**UNITY THROUGH CIVILITY**

We currently appear to be a nation consumed by violence, both in action and in speech. In the midst of widespread divisions in our present society that appear to threaten our ability to consider a variety of issues as a cohesive community, there are efforts underway locally and beyond to restore civility in our discussions, and to reestablish the bonds of fellowship and community that are essential to mutual respect and dialogue.

On April 5, 1968, the day after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and two months before his own assassination, Robert F. Kennedy made the following statement on the menace of violence in all its forms:

It is not the concern of any one race. The victims of the violence are black and white, rich and poor, young and old, famous and unknown….And yet it goes on and on.

When you teach a man to hate and fear his brother, when you teach that he is a lesser man because of his color or his beliefs or the policies he pursues, when you teach that those who differ from you threaten your freedom or your job or your family, then you also learn to confront others not as fellow citizens but as enemies—to be met not with cooperation but with conquest, to be subjugated and mastered.

Our lives on this planet are too short and the work to be done too great to let this spirit flourish any longer in our land….Surely we can learn, at least, to look at those around us as fellow men and surely we can begin to work a little harder to bind up the wounds among us and to become in our hearts brothers and countrymen once again.

In opening and continuing dialogues with those with whom we have disagreements or differing perspectives, there are a variety of tools to help us be good listeners, as well as speakers. To model and advocate for civil behavior, thoughtful preparation is important, and can be enhanced by participation in trainings such as the Bridging Our Differences workshops put on by Civility First, a grass-roots movement founded in Washington state whose goals are to create communities where all members treat each other with civility and respect.

To accomplish this, we are asked to

* promote listening to and learning from people with perspectives different from our own.
* agree to model civility and respect in our public lives, including and especially when in conversation with those with whom we disagree.
* commit to courteously challenge hurtful and disrespectful behavior.
* ask other individuals, as well as civil and religious organizations and politicians to pledge to do likewise.

More information on Civility can be found at [www.civilityfirst.org](http://www.civilityfirst.org), and at the Civility Project booth at the Juneteenth Festival in Pioneer Park on Sunday, June 19.

If you are interested in participating in a training or in taking part in a civility project in the Walla Walla area, please email civilityprojectww@gmail.com, or call 509-522-0399.