

Published February 11th, 2015

Having the Strength to Be Kind and Loving

By Laurie Snyder



Well before his arrival at St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Orinda, Rev. Hubert Ivery had the good fortune to meet fellow theologian and Boston University student, Donna Fado Ivery. Now entering their third decade of marriage, they have two grown daughters. (To learn more about Donna Ivery and her art, see "Table of Tears Mosaic" in the Lamorinda Weekly's March 2013 archives: www.lamorindaweekly.com.)
Photo Jennifer Wake

principles of harmony, mutually affirming, responsible and just relationships as a basis of morality." Compassion, justice and grace "can be applied to social entities such as cities and communities, as well as individuals."

Born in Clayton, Alabama, Ivery began his spiritual journey as a Baptist. "In my early years, I remember my dad not being at home. I know that he was, like many people from the Deep South, someone who went north because he wanted so badly to leave the part of the country where there was sharecropping and a lot of racism." Although his father never finished school, he worked hard - often holding two to three jobs, enabling him to purchase property and provide for his wife and sons. "I think his efforts are heroic," Ivery says quietly.

"My mom, I remember her working in the fields. I always felt that she cared very deeply for us." His mother went back to school later in life, finishing high school and obtaining certification to provide care for people in private duty residential settings and care centers. "She became very independent during a time when most women were working in the home. I applaud her for wanting to be independent and wanting to better herself."

When he was roughly 5 years old, his family moved to Florida, just as Miami's schools were starting to integrate. By third grade, he was living with his brother at their grandparents' farm in Alabama. "My maternal grandfather wasn't much of a church goer, but he also worked really hard. Some of my favorite memories are watching him tinker with fix-it things. But I was most deeply impacted by grandmother. She loved us - had a sense of hope and faith in us, and tried to help us develop our own sense of morality and responsibility." They are also both heroes in his eyes.

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." - Martin Luther King, Jr., "Strength to Love" (1963)

Those words written by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. are inspiring to many Orindans - liberal and conservative, young or old. Touchstones for those who grew up, chronologically and spiritually, as they listened to Dr. King's speeches on television during the turbulent 1950s and '60s, they have a resonance all their own for younger Orindans who are just now only experiencing King's wisdom and powerful prose through the lens of history.

One such man who draws great strength from MLK's ideals is the Rev. Hubert Ivery, the pastor at St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Orinda. Currently also chairing the Commission on Christian Unity & Interreligious Concerns for United Methodists of The California-Nevada Annual Conference, Ivery has been ministering to others for more than 30 years. At an Orinda City Council meeting in August of 2013, which followed some of the most heated council meetings in recent memory, he and his fellow members of the clergy inspired many Orindans to pause and reflect. "The notion of a healthy community is grounded in the ideals and values of human worth, integrity,

The Ivery brothers remained there for two years before returning to Miami to finish elementary, junior high and high school. An athlete, Ivery earned a basketball scholarship to Texas Southern University in Houston. It was while studying engineering technology and electronics that he "heard the call."

After completing seminary in Atlanta, he returned to Houston in 1982 for his first assignment - at a church in one of Houston's poorest sections of town. Increasingly interested in congregants' mental as well as spiritual well-being - and in ethics and community building - Ivery sought further training at the Interdenominational Theological Center at Boston University's (BU) School of Theology - an institution rich in spiritual and intellectual tradition, and the very same place where MLK trained in ethics and philosophy en route to his 1955 Ph.D. in systematic theology (www.bu.edu/).

One can feel the Boston-MLK influence in Ivery's own writing, including in this passage on St. Mark's website: "We live in an imperfect world, but a world that has the potential to be kinder and more just. The hope and vision of the spiritual person is for such a world. The spiritually mature person engages in works of support, comfort, encouragement and advocacy for those who are the victims of tragic circumstances or injustice." Being a spiritual person, observes Ivery, means acting thoughtfully and responsibly in the world.

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