

RACIAL DIVERSITY

This month marks my fifth anniversary of being a full-time rabbi at CRC. My family and I feel so deeply rooted in St. Louis and in our sacred community, and we are so grateful for all of the spiritual gifts that come from such a sense of belonging. Among those blessings is a circle of professional colleagues and personal friends that is increasingly racially diverse.

This is happening for a multitude of reasons. It is because of the many African-American friends, clergy and activists who are part of the CRC universe due to Rabbi Susan's longstanding commitment to racial justice. I also credit the Joint Venture with Cote Brilliant and our more recent relationships with the leaders and members of Cornerstone Institutional Baptist Church, the African Hebrew Israelite Community, and Cultural Leadership. It is due also to our congregational embrace of Jews of Color, and to my family's participation in St. Louis institutions that run against the local grain of racial separateness such as the University City schools, COCA, the LOOP Drum Circle, Heman Park public pool (which the RFT recently called "one of the few places in St. Louis where blacks and whites intermingle in a shared spirit of recreation and relaxation"), and the Everyday Circus.

In theory, I have believed since I was a child in the importance of integration and racial diversity. However, until I moved here, (surely ironic, as St. Louis is generally known to be as racially divisive as cities come) I was unable to reach across the divide. Of course, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose birthday we all celebrate this month, knew that the dream of racial integration would be difficult. Thanks to the Civil Rights Movement, legal segregation has been done away with, but *de facto* segregation still sadly keeps African-Americans and whites apart, nearly 40 years after Dr. King's death. If we are to achieve true integration, we must pay attention to Dr. King's prophetic words: "This is no day to pay lip service to integration; we must pay *life* service to it."

Paying 'life service' to racial diversity is one of the many reasons to come out to North St. Louis and celebrate Dr. King's life with our choir, our rabbis, and our partners at Cote Brilliant Presbyterian Church (see directions inside). Reverend Samuel Billy Kyles of the Monumental Baptist Church of Memphis, an eyewitness to Dr. King's assassination, will be the main speaker. As I have often said, this same service back in 1993 was the first CRC program I was ever involved with (long before I became a rabbi), and the relationships I formed at that time are still strong.

Though to think so is no longer so fashionable, I still believe that Martin Luther King's vision of integration is a necessary step in resolving many societal problems. Though for me living with racial diversity is clearly a matter of personal preference, more importantly it is about justice and freedom and finally addressing generations of oppression to persons of color. As our Supreme Court

ruled long ago, separate can never be equal. When our schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, and religious congregations are finally integrated, a tikkun will have occurred, and we will all finally be able to cry out with Dr. King, "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we're free at last!"

B'Ahavah (With Love),

Rabbi Randy