



Martin Luther King, Jr. was born on January 15, 1929 in [Atlanta, GA](#). As an adult, he worked as a Baptist pastor and preacher and helped found an organization called the [Southern Christian Leadership Conference](#) with [Ralph Abernathy](#) and others. In these roles, King became known [throughout the country](#) for his sermons and speeches on love, nonviolence, and justice, grounded in his belief in the [beloved community](#).

Much of what King learned about nonviolence and activism came through his own reading and his friendships with people like [Bayard Rustin](#) and [Ella Baker](#). King surrounded himself with community leaders who shared his values and his commitment to fighting for full equality for African Americans, though sometimes they did not agree on the best methods or tactics. Rustin and Baker helped organize [young people](#) around the country, helping them to understand that their role was not to lead people, but to love and listen to people. True leadership, they taught, was about learning the needs of others, fighting for their dignity, and using your sense of what is right and wrong as a guide to your actions.

In the mid-1960s, Martin Luther King, Jr. began to speak out against what he called [The Triple Evils](#) of American society. He, and other Black leaders like [Malcolm X](#) and [John Lewis](#), looked around at the experiences of African Americans with poverty, police brutality, and voter suppression, and called for more [impactful and rapid change](#). This time also saw the rise of similar, but unique, civil rights movements across identity categories, including those for [Chicano Rights](#) in [the southwest](#), [Asian American](#) rights and [LGBT equality](#) in coastal cities, and the [Native and Indigenous rights](#) movement. Each of these movements included a call to recognize the dignity and worth of people who experienced inequality and injustice in the United States. They also brought people together to take active steps to eliminate the problems, in their communities and across the entire country.

[Coretta Scott King](#) worked for fifteen years after her husband's assassination to gain federal recognition of his efforts to create a more equitable and just country. She, along with John Conyers, Jr., testified before Congress, gave interviews and speeches, and wrote letters to governors, mayors, and city councillors to encourage them to support the recognition of King's legacy. After multiple votes over the years were blocked by legislators who did not respect King's work and the many millions who fought alongside and after him for similar goals, in 1983, the [King Holiday Bill](#) was signed into law and it was first celebrated nationally in January 1986 (though some states, like Arizona, Virginia, and South Carolina fought its celebration for the next two decades).



"This is the most important and crucial period of your lives, for what you do now and what you decide now at this age may well determine which way your life shall go." -MLK

Questions To Consider Together

For each of the questions below, discuss them with your family. Use the links above and other sources on the internet to look up any unfamiliar ideas and learn about them together. Let your discussion guide your service activities this year, keeping in mind all the safety guidelines needed during this pandemic.

- What is a community? Who is included in your community? What does your definition of community have in common with Martin Luther King's Beloved Community?
- Think about who is excluded in your community. Why are they excluded? What can you do to make them feel like they belong?
- How do you want to be treated within your community and how will you model that in your treatment of others?
- What is justice? What is equality? How will you be open to new ideas about justice and equality? Who can you learn from?
- How do you define racism? Does your definition include an understanding of history and access to power?
- How do you know when something is wrong? How do you know when something is right? What values help you make good decisions each day?
- Where do you see problems related to poverty and injustice in your life, in the news, and in your actions? What can you do in your daily life to help end poverty and fight injustice? How might you take action in a new way?
- Who is already working in communities of need around you and how can you help and support them?
- When you dream of the best possible society for everyone, what do you see? Are there small steps you can take today to make your dream a reality?

DIY Activities To Do Together

While many organizations have limited service activities due to the pandemic, there are lots of ways beyond those listed below to achieve your vision of a beloved community this year. This is just a start! Remember that you can also visit the Maret website's Community Engagement page to find organizations we have worked with in the past, each of which may have alternate ways to support their work, including in-kind and monetary donations.

- Food (muffins, sandwiches, trail mix) for [Martha's Table](#)
- Bookmarks for [Liberation Library](#)
- Cloth Face Masks for [Sibley Memorial Hospital](#), [Unity Healthcare](#), and/or [Home Care Partners](#)
- Handmade gloves, scarves, hats, and socks for [Central Union Mission](#) and/or [Operation Gratitude](#)
- City Year DC [Projects](#) (local pickup)
- [Letter writing](#) to your Mayor, Governor, City Council members, State and/or Congressional Representatives

"Somewhere we must come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals....So we must help time and realize that the time is always ripe to do right." -MLK