

BY JIM MERRITT
Special to Newsday

Martin Luther King Jr. Day, celebrated as a national holiday on Jan. 17, is especially meaningful to many Long Island religious leaders. This week's commenters discuss how they live the American civil rights icon's messages of social justice and transformation. The three commenters will also be featured in a panel discussion from 4 to 5:15 p.m. Jan. 16 hosted by Abraham's Table of Long Island, an organization that explores the common faith roots of Judaism, Christianity and Islam; to attend virtually, visit abrahamstableli.org and scroll to the link at the bottom of the page.

Isma H. Chaudhry

Board of trustees co-chair, Islamic Center of Long Island, Westbury

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s message of social justice and equity particularly resonates with me as a Muslim. The most important and valuable right recognized by Islam is justice with dignity and compassion for all humanity.

According to The Holy Quran, we must not let prejudices incite us to discrimination and oppression. In the Quran, justice is the central theme guiding the personal, communal, political and moral consciousness of communities and institutions. The Quran reminds us that the prophets — from Adam to Noah, Abraham to Moses, Jesus to Muhammad — conveyed the same exhortation: that we need to establish an equitable, responsive and responsible society that upholds equity and justice for all.

The Quran states: "O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even if it be against



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Earl Y. Thorpe Jr.



Lina Zerbarini

ASKING THE CLERGY

How does MLK's message resonate in today's world?

yourselves, your parents, your relatives, or against the rich or the poor." (Quran 4:135) Achieving equity and justice is an ongoing commitment, requiring humility, courage and integrity to change the attitudes of the oppressors and assuage the despair of the oppressed. There is no justice without compassion and no liberty without equity.

The Rev. Earl Y. Thorpe Jr.

Pastor, Church-in-the-Garden, Garden City

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s message trumpeted the soul-saving, radical, social-transforming ministry and mission of Jesus Christ. Like many civil rights leaders, King implored us to embody the transformative power of love in implementing Jesus Christ's social justice gospel.

King clearly understood and affirmed Christ's clear example that we need to put our faith into action in ways that embolden us to dismantle structures of oppression, to search for truth, to seek peace instead of war and to demonstrate concern and care for those who are hurting, hopeless and helpless. Yet as a society, we have regressed in addressing systemic inequalities, and many states continue the disenfranchisement of voters.

Furthermore, many have shamelessly and sophomorically distilled King's human rights message about America's poor and disenfranchised people into pithy and hollow quotes without applying them to our society. Indeed, far too many people cherry-pick the "palatable" and "comfortable" parts of King's messaging and never engage fully with

his many searing, biblically based critiques of this nation.

Any real engagement with those works would help us examine our society constructively and build the "beloved community" he spoke of. King's message reminds me of what my faith in God calls me to do.

Rabbi Lina Zerbarini

Kehillath Shalom Synagogue, Cold Spring Harbor

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was a prophet. He drew upon the tradition of the prophets of the Hebrew Bible when he quoted Amos: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." (Amos 5:24) Those words are more than 2,500 years old, but King's call to envision and embody them in our own country and our own lives continues to call to us today.

The Hebrew prophets were not about telling the future, but about shining a light on the ways that the Israelites were not living up to the commandments to "love the stranger" and "care for the widow and orphan" and "remember you were a stranger." And, especially, "love your neighbor as yourself."

King's faith in and commitment to love was a foundation of his life and teaching. Accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, he said: "I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality." If he could believe this, could trust in love, despite what he had seen and experienced, so can I, so can we. May his memory continue to bless and inspire us.

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