

Minnesota Multifaith Network
Discerning Our Moral Commitments Together
June 17th, 2021

Anantanand Rambachan

Dear sisters and brothers,

It is an honor, on behalf of the Minnesota Multifaith Network, to welcome you to this special conversation on justice and human dignity, as we seek together to discern our moral commitments. We are grateful for the opportunity to listen, to share and to learn from each other. I want to welcome Reverend Jia Starr Brown, senior Pastor at First Covenant Church in Minneapolis. We look forward to Reverend Brown's words.

The Minnesota Multifaith Network was founded with the belief that the moral and spiritual resources of our traditions have much to contribute to our quest for justice and for the good life for all. We pursue this by supporting faith and interfaith leaders working for just communities. We are committed to building and strengthening relationships, both intrareligious and interreligious. We seek to facilitate the sharing of resources to strengthen cooperation among our members. In all of this, we aim to be radically inclusive and committed to diversity.

We are the grateful inheritors of a legacy of interfaith work in Minnesota that includes the Twin Cities Interfaith Network, the Saint Paul Interfaith Network and the Mall Area Interreligious Council. We are inspired by the ongoing work of religious communities standing against racism and inequities.

Since our launch in late 2019, we have established a Board of Directors and a Network Council to guide our work. We secured IRS non-profit status and developed documents to clarify our policies. Our achievements include assisting the formation and operation of the Minnesota Multifaith Speakers Network, an interfaith organizational directory, a monthly convening of interfaith leaders in Greater Minnesota, and communicating regularly via email and social media.

Convenings like this are central to our work and goals. This is our first major event of 2021 and we are truly delighted that you have joined us.

It is easy to miss the rare nature of our conversation today. At the same time, it is important that we understand its historically exceptional character. If we do not, we may be discouraged by its challenges. Our conversation today is boundary breaking. Why do I say this?

For most of the history of our religious traditions, we did our moral and theological thinking separately and not together with our neighbors of other faiths and commitments.

Today, our religious landscape in Minnesota has significantly changed. The United States is the world's most religiously diverse nation. Our destinies are now inseparably joined with each other. We will all live our lives, religious, social, and professional in the context of religious diversity. Religious diversity is our reality; our choice is whether we see this reality as a problem to be overcome or as an opportunity for enrichment, and for the formation of friendships and partnerships that serve our common good.

All of our traditions share visions of a community distinguished by justice, compassion, peace, prosperity and freedom from violence. Any community, or any individual, concerned about social justice, must reach across boundaries to find common ground and values with people of other faiths and commitments. Our hopes for just and peaceful communities will only be realized together or not at all. "No religion," as Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel reminded us, "is an island." No tradition can "go it alone."

We will not work together, however, if we think separately. We will not work together if we do not sit together to listen and to learn from each other's wisdom and life experiences. We will not work together if we privilege a few voices and marginalize or exclude others. Our convening today is a welcoming invitation to move from thinking separately to thinking together. We aim for dialogue that is deep and truthful; we aim for dialogue that welcomes diversity; we aim for dialogue that builds and strengthens relationships.

Why is interfaith engagement necessary in the work of discerning moral values for justice and human dignity?

All of our traditions in their distinctive teachings affirm the sacredness of human beings. The Hindu tradition, to which I belong, speaks of the divine as present equally in everyone. The Jewish and Christian traditions teach that human beings

are created in God's image. Islam reminds us that God is closer to us than the jugular vein. Traditions of Buddhism speak of everyone having Buddha nature and of our unity and interconnectedness. Native traditions remind us of the kinship between all things. Jainism teaches us the value of the tiniest of living beings and commends non-injury.

Our dignity as human beings is intrinsic and our traditions call us to hold each other in reverence and respect. The murder of George Floyd was an illegal act, but it was also a violent act of irreverent disdain for his sacredness and dignity as a human being.

The source of our commitment to justice is not limited by the legal. It springs from the deepest truths that we hold about the meaning of human existence. From these places of meaning, we can join our voices against ideologies and structures that deny the personhood, and dignity of human beings.

Let us today, from the heart of our deepest convictions, overcome the boundaries of our differences and think and speak together. Let us learn from and with each other about the sources of our faithfulness to justice and to human dignity in these times of challenge. If one of the fruits of our conversation is the discovery of shared moral obligations, may this discovery bring us joy. May these unite and inspire us to work together for the flourishing of all in our community.

Thank you for accepting our invitation to be here today.

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