

## Preparation for Healing Ourselves and Our Country (November theme)

Our country is post-election day but not post-pandemic and not post-crisis. Our personal lives and our life as a nation have been deeply affected by the trauma of recent times.

In our personal lives, much has changed. Some of us have been affected directly by the disease. Many have had our economic security threatened and our children's or grandchildren's education disrupted. Isolation from friends and family may have affected our well-being.

The issues are not only personal but social and political. We saw the nation's response to a public health crisis become a political issue, as national leadership failed and organizations struggled to cope. Public health measures like wearing a mask somehow became a political statement.

The pandemic has made it clear that health involves many measures of well-being for our nation. The groups that have been hardest hit by the pandemic are the elderly, people of color, and essential workers – a group that includes not only health care workers but also grocery employees, janitors, meat packing workers, and many others. Many of those affected have low wages, little provision for sick leave, and limited access to healthcare. Many are women and people of color, whose lives are affected by systemic structures of race and ethnicity and class and gender in our society.

This crisis has shifted our view of well-being from an individual to a public concern. As Lucas Johnson points out, “we have, for a long time in the United States, thought that, contrary to the way biology functions, we can protect ourselves from disease with our individual choices ... But infectious disease doesn't really respect your income or your gated community – that's just not the way viruses function. You can't be healthy while everyone else around you is sick.” Johnson says that racism and other social ills are similar: we are all involved, we are all affected. The Black Lives Matter protests have made it clear that Americans can no longer isolate themselves from awareness of oppression.

What can we do to begin to heal ourselves and our country? We must first acknowledge that healing is a human process, often different from a “cure.” Healing means “becoming whole.” It might involve adaptations to a “new normal” different from before. Healing from the pandemic may also require adaptations, with the lives of the most vulnerable constrained for some time.

Healing as a nation is also a process. We can look to the democratic process, which acknowledges differences and treats those differences as part of the path toward a more just social order. But electing officials and passing laws will not be a “cure.” We can look to continued actions of protest and discussion to cast light upon structural oppressions and find ways to dismantle them.

We can listen to others and find ways to share values and stories. As Parker Palmer says, “When two people discover that parallel experiences led them to contrary conclusions, they are more likely to hold their differences respectfully, knowing that they have experienced similar forms of grief. The more you know about another person's story, the less possible it is to see that person as your enemy.”

Finally, we can remember that out of crisis can come not only healing but a new vision for the future. We can remember the words of Martin Luther King Jr.: “All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

In the end, reconciliation is a spiritual process, which requires more than just a legal framework. It has to happen in the hearts and minds of people. *Nelson Mandela*

For me, singing sad songs often has a way of healing a situation. It gets the hurt out in the open into the light, out of the darkness. *Reba McEntire*

To reconcile ourselves with one another, we must release our judgments and make peace with the fact that we are one. This country was founded on the ideal that we are all created equal. If we truly believe in the equality of all humankind, how can we put down and belittle one another? How can we disrespect and prejudge one another? *John Lewis*

There is no separation. We are all from the same place. As long as there is respect and acknowledgement of connections, things continue working. When that stops we all die. *Joy Harjo*

Remember that the person in front of you is a human, first, and an opinion, second. To be human is to story. So remember that before you is a person trying to understand their story, one of billions that make up our family. *John Paul Lederach*

Stop telling people to reconcile, when you have no idea what it took for them to break free.  
*Zara Hairston*

1. You must let the pain visit.
2. You must allow it teach you
3. You must not allow it overstay.

*Ijeoma Umebinyuo, Three routes to healing*

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

*Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address*

## **Questions to Ponder**

1. Reflect on a time when you were healing, whether physically, emotionally, or mentally. What contributed to the process?
2. Has a time of healing ever prompted you to re-envision how you want to live your life?
3. How has this past year been difficult for you – health, finances, relationships, mental and emotional equilibrium? What paths do you see toward healing?
4. How has the past year changed your awareness of social ills in America?
5. What values and experiences might you share with someone who voted differently from you in the recent election? What values would you not compromise on?
6. What is your vision for how the country can build a better future?

## **Words of the Day**

Before coming to the gathering, think of your hopes for healing – either for yourself or for the country. The Words of the Day sentence is “I hope for healing by ...”