



**Racial Justice**  
BELOVED COMMUNITY

# RJBC Newsletter

# *WELCOME, RESPECT AND DIGNITY FOR ALL*

**ONLINE FORUM  
27 SEPTEMBER 2025**

**Continuing our theme of welcome ...**



# WELCOME RESPECT AND DIGNITY FOR ALL

Though perhaps usually unstated, I am sure that we would all like to feel welcome in our surroundings, whether at home, at school, at work, in church, or just generally in society. It's probably not a big deal but we certainly wouldn't wish to feel unwelcome. The act of making someone feel welcome and a sense of belonging in the one being welcomed, go together. It is also true that whether we are shy or gregarious, even the most independent of us appreciates it when we are given the choice of being included. This indicates that I am recognized as someone of worth; I am respected.

We may have been taught to respect our elders, particularly parents. We might have learned to be respectful of professionals, be they doctors, lawyers, plumbers, teachers or musicians, although some of this could be connected with expectations of services to be rendered. Perhaps in similar vein, albeit without any immediate likelihood of reward, we might have become accustomed to the practice of offering a seat on a

## WELCOME

I feel welcome when:

I am greeted with a smile  
My name is remembered  
Someone listens to me  
and is not distracted  
I am invited to share a meal  
Someone shows me gratitude  
I am asked to participate  
I am respected.

## RESPECT

I am respected when:

I am given choices freely  
My feelings are taken into  
account  
I am recognized for who I am  
Someone shows me gratitude  
I am offered help when needed  
I am not treated as 'other'  
You guard my safety.

## DIGNITY

Dignity exists when:

Educational or income status  
doesn't drive how I'm treated  
My right to be valued is  
recognized  
Other inalienable rights count  
Gender, ethnicity and race do  
not adversely affect me  
We recognize and act on the fact  
that we are created in God's  
image

## FOR ALL

Means exactly that.

Regardless of any label that might be applied: nationality, physical or mental ability or skill, sexual orientation, migrant or refugee status, everyone is a child of God and therefore we are siblings and must welcome, respect, and ensure the dignity of every person.



bus or a train to certain people, or just to smiling and even greeting a passerby on the street – all acts of showing respect. This may all work well and probably routinely goes unnoticed in the interactions between those who are somehow alike, perhaps of similar social class, and also for those who perceive themselves to be engaging with someone in a superior class and find that acceptable. But what if we are dealing with someone inferior? Do we still think like that – the immigrant, the unemployed person, someone suffering from mental illness, an individual with a physical disability – and can our thoughts about others be disrespectful? How we think affects how we act.

Respect is about the consideration shown towards someone. It is exercising due regard for the feelings, wishes, or rights of others. It's about the acceptance of everything that exists just the way it is, not the way we want it to be. It is also caring how words and actions may impact others, including how we speak to people and how we dress when going to meet someone or when we go to church. Giving and receiving respect from others is important because it helps us to feel safe and to express ourselves. Respect is the glue that holds relationships, even fleeting relationships, together.

We talk about showing respect and also about allowing people to have dignity. By this we recognize the right of a person to be valued and to be treated ethically for their own sake. Dignity doesn't or shouldn't depend on status, education, income or any such attribute. To be able to have and maintain one's own dignity is an inherent, inalienable right, regardless of gender, sexual identity or orientation, ethnicity, race, nationality or any particular condition in society, or label that might be applied. Notwithstanding morality, ethics, law and politics or any other such consideration, it is hugely important for us to remember and realize that no matter who we are, we are created in and bear the image of God. Dignity is about recognizing this fact.



So whom do we welcome? The Episcopal Church welcomes everyone: all who worship Christ already, the seekers, the unsure, and those who are looking for a place where their questions, doubts, even fears, can find a safe place to be shared, expressed and explored. Notably in the context of our refugee and migration ministries, we welcome sojourners to a place of safety and, among other things, respect our new neighbors and uphold their dignity by offering friendship, fostering community connections, and providing practical support as they navigate their way in unfamiliar, sometimes hostile territory. We seek to appreciate the gifts that all people have to offer, gifts from God, and as a community of people whose lives are centered on Jesus Christ, committed to living the way of God's unconditional, unselfish, sacrificial, and redemptive love, we aspire to exemplify and testify to God's love for every human being, by word and deed.

When we say 'Welcome, Respect and Dignity for All' we mean it. We believe that God loves us all – no exceptions, and we are called to do the same. As we journey on working to enhance racial justice and build beloved community, we play our part in the church's mission to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. In step with that mission, we follow Jesus into loving, liberating, and life-giving relationships with God, with each other, and with the earth.

When the questions are asked, "Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?" There is a resounding response: "I will, with God's help." Together, we will, with God's help!

Welcome, Respect and Dignity for All.



**DAVID**

### **What do the parables say about welcome, respect and dignity for all?**

We could open up a major treatise in response to this question but instead here's an invitation. Take some time to re-read the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), prompted by the simple question "And who is my neighbour?" As you do so, consider how welcome, respect and dignity for all fits in.

In similar vein, go back to the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), and take a fresh look. Where do welcome, respect and dignity for all come into play?

Reflect on these parables and while doing so reflect on our theme of welcome, respect and dignity for all. Look around. How do you engage in welcome, show signs respect, and safeguard the dignity of those whom you don't know well?

# Made For Relationships



Community is not only a biblical reality but also a human necessity. From the very beginning, God declared, “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). We were created in His image to live, breathe, and move within the context of community.

Yet circumstances can sometimes lead us into isolation or unhealthy independence. The parables of the Good Samaritan and the Compassionate Father (commonly known as the Prodigal Son) illustrate this reality. In both parables, a person experiences a loss of respect or dignity and belonging in one way or another.

This kind of loss takes many forms, but it always affects our lives deeply.

Our initiative to welcome those who are estranged or isolated — those carrying wounds we may not see — can offer a much-needed sense of belonging to our neighbors.

For instance, the Good Samaritan cared for a person who was wounded physically. Can we extend the same compassion to people wounded spiritually, emotionally, or socially in our communities?

Can we be like the compassionate father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, ready to embrace those returning from places of loss or brokenness?

Jesus Himself understood this deep human need for welcome. He was intentional about building community. For three years, He lived closely with His disciples, sharing meals, stories, prayers, travels, service, and even resources. They truly did life together.

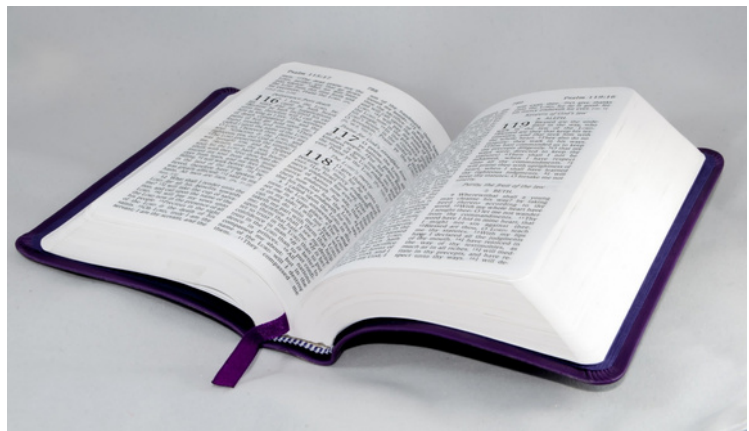
Welcome is not just a word — it is perceived, observed, and tangibly lived out when we open our hearts and our spaces to others. For me this is when welcome becomes respect and dignity for all people made in the image of God.



# The Great Commandment and Respect

In October of 2024, a small conference of Biblical Scholars from many countries took place in Tübingen, Germany, on the topic of the Great Commandment - to love your neighbor as yourself - under the title of "**The Great Commandment** in Early Christianity and its Jewish and Greco-Roman Environment." The scholars were not only specialists on the Old and New Testament, but also on the Talmud (rabbinic teachings). One of the main papers was given by Prof. em. Dr. Bernd Janowski (Old Testament scholar); it emphasized the aspect of equality in society. He said the current understanding of the commandment as 'love your neighbor *as you love yourself*' is entirely incorrect. The Great Commandment has nothing to do with how you love yourself. The command is to treat your neighbor as *you expect to be treated* in society: same nationality, age, socio-economic status, etc. It is all about 'concrete handling' – being honest, respectful, empathetic. This equal treatment, Janowski said, is central to the Old Testament ethic of correct societal behavior.

In the New Testament of course, Jesus says that the first and second commandments are the most important: love God and your neighbor. All other commandments rest on these two (Matthew 22:40).



The Great Commandment is repeated and interpreted in other verses in the New Testament as well: "Whatever you wish men would do to you, do so to them for this is the law the and prophets." Matthew 7:12; and "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another." Galatians 5:13-15

Of course, this commandment has been taught as the 'Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' Even those who do not profess the Christian faith recognize this maxim and often live by it. In today's language we would call this civil and polite social behavior. But do we really do it? What if you were taught to avoid certain people based on nationality, skin color, or faith? Sadly, many of us were taught not to talk to *them*, *they are not like us* or *they are not our people*. This, however, is not in keeping with the Great Commandment at all. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus teaches us that your 'neighbor' may not look like you or hold the same beliefs; they may even be considered an 'enemy' by your own community. We are, therefore, to treat everyone we meet as our neighbor: with respect, equality and honesty. After telling the parable, Jesus asked

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”



LOIS



# Dignity

So whom do we welcome? The Episcopal Church welcomes everyone: all who worship Christ already, the seekers, the unsure, and those who are looking for a Being worthy of respect, having one's dignity honoured is not, as Jesus teaches us through many examples in the gospels, something to be gained through hard work, titles, position in society, or wealth. Nor is it limited to a group of happy few who happened to be born in certain parts of the world, endowed with some advantages right from the start. This is a birth right, inherent to the simple fact of being human. Even beyond this, as global warming urges us to remember, respect is to be extended to all living beings and the planet, that is, to God's whole creation.



The Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30; Matthew 15:21-28) – compared to a dog, i.e. dehumanized –, the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42), the lepers (Mark 1:40-45), tax collectors (Matthew 9:10-17), those infamous for and reduced to their 'sin' (Luke 7:36-50) are only but a few examples of how we, humans, all too easily categorise people based on one characteristic and become blind to their essential dignity as fellow human beings.

I have caught myself doing exactly the same. And I have been hurt whenever it was done to me. The memory of these moments resurfaces whenever the risk of forgetting somebody else's dignity arises, including when this is triggered by witnessing a behaviour of which I profoundly disapprove.

In his autobiography, Gandhi said that if there was one thing that he had hoped his writings would convince his reader of it was the fundamental importance of 'Ahimsa' which is found in Jainism, Hinduism and Buddhism: the ethical principle of non-violence, or non-harming. Ahimsa stems from the belief that everything that is and everyone who is contain the sparkle of God in them. This means that hurting another equates to hurting oneself.



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As a Christian, I see a parallel between Ahimsa and the teachings of Jesus Christ. This relates to honouring the dignity of everyone I encounter and engage with. I won't deny that this can prove very challenging at times, especially when I feel that what I value is endangered by the behaviour, words, or power exercised by some. Yet, what Jesus Christ taught us is that it is by honouring the dignity of everyone, including of those I consider to be my 'enemies' that I contribute to paving the way to peace, reconciliation, justice. It is not an easy path, but it is the only one that can offer enduring and valuable change for the better.

Likewise, when society, human hierarchies, or ordinary unconscious collective behaviours or peer pressure would have me treat some people as less important or less valuable than others, Jesus's teachings which are continually forming my backbone and inner strength lead me to resist that pull and prompt me to imagine what it would be like if I were in that position.

Regardless of our status, our wealth, our heritage, our achievements, what we look like or sound like, we all bear the same worth in God's eyes, as a human being, made in the image and likeness of God. And if God sees every one of us that way, who am I to deny this?



**STEPHANIE**

## **"There is Always Room for One More**

My mom has the gift of welcome. Through her front door have come kings and queens, princes and presidents, priests and politicians — all received with the warm embrace of her smile. Into her sitting room she has welcomed refugees, people who came to borrow or beg, or to work; visitors from near and far were met with the same warmth and grace. In my mother's house dignity was not earned but honoured, and respect was as natural as breathing. My natal home was a living parable of the truth that we are all made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), each of us a reflection of divine love.

The gift of welcome is a holy calling. Scripture tells us, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2). In a world quick to divide, judge, or exclude, welcome becomes an act of resistance — a declaration that every person, regardless of status or story, carries the sacred imprint of their Creator. Jesus embodied this when He shared meals with tax collectors and sinners, crossed cultural barriers to speak with a Samaritan woman, and blessed children others tried to turn away.

Respect and dignity for all are not optional virtues for people of faith — they are the very outworking of the gospel. To welcome is to say, "You matter. You are seen. You belong." And when we extend such hospitality, we mirror God's own open-armed invitation to us: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). In the household of God, there is always room for one more chair at the table."



**MPHO**



Join us online on Saturday, 27 September, 10:00-12:00 in an exploration of our Convocation Covenant for dismantling racism, advancing racial justice and building beloved community in Europe.

*What does it say? When did you last look at it?  
How can we use it today?*

Welcome, Respect and Dignity for All.

Register at <https://episcopaleurope.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/2903399>



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