Columns
Horizons
Social Justice



A mural of Martin Luther King Jr. in Youngstown, Ohio (Eilis McCulloh)



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January 17, 2025

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As I sit down to write this, it is Jan. 1 — the dawn of a new year and the hope of a fresh start. Yet, I find myself living in dreadful anticipation of the upcoming four years and praying that things will not be as bad as I think they will be. The United States will soon have a new president — a president who has shown us and told us exactly what he will do.

Most of his priorities are not what we care for. He has talked about mass deportations, separating families, ending access to health care for many, restrictions for transgender people, and tax cuts for the ultra-wealthy on the backs of those who are already struggling to survive. These priorities should not come as a surprise — we saw much of this eight years ago. Yet it still feels like a shock to my system.

Perhaps the most unsettling aspect is that this year 's inauguration also falls on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. On a day we honor King and his prophetic work to achieve civil rights and promote the dignity of all people, we will witness the inauguration of a president who seeks to destroy much of what King fought for.

So, how does this year call us to respond?

Tucked into one of my books, I found the following quote from King's "But, If Not" sermon:

> And I say to you this morning, that if you have never found something so dear and so precious to you that you will die for it, then you aren't fit to live. You may be 38 years old as I happen to be, and one day some great opportunity stands before you and calls upon you to stand up for some great principle, some great issue, some great cause — and you refuse to do it because you are afraid; you refuse to do it because you want to live longer; you're afraid that you will lose your job, or you're afraid that you will be criticized or that you will lose your popularity or you're afraid that somebody will stab you or shoot at you or bomb your house, and so you refuse to take the stand. Well, you may go on and live until you are 90, but you're just as dead at 38 as you would be at 90! And the cessation of breathing in your life is but the belated announcement of an earlier death of the spirit. You died when you refused to stand up for right, you died when you refused to stand up for truth, you died when you refused to

stand up for justice.

This reminded me that I — that we — cannot sit idly by waiting for the next election.

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We know what this administration does: It pits one group of people against another. Newly arrived immigrants versus those who have been here for decades. Suburbanites versus city dwellers. Transgender people versus everyone else. The list goes on.

We must be the ones who put an end to this. We cannot continue to allow our transgender siblings, newly arrived immigrant neighbors, women, children, those who live in poverty, and people of color to live as though they are less than. All people are not the source of our problems. The source lies in a small number of politicians who deemed to put their money over the needs of the people in the common.

Emboldened by my own commitment to justice, truth and light, I know what our focus must be. We must be about change and, to the best of our ability, we must live what we proclaim.

Does that mean that we are to open our homes or motherhouses to provide sanctuary? Speak up and out against the violent and hateful rhetoric of the new administration? Call, email and write our legislators incessantly to demand a way forward centered on the common good?

Even though the future seems bleak, I must keep reminding myself that we cannot fear repercussions for standing up and speaking out alongside those who are ostracized by society. Together with my friends, my community, my colleagues and everyone who has dedicated their lives to fighting for others, we must rise up. As King said, we must be the light in the darkness.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.