

Social Justice Coordinating Team

Church Service

May 2, 2021

My name is Candi Tomlinson, and this is what I would like to share with you today about why I have hope for our future in the area of social justice.

I feel like I have been aware of social justice issues all my life – from early childhood trauma, to experiencing domestic violence, to being married to a gay man, to struggling with obesity, to struggling as a single parent, to “discovering” that I am a lesbian at 70 years old. Each of these has caused me to be acutely attuned to how society has addressed – or not addressed – these social justice issues that have affected me and so many other people.

Given this awareness, how do I have hope? I find hope by trying to make a difference in society and in people’s lives. That’s why I joined the Social Justice Coordinating Team. As well, I spend time learning and working on other initiatives whenever I can.

I serve on the Interfaith Reproductive Justice Coalition, a state coalition sponsored by MUUSJN, and stay informed on the latest issues and upcoming bills surrounding women’s rights, domestic violence, and of course, reproductive rights.

I serve on the LGBTQ Policy Planning Committee of the Michigan ACLU to stay updated on these issues from a different perspective.

I attend every Bariatric Support Group meeting I can, and speak about my journey. I answer questions and give hope of a better future to those just beginning their weight loss surgery journey.

I host a support group for newly out, wanting to come out, and/or questioning persons within the LGBTQ community. The members contact me privately to talk more about their stories, so, little by little, I try to help one person at a time.

Conversations with straight friends, and even some ill-informed gay friends, have given me many opportunities to explain the lack of rights for LGBTQ people in the state of Michigan, and our hopes for the future to expand the Civil Rights Act, commonly known as the Elliott-Larsen Act.

I am working on a book to tell my bariatric weight loss and coming out journeys because the two are intertwined.

I take these actions because I *do* have hope for a better future. I fight for a fair and equal future for everyone, every day, in every way I can.

Good morning. My name is Norma Bailey, and I would like to share with you where I have had hope nurtured in the world of social justice.

While I too have had a personal history that led me to an interest in social justice issues, I believe that my primary passion for engaging in social justice work – and that which keeps me there – is the inspiration from various people, what they said and how they lived, that awakened my hope and passion and still keep my hope and my passion alive.

I've shared with you before that the first inspiration came from the inaugural address of President John F. Kennedy in 1960 in which he said: "My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." His brother, Robert F. Kennedy, also inspired me with these words: "Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, he strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance." These awakened in me a belief that I, a young person from a modest home, could make a difference in the world.

I'll share a few more quotes with you from people who have been my heroes and my inspiration for continuing the work in whatever way I can.

I am only one, but still I am one; I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something I can do. – Edward Hale

We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make which, over time, add up to big differences that we often cannot foresee. – Marian Wright Edelman

When I despair, I remember that all through history the ways of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall. Think of it. Always. – Mahatma K. Gandhi

"To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, and kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places – and there are so many – where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. If we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory." – Howard Zinn

I haven't even mentioned one of my greatest heroes of all time – John Lewis. Having studied the civil rights movement, having been to Selma, Alabama, having read his autobiography *Walking with the Wind*, almost every word that came out of his mouth has inspired me to believe that one person does make a difference. That is what gives me hope to continue the work.

Joyce Henricks

I didn't grow up in a family of activists. We were a working class family in Brooklyn, NY. When a neighbor was sick we brought food over; when an uncle lost his job, we gave what money we could; when a grandparent could no longer live alone, we took them in. When a child in the neighborhood was being bullied because he seemed "effeminate", the women sitting on the stoop acted like deputized mothers and intervened, loudly scolding the bully. We didn't think of it as "justice." It wasn't based on a religious sense of duty. It was just what one does.

I didn't get involved in activism until college, where friends brought me into the civil rights movement and I started to learn about racism. The '50s and 60's were pivotal times for me; they changed the direction of my life. Now instead of focusing on my initial fields of research in epistemology and metaphysics, I was learning about racism, poverty, patriarchy, war. My eyes had been opened to the true history of our country—the shameful alongside the wonderful events.

Now I'm a mother, a grandmother, and a great grandmother—and I worry. I worry about my children. I worry about other children, too. I worry about **all** the children growing up in a world with more violence and hatred than I knew about as a child; a world where **over 14%** of the children in **our** country—the richest country in the world—live in poverty and go to bed at night hungry; a world we are slowly destroying: polluting the air we breathe, poisoning the water we drink, destroying species to make room for corporate profits, and heating the planet so that it becomes less and less habitable for humans and others. We have less than 30 years to turn this around. Many of us in this room won't be around then—but our children and grandchildren will be. But I have hope. I take a step back and look at what young people are doing today: protests for racial justice, gender justice, voting justice. We can get depressed focusing on the amount of hatred there is in our country, but I like to remind myself, there is more love than hate. I look to the many **small** things that people do for each other and that gives me hope. And I look to educating our young people, from pre-K on up. Already we've seen a generational change in attitudes towards things like same-sex marriage. Let's keep working to change attitudes—and beliefs—about race, sex/gender, and poverty—and let's not forget the environment, without which the **rest** won't soon matter.

It'll be a long journey and sometimes we'll wonder if we're getting any closer to a just society, a just world. I'm going to end with something Jim Moreno wrote in the Chat box last week: "Never give up. Stay for the long haul." And I'll add": it'll be a hell-of-a-journey, but well worth it.

I'm Katie Zapoluch, and I'm a lifelong pessimist. I'm also a parent to an almost 3-year-old named Felix. Becoming a parent has helped me rethink the concept of hope, and made me understand how integral hope is to social justice work.

At the heart of my parenting is the sincere hope that I'm raising a good human, who will grow up into a world that is better, kinder, and more equitable than the one we grew up in. I won't know if it's working for awhile, and I can't know what that will even look like when it happens, but I have to believe it's possible. How do I do this as a pessimist, though?

I use my pessimism as a tool. I don't expect the world to change for the better or for injustices to simply disappear; instead, I turn toward my pessimism and accept it as a challenge to work harder. And that's where hope comes in. I don't mean the kind of hope that is a desire for good, however ardent that wish. Hope by itself can be a flimsy, dreamy thing—you can find yourself abdicating responsibility that way, hoping that someone else will do it. Hope is not enough by itself. It has to be the catalyst for resilience and action. I can't hope, after a hard day with a toddler, that tomorrow will somehow be better unless I am also willing to put in the effort to make it so.

Social justice requires the same commitment: hope that change is possible, that justice is coming, but that it is not inevitable without the commitment to work with others toward that goal.

As a teenager, I was an angry pessimist. I often felt a vague sense of rage at all the injustices I saw, and the lack of awareness and action around me. I didn't even know the term social justice. Twenty years later, I've learned to appreciate the progress that has been made. I draw hope from the fact that for my son's entire life, same-sex marriage has always been legal in all 50 states in the US. I am hopeful because 1 in 6 members of Generation Z identify as LGBTQ, a proportion that's expected to grow as more and more young people feel safe living as their true selves.

My son will grow up having discussions about inclusion and representation; about institutionalized and systemic oppression; he will understand consent and reproductive justice; he will know that to fight white supremacy, he must be actively anti-racist. He will have language for these concepts that I didn't have until well into my 20s. He will learn in a more inclusive world, while I continue to unlearn the systems of oppression I grew up with.

I don't just want a better world for my kid, though. I want that for every kid. Felix will grow up understanding that empathy without action is just a feeling. If it takes a village to raise a child, I want to work so that his village is made up of people who recognize that our hope must be shared, so that we are more powerful because we are called to act in solidarity.