

Building a bigger table at Thanksgiving

By Laura D. Hill
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The speakers at the fifth annual HART Multifaith Thanksgiving Service on Nov. 21, 2022. Courtesy of Meghan Roth Clayton

As we enjoy Thanksgiving weekend, I am reflecting on how my holiday kicked off at the 5th annual HART Multifaith Thanksgiving Service.

I was invited to speak at Monday's service along with 12 faith leaders. You see, HART, which stands for Historic Area Religions Together, is a coalition of ministers who started meeting in 2017 after the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville. Local clergy decided it was time to put aside their differences and "build a bigger table" by focusing on their common denominators.

HART is committed to building relationships among diverse congregations and leaders for the moral and spiritual well being of the Historic Triangle community. One of the important ways that HART serves the community is by having their members take turns writing the Faith & Values column that is published weekly in The Virginia Gazette.



More than 100 people attended the Thanksgiving Service held at Walsingham Academy. I was in good company as I listened to leaders from St. Bede Catholic Church, Historic First Baptist Church, Williamsburg Unitarian Universalist, New Zion Baptist Church, St. Martins Episcopal Church, Williamsburg Buddhist Sangha, Williamsburg Presbyterian Church,

Temple Beth El of Williamsburg, Williamsburg United Methodist Church and William & Mary Campus Ministries United. A common thread ran through each message: “We must seek to better understand one another.”

In keeping with this timely message, I shared about lessons we can learn from natural beauty that we see all around us. This time of year trees are adorned with yellow, brown, red and green leaves. Blue jays, red cardinals and brown sparrows can be spotted in tree branches. Even as we appreciate

and value differences that we see in nature, we can learn to appreciate different people, cultures, languages and skin colors.

How can we learn to celebrate our differences and unify in a climate of divisiveness?

First, we can follow the simple wisdom of Mother Teresa, the famous nun and humanitarian, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. Mother Teresa once said, “Peace begins with a smile. Let us always meet each other with a smile, for the smile is the beginning of love.”

Secondly, we can commit to HART’s 3-step blueprint: Set aside our differences; focus on our common denominators; and work for the good of the Historic Triangle community.

Thirdly, we can acquire necessary tools and training to help us better understand one another. Organizing and participating in work-related and community programs that foster racial dialogue, inclusiveness and bridge building are a starting point. Just in case that sounds daunting, Coming to the Table-Historic Triangle can provide experienced facilitators to tactfully guide this process.

The holiday season is a time of remembering traditions — family gatherings, turkey dinners and football games. I have a new family tradition. From now on you will find me attending the annual HART Multifaith Thanksgiving Service. I hope to see you there!

When we come together to create a more welcoming community, we all win!

Laura D. Hill is the founder and director of Coming to the Table-Historic Triangle, a program of the Virginia Racial Healing Institute. Learn more about her work at Comingtothetable-historictriangle.org.