

Beloved Community Initiative

The hatred and fear now being brought to life throughout our country denies the dignity God grants to all people. From Charlottesville to the repeal of DACA, from the anti-Muslim ban to the disproportional imprisonment of people of color, we face challenges of justice and hope. As United Methodists, we have a unique opportunity to play a key role in the healing and reconciliation of our nation. This is our time to awaken and to mobilize people for justice.

The **Beloved Community Initiative** is one way the Baltimore-Washington Conference is addressing racism and intolerance. In this Initiative, churches and community partners will address both implicit and explicit racism and racial bias. There is robust and compelling evidence emerging out of the scientific community that suggests that an overwhelming amount of the harm facing communities of color stems from implicit bias. And, at times, this implicit bias can be even more insidious than more overt biases. Most of the strategies used to address harm are designed to address explicit racism. If we can understand and begin to act to change our implicit biases, real and deep healing can begin. The Beloved Community Initiative seeks to increase the number of individuals who are acting as human justice change agents. These change agents will then identify which specific systems, policies and practices in the community they and their team will begin to address.



How to become a Beloved Community

The first step in becoming a Beloved Community is to complete an application. Pastors and lay leaders are encouraged to complete this application together. These applications will be reviewed and selected by our Beloved Community Leadership Team. Congregations that indicate readiness to engage this work will be invited to join a hub. A Beloved Community Hub is a site made up of at least 7-12 people who have covenanted to lead the congregation and community in intentional work to address both implicit and explicit racism and racial bias.

Hub participants must attend a mandatory training on an “Orientation to the Hub and Introduction to Implicit Bias.” They will then participate in a six-month journey of vital conversations in cross-racial, cross-cultural groups. The monthly two-hour dialogues are designed to reduce unconscious bias at each hub. Dialogue participants will include clergy and lay leaders from the respective church, as well as “no faith” or “different faith” community members and other hub partners. After completing the dialogues, hubs will identify an issue that is broadly and deeply felt as well as an acupuncture point in changing the way individuals address bias and racism. Hubs must commit to engage in a short-term organizing campaign regarding their issue.

As a theological framework, the Beloved Community Initiative will focus on Romans 12. This text begins with an admonition “to be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God’s will is -- what is good and pleasing and mature. As Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. said, creating a beloved community requires “a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.”