



CATHOLIC CHARITIES  
of St. Paul and Minneapolis

## Reflections on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – January 19, 2015

Dear Catholic Charities Colleagues,

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day offers us an opportunity to pause and reflect on the injustice he sought to have us overcome, the significant progress we have made, and the considerable unfinished business before us.

My reflections today bring me back to the 1970s and 1980s when I had internships in Washington D.C. I would run the National Mall up the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and catch my breath while reading the Gettysburg Address of 1863:

*...that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion...  
that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom...*

I still visit the National Mall, climb the same steps, but now after descending turn south to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial. Adorning it are passages from Dr. King, several from 1963, 100 years after Gettysburg:

*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.  
Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. (Letter from Birmingham, Alabama jail.)*

From 1863 to 1963. Fast forward to 2063. What progress will have been made and what challenges will remain? Will freedom ring from the National Mall, to the Nicollet Mall, through the Mall of America, and in the skyways of Saint Paul?

My grandchild, whose mother comes from rural Kenya and father from Highland in Saint Paul, is to turn 48 that year. The actuaries say I will not witness the world we have created by then.

So today I pray for no more martyrs or memorials, that we forsake injustice and poverty, and provide opportunity instead. It is possible if we, like Martin Luther King, Jr. “have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits.” (MLK Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, 1964.)

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'L. M. X'.