

In Remembrance of Martin Luther King

Today we honor Martin Luther King. We need to reflect on his messages given to us. What a role model he is for all of us! My recollections of him go back to the 60's in Chicago, IL where we held the first National Conference on Religions and Race. It was Martin Luther King who was to be our main speaker for a gathering of about 1000 church leaders. He pleaded for the acceptance of everyone into American society since all are God's children. I had the privilege of being with him again in Milwaukee, WI where he addressed the teachers serving in the National Catholic Education Association. There we were confronted with many protestors who tried to disrupt the conference. Messages were being distributed at all entrances to the amphitheater. The message was a diatribe against Martin Luther King, noting that he was basically a Communist and should not be addressing the conference. I offered to help the distributors and took arm loads of the flyers which I either stored under my chair and/or dropped into waste paper baskets!

There is one more story I'd like to share with you before I continue with my message:

You've got to be taught to hate and fear.
You've got to be taught from year to year.

It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear.
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And People whose skin is a diff'rent shade.
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught before it's too late,
Before you are six or seven or eight
To hate all the people your relatives hate.
You've got to be carefully taught!
You've got to be carefully taught!

Yes, prejudice, hate, discrimination have been a part of our fabric for a very long time, and as Oscar Hammerstein says, "You must be carefully taught!"

Again in the early 60's, the editors of a new religion text approached me since the book had not been well received on the north side of Chicago in the Catholic school system. Parents were objecting to a certain person named Martin Luther King who had been written up in one of the chapters in the religion text. The editors, two priests, called a meeting with the concerned parents and asked that I join them. After lengthy discussion about the paragraph describing Martin Luther King in a very positive way, noting that he was like Jesus in working for the poor and down-trodden, the editors asked each person to give his/her concluding decision. I was first to speak and said, "If you remove Martin Luther King from the text, you may as well

remove all that pertains to our black citizens because it seems to me that is what the group is asking. My vote is that you keep every word about Martin Luther King.” Almost all the parents requested that the paragraph be removed and the editors, sad to say, acquiesced their wishes. Two weeks later, Martin Luther King was killed!

King’s message given in Mississippi just before he was killed is the message I would like you to hear now:

“I have a dream. . .