



ON THE  
**BELOVED  
COMMUNITY**



PROVIDENCE  
COLLEGE



# ON THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

During her keynote remarks at the 2018 MLK Convocation, Bernice A. King, daughter of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke movingly of her father's vision of a beloved community. It was a moment of inspiration and vision for Providence College. Since then, we have adopted this language to describe the community we aspire to become.

The idea of the beloved community has a long history, one upon which Dr. King inspirationally and definitively built. For Dr. King, the beloved community is a story about who we are, how we were made, and where, together, we are destined to go. This vision tells a story about justice and equality, goodwill and reconciliation, and about the ways in which the love of God can transform individuals and communities. It is a culminating idea in Dr. King's vision: it is that towards which all his efforts were ordered, where both justice and love mutually uplift one another and become inseparable.

At Providence College, we hope to carry this legacy of the beloved community in what we do. It is a vision that finds expression in the foundational narratives of Providence College as a Catholic and Dominican institution of higher learning. In what follows, we will articulate a vision of the beloved community for Providence College. Being an institution dedicated to the pursuit of truth, of veritas, we hope this clarity of articulation for our campus will lead to the cultivation of justice and love in our midst.

As we chart our institutional path, we need to remember that such considerations are important because we are distinctive. There will be many similarities between what we do and what others locally do. But our path uniquely begins with and is formed by our Catholic and Dominican tradition. This description of the beloved community at Providence College will do likewise. Such an authentic approach will allow us to become a more inclusive and equitable community from the very foundations of our identity. The remainder of this document will offer an institutional definition of the beloved community and will then unpack its meaning.



PROVIDENCE  
COLLEGE



01

**JUST  
COMMUNITY**

Justice as an ideal, Justice as a virtue of social institutions,  
Justice as a personal virtue

02

**ORDERED BY  
AND  
TOWARDS  
LOVE**

While a just community is one we ought to always seek after, it is not synonymous with the beloved community. Dr. King's use of beloved is important. Our goal, like his, is both justice and love.

03

**ANIMATED BY  
THE SPIRIT OF  
CHRIST IN ITS  
PURSUIT OF  
TRUTH.**

To be a beloved community here at Providence College where our mission is our motto: veritas, where we are founded on the pursuit of truth, calls us to believe that our pursuit of truth is intrinsically connected to how we care, support, and protect one another

# THE BELOVED COMMUNITY IS A JUST COMMUNITY...

Historically in the Catholic tradition, justice has been used an ideal to evaluate different types of exchanges between people, to analyze whether they are fair and expressive of what is rightfully due to each constituent in the exchange. For this articulation of the beloved community at Providence College, we will focus on three key senses of justice that are important for our task: 1) Justice as an ideal, 2) Justice as a virtue of social institutions, and 3) Justice as a personal virtue.



AN IDEAL



A VIRTUE OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS



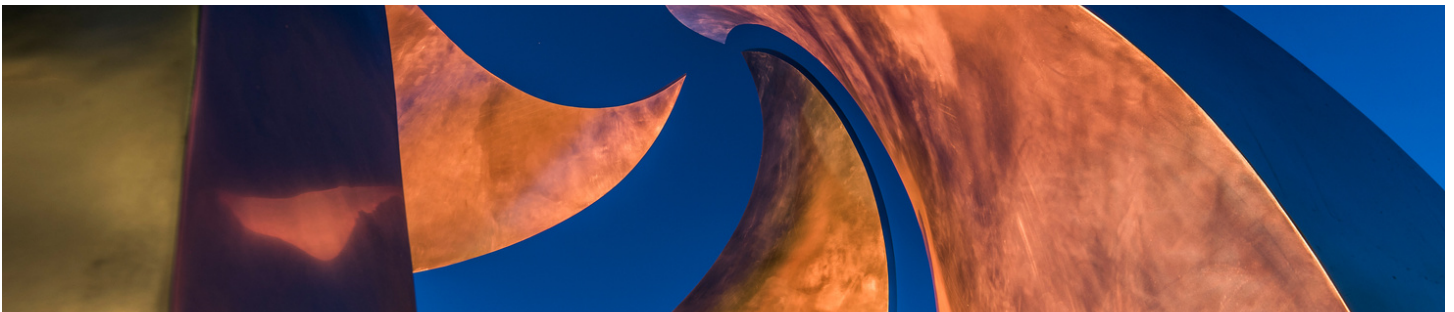
A PERSONAL VIRTUE

## Justice as an Ideal

At a basic level, justice is an ideal. It is a vision of what ought to be in our common life based on a sense of who we are, a vision for what is due to each of us and our lives together that respects our inherent dignity and equality. It is a tool that we use to help us see our lives, our relationships, our communities, and our institutions truthfully and prescriptively, so that our relations might become more expressive of the value, dignity, and equality we believe are the right of each person.[i]

This ideal is grounded in the belief that each person, without condition, is made in the image and likeness of God, *imago Dei*. Such a belief grounds a sense of the sacredness of each person, that we each have an inviolable dignity inherent to us irrespective of social status, culture, ethnicity, or any condition, which is to say it is unconditional. Connected to this belief is the idea that we are each created for freedom, with capacities such as free will and an agency for self-determination and resistance to compulsion. Such freedom allows us to direct our lives, to make choices and decisions, and, most profoundly, to love and seek after the good.





## Justice as a Virtue of Social Institutions

In contemporary times, we have come to see that the lens of justice is also suited for reflecting upon and reforming the ways in which we structure our communities. This brings us to our second sense, justice as a virtue of social institutions.[ii] For the Catholic tradition, human persons are not isolated individuals, but are social by nature. We share our lives and depend on one another to grow, develop, live, and flourish. Such shared work of mutual dependence generates forms of collective activity, such as bureaucracies and organizations and leadership structures, as well as social and cultural structures that all impact and shape us. These social institutions contextualize and cultivate our own agency in important ways.[iii]

However, these social institutions are not immutable sorts of things. They emerge from our shared activity and the fullness of our lives together, lives that are marked by goodwill and God’s liberating grace, yes, but also by sin and brokenness. They often reflect imbalances of power, unequal treatment of persons, deprivation of opportunities, and outright oppression. Pope St. John Paul II spoke to such injustices, saying they are the “fruit of many sins which lead to structures of sin.”[iv] They need justice and grace, as well.

## Justice as a Personal Virtue

Finally, the Catholic tradition speaks of justice as a personal virtue. Dr. King spoke of the need for structural and institutional transformations for justice to be joined with transformations of attitudes, dispositions, and character.[v] The Catholic tradition speaks to these latter concerns with the language of virtue, which can be defined as “a habitual and firm disposition to do the good.”[vi] To call justice a virtue is to name a disposition, attitude, and perfection of will that consists in the “constant and firm will to give one’s due to God and neighbor.”[vii] Toward our neighbors, justice disposes us to “respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good.”[viii]

In this way, the virtue of justice names an alignment of the person with justice, with giving one's neighbor his or her due. It is about making good decisions and being grounded in the idea that what we do in this world matters for the sorts of people we become. The promise of this approach is that with grace, commitment, community, and exemplary guides, we can cultivate the virtue of justice in our own lives.

Envisioning the virtue of justice as transforming attitudes and dispositions is also a way of saying that it transforms how we perceive the world. This ascription matters significantly for our community, as so often our perceptions are shaped by biases we struggle to see and other notions that marginalize members of our community. To give our neighbors what they are due begins with learning to see them justly as they are, in veritas, and apart from the malformations of stereotypes. Our work of dialogue and bias education on campus, insofar as they aim to help us to see our neighbors truthfully, are sources for formation of the virtue of justice.

# ... ORDERED BY AND TOWARDS LOVE...

While a just community is one we ought to always seek after, it is not synonymous with the beloved community. Dr. King's use of beloved is important. Our goal, like his, is both justice and love. In his Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI explains what this means with clarity. He writes:

Charity [or love] goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is 'mine' to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give to the other what is 'his', what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting. I cannot 'give' what is mine to the other, without first giving him what pertains to him in justice. If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just toward them... On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and people. On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving, [by] relationships of gratuitousness, mercy, and communion.[ix]







Love elevates justice to a more profound communion. This is what it means for justice to be ordered by love, especially the love of God. As God draws us toward himself by means of his own self-giving love, he draws us together into right relationship.[x] Dr. King explains that right ordering is seen most clearly in Jesus' death on the cross. He writes, "The cross is the eternal expression of the length to which God will go in order to restore a broken community." For Dr. King, the love of God is a "community creating force." [xi] It is what makes it a beloved community, as this sense of love reconciles and uplifts our community into a more profound unity. It is this vision of a beloved community that is the end towards which Dr. King worked.

When Dr. King speaks of legal racial desegregation in his time, an act of justice achievable with legislation and policies, he distinguishes it from genuine integration, which requires both desegregation and a change in attitudes, dispositions, and a loving understanding of individuals and groups. Make no mistake: Dr. King sought legal desegregation. However, he also, after achieving desegregation victories, sought integration in the community, for as he once said, justice without love creates a society where 'elbows are together and hearts apart.' [xii] This vision is most clear in one of his first uses of the phrase beloved community, at a victory rally speech following the announcement of a favorable US Supreme Court decision desegregating the seats on Montgomery, Alabama, buses. Here, Dr. King proclaimed that "the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opponents into friends. It is this type of understanding goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men." [xiii] We seek to cultivate the integrated spirit Dr. King speaks about above on our campus, where opponents are transformed into friends, where conflict is transformed by reconciliation, and where justice and love mutually uplift one another here at Providence College.

“

The cross is the eternal expression of the length to which God will go in order to restore a broken community.

”

MARTIN LUTHER  
KING JR







## ... AND ANIMATED BY THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST IN ITS PURSUIT OF TRUTH.

“

Catholic universities pursue their objectives in the context of an authentic community, animated by the Spirit of Christ and held together in unity by a common dedication to truth and a shared sense of the inviolable dignity of the human person.

”

This integrated spirit of the beloved community takes on a particular importance for us as an academic community. To be a beloved community here at Providence College where our mission is our motto: veritas, where we are founded on the pursuit of truth, calls us to believe that our pursuit of truth is intrinsically connected to how we care, support, and protect one another. In his exhortation on Catholic universities, Pope St. John Paul II describes this distinctive way that Catholic universities seek truth. He gives clarity that we do not pursue it coldly and impersonally, devoid of relationships or a concern for flourishing, as if the university is purely a factory for knowledge. Rather, Catholic universities pursue their objectives in the context of an authentic community, animated by the Spirit of Christ and held together in unity by a common dedication to truth and a shared sense of the inviolable dignity of the human person. To be a community animated by the Spirit of Christ is to trust God is working in our midst. It is trusting, like Dr. King shared, that Christ is drawing us together into a more just and charitable, indeed a more beloved, community. In this vision how we support and love one another is intrinsic to our task of pursuing truth and, as Pope St. John Paul II shares, is characterized by “mutual respect, sincere dialogue, and protection of the rights of individuals.”[xiv] This calls us to envision Providence College as a place where everyone will be supported in achieving wholeness. Considering this vision for Catholic higher education, Providence College seeks to be a place where persons are at the heart of our mission, and where each person is treated justly and lovingly as a beloved child of God. This is the foundation upon which we pursue our mission of veritas, the pursuit and proposal of truth.





## CONCLUSION

At Providence College, the beloved community is a just community, ordered by and towards love, and animated by the spirit of Christ in its pursuit of truth. Such is what we aspire to become. The reflections above draw on our deepest traditions as a Catholic institution and bring us to a new moment. We look ahead in anticipation and in hope that, with justice, love, and grace, we will minister to the beloved community in our midst. These reflections are a starting point, a sense of the direction forward. The future will be defined by our commitment to bringing these principles and this vision to our life together in vital and transformative ways. We are excited for you to join us.

**JUST  
COMMUNITY**

**ORDERED BY  
AND  
TOWARDS  
LOVE**

**ANIMATED BY  
THE SPIRIT OF  
CHRIST IN ITS  
PURSUIT OF  
TRUTH.**



# ENDNOTES

[i] Porter, Jean, *Justice as a Virtue: A Thomistic Perspective*, p. 5, 10-11, 31,115-131.

[ii] Porter, 1-2.

[iii] Smith, Christian, *To Flourish or Destruct: A Personalist Theory of Human Goods, Motivations, Failure, and Evil*, p. 30-31.

[iv] Pope St. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no. 36-38.

[v] Smith, Kenneth & Zepp Jr., *Ira, Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ch. 6

[vi] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1803.

[vii] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1807.

[vii] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1807.

[ix] Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, no. 6.

[x] Hauerwas, Stanley, *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity*, ch. 8

[xi] Smith & Zepp, p. 144.

[xii] Smith & Zepp, p. 130-131.

[xiii] <https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/>

[xiv] Pope St. John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, no. 21.