



Personal Responsibility Starting With Ourselves

This principle challenges individuals to move beyond denial, blame and personal pain or indifference towards responsible action.

Our greatest need is not for more race relations or diversity experts, or more research papers analyzing the problem. It is the willingness of each one of us to look in the mirror and ask ourselves, “What am I doing to build one America?”

Most of us want to see positive change in the world, our city, and our neighborhood. But most of us also want the other person, the other races, or the other group to take the first step. Change is more likely to be effective if we have the courage to take a personal inventory and to turn the searchlight inwards on those areas in our own lives—and in our sphere of influence—that need to be challenged.

None of us can be held responsible for the acts of previous generations. But all of us are responsible for making a difference now. Simply accepting the status quo makes us part of a destructive separatism.

Personal choices about how we invest our resources, the kind of neighborhoods we live in, how and where we spend our social time, and what we discuss with our friends, all have a profound collective impact on the life of the wider community.

Often we are more sensitive to how we have been hurt than to how we have wounded others. Jealousy and resentment between people working for the same goal can poison the most promising community enterprises. It’s like a surgeon operating on a patient without sterile equipment.

Taking a look at our motives and actions against benchmarks such as honesty, purity, unselfishness and love may provide a useful indication of where change needs to start. Individual decisions to let go of bitterness, ambition, or self-absorption can lead to a wave of creative change in the community. A simple—though difficult—apology can open more doors than a hundred lectures. As people find the inner courage to take risks, they begin to reach out to people they might never have thought of. New partnerships evolve, based on a level of trust that makes possible things that seemed impossible before.

Guiding Principles

Healing our communities is not for the faint of heart. It requires teams of committed individuals who are prepared to work together over a long period of time, and who are willing to model the change and the new relationships that they are calling for in the wider community. Three key guiding principles can help connect communities: honest conversation, personal responsibility and acts of reconciliation.