath of bin Laden's death) is to remain united, focused, and hopeful. We attempt to do this by calling on community leaders to keep MLK's teachings at the heart of all they (and we) do. And not just King's iconic "I Have a Dream" speech, but more importantly his teachings about and use of nonviolence to initiate social change and to create the "beloved community" we desire.

Our efforts here may never be more important, particularly in witnessing the spontaneous celebrations that followed the news of bin Laden's death, the quick call that justice has been served, and the loud public clamoring to see photos of bin Laden with a bullet hole through his head.

I am reminded that Mahatma Gandhi once said of retribution: "An eye for an eye and soon the whole world will be blind." Or as Dr. King explained, "Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already void of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

Like every American, every Muslim, and most everyone around the world, I am delighted that Osama bin Laden was finally captured. It is a great accomplishment. Bin Laden and his followers symbolized terrorism and violent death. But I cannot celebrate his death or think that his death alone is equal justice for all the death, loss, pain, and expense his actions, and those of al-Qaida, have caused. I caution us from expressing such hate and vengeance for our enemies. And I ask that we learn more about and practice nonviolence—the tool that has brought about the most change historically (Gandhi, Civil Rights) and we are witnessing in Egypt today.

Central to the ICRJ's programming (and to nonviolence) is overcoming fear, particularly fear of others and the recognition that we cannot lift ourselves up by putting others down.

Our "Listen, Learn, & Live" (LLL) programs aim to build bridges of understanding among people of different cultures and faith traditions. Currently we are in the middle of our ninth module on Islam and Muslims. And earlier this week we began a module on Christianity at a mosque.

LLL's purpose, however, isn't just to deepen intellectual understanding but to help build trust among different people that fosters relationships and ultimately unity in working together for social justice.

We offer a variety of programs annually, including two June LLL modules: an experience with the Black Church and on the Chaldean community. And later this year we will look for community support and involvement in our LLL Summer Camp for Teenagers, fall interfaith breakfast seminar, interfaith Thanksgiving Celebration, and upcoming 2012 Silver Anniversary MLK Celebration.

At this time of great social change worldwide, our community can either choose to follow the downward spiral of vengeful distrust of others, or continue the important legacy of nonviolence that brings about real and lasting justice and peace for us, for our children, and our children's children.

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