



MAC Interviews: Reverend Ron Loughry

MAC is pleased to present a recent interview with retired Reverend Ron Loughry to discuss faith-based traditions and their role in helping those who are in need of assistance.

Rev. Loughry served as the executive director of the Fern Creek/Highview United Ministries and as a minister within the Christian Church, DOC. He was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland. He holds degrees in history and philosophy, as well as a Masters of Divinity seminary degree.

In addition to pastoring, Rev. Loughry taught as adjunct history faculty for 30 years, worked in ecumenical and interfaith ministries, ministered in the social justice arena, and has worked with older adults for more than three decades.

Rev. Loughry has long been an advocate for seniors, an aging services provider, and a champion of compassion in the Louisville Metro community and elsewhere. His earliest work with older adults began in the 1970's as a lay minister working with a church based senior adult nutrition center in Baltimore

Q: Rev. Loughry, thank you for talking with us. You've long been a champion of social justice and caring for the elderly. Could you talk about your history in assisting those less fortunate?

Most of my ministerial work was through interfaith and ecumenical ministries. I served as Associate Director of the Kentuckiana Interfaith Community. KIC brought heads of different faith communities together. It ended up dissolving many years ago, but in many ways the great organization, Interfaith Paths to Peace, has filled that vacuum. Interfaith also involved the Muslim community for the first time, which is a vital community to collaborate with.

I'm not nearly as involved as I was earlier in my career, but I try to be very intentional in my life, even in retirement. As a local and global community, we can't afford to be anything less than compassionate. So, I try to be supportive when my brothers and sisters are doing something. If I can provide a presence and be supportive, I do so. Sometimes its just important for the visibility to have clerics from the Muslim community, from the Jewish community and from the Christian community stand together and be visible to the public.

One program that I'm very supportive of is the Dare to Care Annual Community Hunger Walk. I actually directed that walk for a few years. In this, Dare to Care calls for faith leaders to announce the upcoming walk so we could show our community that hunger is not a partisan issue, not a sectarian issue. It faces all people: Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu. We can stand together, and I believe its been a great success.

Q: Could you discuss how your time in ministry began?

I preached my first sermon at age 16. It was in 1969, and I was comparing Dr. King's ministry to that of Jesus. I did that to a primarily white congregation, but that was shortly after his assassination. That had a massive impact on me and my approach to ministry and justice issues. As a lay minister, I was involved in Baltimore, in Tennessee, and then here in Louisville. I worked with many ministries in the African American community, trying to bring white and black congregations together. In more recent years, I've had the privilege of getting to know Muslim leaders as well.



When Dr. King was assassinated, I didn't know his teachings very well. My friends in the integrated school I was a part of were either angry or crying. I started asking questions, and that's when I learned of Dr. King and his work in nonviolence. That changed me, as well as my outlook on justice and community. That change has guided me through the years. I believe we simply need to get to know each other, our stories and commonalities. We must move from tolerating diversity to celebrating diversity.

For example, back in Baltimore in the 1970s, there was an annual city fest. All the different neighborhoods would come together and have booths next to each other for a long weekend of festivities and celebrations. The neighborhood where I lived was a predominantly white, working class neighborhood. I had a fellow, just a working guy, who had never been a part of the festival. So, I talked him into helping out.

We went down Thursday evening to set up our booth. Next to us was a neighborhood that was primarily African American. I happened to know the lady in leadership from that community. Wonderful lady, she was a hugger. We're there, and she calls me over. We hug, we're chatting, and this friend was just looking and watching. I introduced him. She gave him a big hug, and I could see his uncomfortableness.

Sunday evening, we're taking down everything. She said goodbye and they hugged again. As we were driving back, he was quiet. He turned to me and said, "She's a great lady, isn't she? You know, I've never really been around black people." He was quiet a little longer, then he said, "Thanks for bringing me along. It really changed my point of view."

That's what it's all about. If we can bring people together, we find that we have so much more in common than we have different. The major religions too have so much more in common than otherwise.

I have a Christian collar, a Jewish yarmulke and a Yeoman's cap. My belief is much broader. I can look at the major world religions, and I see my brothers and sisters there. There's one supreme being and perhaps many ways of knowing that supreme being.

Q: Could you talk about some of the Louisville institutions you've worked with that provide hope and stability in the community?

There are a number of congregations that very much try to practice justice and compassion within their work. We've seen both laypeople and clergy get involved, in addition to organizations like MAC, Interfaith Paths to Peace and the Jewish Community. It's so important to keep these organizations strong and visible, because they represent people coming together.

It was a few years ago when the Hindu Temple was defaced. We were able, as individuals and groups, to show up in a move of solidarity to paint over the defacement and show our sisters and brothers that this was an aberration. This was not our community. When these negative things happen, we must be just as quick to stand up and say no. This is not the true nature of our



community.

Q: You've helped countless people deal with trauma and grief. What is your approach when sharing that burden with mourning families?

Through my years of ministry, I've conducted probably in the upper hundreds of funerals through the years. I walked with families through that very intimate sense of grief. I also worked with individuals and families experiencing the effects of dementia. I tried to make sure there are care systems in place for their loved ones which will be both professional and compassionate. They need programs designed to address the physical, social, psychological and spiritual aspects of these people who are on that difficult journey.

It's our job as a community to make sure, at a systemic level, that there are services in place. We must meet each of these patients with respect for the life they have. While they are perhaps being diminished by disease,

they are still individuals. They're still children of God. To walk that journey with them as compassionately as possible is always the goal.

Perhaps that means hearing the same story more than once or answering the same question. Perhaps it means simply resting your hand on a person's arm, reassuring them and smiling. For dementia, music is a wonderful tool. If I know a favorite song, I can start singing it and soon they may sing along too. This can allow for patients to slip away from that anxiety they may be experiencing.

With the caregivers, we must walk with them on their journey. They're losing a person who has been a loved one. We help them to celebrate that relationship, to honor that relationship and to equip them with tools they can use.

There were a variety of times in my office where someone just needed to chat for a while. They could chat; they could cry. When it comes to death, we must help people honor their grief. Yes, they've lost someone they love. There's going to be a hole in their life, an emptiness. Honor that loss by acknowledging it. Don't try to sugarcoat it with little clichés. Most compassion is not made up of huge gestures. It's individual. It's quiet.

Q: Could you discuss your teachings to the community that are still ongoing?

In my community ministries work, I routinely tried to provide ways for young people to get involved. When I spoke to youth groups, I asked them to help unload food, to interact with the adults, to make sure they know about issues related to hunger and economic injustice. The network of 13 organizations known as the Association of Community Ministries here in Louisville continue these efforts. We want to give these young people hands on experiences.

This can be through school programs, community service, college internships, etc.



We're always striving to get more people involved because it can change lives. One changed life can touch another. We want to give young people the opportunity to lead. If there's a gathering of adults, we don't always have to listen to people with gray hair. We can have a tremendous impact on the lives of young people if we provide opportunities for them to show passion and cultivate compassion. Engage them in conversation. Make sure they always feel included, and they are not discounted.

Q: Thank you very much for your time Rev. Loughry. Do you have any final thoughts?

Louisville is a community, blessed with individuals, companies, and civic groups, willing to work together, regardless of individual missions, to champion service for our older adult community. It is an honor to be part of such a community, and to play some small part in this vital work.

How my story has interacted with many others has been a wonderful journey. I treasure those stories that have become a part of my own, and I hope that in return I have become a part of other people's stories. I count myself blessed.



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