

Bishop McKinley Young preached a powerful sermon during the opening worship service of the West Virginia Council of Church's Annual Assembly, Oct. 20. He challenged the council and the church universal to work to end racism through working for a "beloved community" - a concept championed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and explained on the [King Center's website](#).

*"In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict."*

Bishop McKinley Young is the resident bishop of the third district of the African-Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). Below is a transcript of Bishop Young's conversation with Laura Allen:

**LHA: (off mic) Tell me a little bit about the concept of the beloved community.**

I didn't create the term, but I see the term of being reflective of the community that is closest to what the Kingdom of God would be like. Where you have the engagement, the involvement, the participation of all of the community, of all people. You'd have the cultural and racial diversity. and the religious diversity. So that people could find a way to be in the world together differently. and could find a way to be together in the world responsibly, in a space where we really do value each other's culture, history.... promise. And we have an appreciation for what each other faces - the struggles - and how we might be in relationship to address those.

**LHA: The last year, we've seen so much happen in the country. And certainly, you all, in the AME Church have seen a lot.**

**Bishop Young:** I think the Charleston (SC) event is perhaps the most devastating of all of those. But it holds promise, because it started a conversation in the country, and in the world about what the impact of racism....I'm trying to find the word that really fits.

Roof, who pulled the trigger, was a product of that **venom**. The contradiction was when you heard the people who were related to the families of the people who had been killed in the church. All responded in a loving and charitable way by saying they forgive. Their willingness to forgive him and to say that his racism was not going to change them.

While they did resent what he had done, it was not making them into bitter or hateful people; nor were they going to embrace racism as a response. They were going to be able to forgive and move forward.

I thought that opened a window into the souls of those people in SC, but it also opened a special window into the heart of the black community. Because those were not your social activists or your elected officials. These were persons who were common everyday people who were the victims of this heinous act. and yet, they found room or space to say “we forgive you.” We are going to go on. We know you are responsible for what happened to our family members. But hating you will not bring them back, or make the world better.

So we want what they were trying to achieve in the prayer meeting that night.

We want to pray for a better America, a better SC, a better world. And a world where guns and gun violence will not be a reality.

**LHA: You said something else today that I thought was pretty profound. You were telling the story this morning about a woman - a white woman in this case - who talked about wanting to make the world different. About wanting to move beyond what she had experienced and what she was capable of. And you said something that was really beautiful about how things happen at home, one-on-one, in relationships. Is that how we dismantle this thing called racism?**

**Bishop Young:** I think you have the public discourse - the speeches by senators, congresspersons, presidents, etc. All of that is helpful, because it gives you the larger community’s take on it. But then - how all of that gets processed is around the intimate table settings. What I like to call “table talk.” Because growing up, some of the most intimate conversations with your family was at the breakfast table, the dinner table. And the Sunday dinner table. That was the time the really significant things were being discussed and shared. And that’s when you were encouraged and loved and stroked and affirmed. We need to create a space - to encourage more of those - and we need to make sure what is shared in those settings and that it finds it’s way back into the larger community.

For her to say that was the telling piece. She said “I want my children to be less racist and I want to work on how that is achieved. And on how that is accomplished.”

**LHA: And that takes some vulnerability on her part, to admit her own wound.**

**Bishop Young** - Right, right. To admit it, to own it, and to allow it to be seen. But to also realize there is healing for it. But it only comes in the context of shared opportunities, of exchange at a place where people can be honest and vulnerable.

**LHA: This issue has become very serious for the AME church in the past year. Last night you sort of challenged our ecumenical unity when you said “ we are in this together.”**

**Bishop Young:** Here’s what happened. We went to Washington and the Nat’l Council of churches executive leadership shared. And the AME Bishops, CME church and other faith groups came together to say we want to take engagement and conversation to a different level. We want to make sure the larger community of America is able to hear this discussion, and we want to invite them in.

And we also want them to say: “What are we prepared to do so that...we don’t want the dialogue to stop.” We want to talk about all the issues. We want to talk restoration of the voting rights act, which expired - so that it will have all its appropriate components.

We want to have some discussions about gun control. Real discussions which would have some real visibility and viability. People hunt a lot in West Virginia, as they do in other parts of the country...so there is a respect of guns. But part of our problem now is the widespread drug abuse and weapons. Guns and drugs don’t mix - and the two should not be in the same room or share the same space.

So, I think what has to happen is we need to have some coalitions...some agreement...some...covenants. We need to have some covenants established where we will promise and commit ourselves in the presence of God and with God’s grace and mercy, and that we will hold ourselves accountable to seek the just community that God is calling us to embrace. And that we will be willing to make the appropriate sacrifices. Have a special time of prayer and fasting to prepare for that - and to see if we can work our way to a different reality than the one we presently experience.

**LHA: This is hard work, when we talk about undoing racism.**

**Bishop Young:** It’s not easy. You can’t issue a demand for it and make it happen. You can’t create platitudes and think that will allow you to achieve it. It has to be done through what I call honest brokering at the grassroots level.

**What are some of the things you think that people can start to do really get to this issue today?**

We are going to have to talk about these issues openly, honestly. You have to call it like you see it, then you have to be willing to sit down with people. Principals, teachers. Families - Parents, grandparents. We have to be vulnerable enough to open ourselves up to have the conversation about what needs to be addressed.

I saw this, I experienced this. Here’s how I feel about it. And I’m prepared to tell you where I am on it, and I want to hear where you are. And then I want us to decide here how we are going to

go out that door together, given what has happened in here. Given the realities of what we've experienced, the words that have been uttered.

**LHA: I have a male friend who explained it to me this way: "It's not up to women to explain sexism, it's up to me, as a man to explain to other men why something is sexist." It's the same with racism, I think. It's not up to black people to explain it - it's up to white people - because we made it.**

**Bishop Young:** And just inviting a black person to talk about it is not the remedy for it. It goes back to what that lady told me once: "I want my children...to know better. So whatever I'm going to have to do, whatever steps I need to take, articles to read, panels, etc. I want to be a part of that."

It should not be done from a standpoint of guilt, but from the standpoint of reaching for a better tomorrow, reaching for a better today, reaching for a better relationship. And that's what we have to do. I think the council of churches works best when they get the congregations and denominations saying "how can we get this better?"

The sea change is that white churches are going to have to own their part of it. I remember when Roy Pearson was our president at Andover Newton. And someone came and made a speech and really laid out...and called the school racist. And he was very offended. "I'm not responsible for this."

No, you aren't responsible. But this is your watch. and on your watch the collective consciousness has been raised to a different level. We see things in a way we didn't see them before. We want you to see this and acknowledge it.

Not to try and escape by saying "I'm not responsible for this," but rather to say, "I own my part in this and I want you to share it take this walk with me to and fix it. And I think we can fix it.

But you'll never fix it once and for all. it's an ongoing process (**LHA - it never ends**)