

Do We Really Want an Inclusive 'Tosa?

"Inclusive" can be an elusive word. Do people really want to include everyone? Surely, in this fallen world, there are some legitimate undesirables. Well ... instead of making excuses about including the 1% or 4% that may be problematic, why don't we focus on those who are not beyond the pale (If indeed anyone truly is)? This will involve confronting our biases, prejudices, fears and unspoken narratives. Including others will probably require us to exclude some of our preconceived notions and deeply held beliefs. Retraining our minds may have to come first before our emotions and/or heart follow.

Robert Kennedy once said that there is nothing that is serious and important in life that is easy. To overcome the scourge of racism, segregation and inequality will take much work. It will also take discipline. Discipline is almost a four-letter word. People hate to hear or talk about it because even though it's necessary, it's usually not fun. However, when we believe in and desire a goal, we embrace discipline because it can help us get to where we want to go. In this journey to make Wauwatosa more inclusive, people need to be deliberate and intentional about their choices, their actions and their words. These things matter. Let no one tell you they do not. However, our actions and our words are often a reflection of our thoughts and our beliefs. If we all agree that many of the things happening are not right and need to change, we are in essence saying that our thoughts and beliefs need to change. This hidden labyrinth of prejudice, fear, and racism buried deep behind calm facades needs confronting. Will we have the discipline to do so? Will we begin to tear down every lie, half-truth, unkind thought, unjust stereotype word by word? Will the people of Wauwatosa deem accepting and welcoming all worth the effort?

Perhaps it is worthwhile to question the source of our resistance to inclusivity. Some say the root cause of society's ills is poverty, lack of education, disenfranchisement, etc. However, I submit to you that the reason we are plagued by poverty, racism, health inequity, etc., is the search for profit and the lust for more, stemming from self-centeredness and a lack of empathy and compassion. This me-focused absorption destroys community and the common good. If we can live in a world where we are content as long as we are comfortable and have what we need even though many around us do not, it says something about our character and about our values. To make Wauwatosa an inclusive community does not require complex solutions or even huge investments of money. What it requires is every citizen (or at least most citizens) believing that we all are of significance and worthy of respect. It requires determining to treat everyone with courtesy and dignity and to extend a welcoming and helping hand to all. It requires us to do heart and thought surgery to root out those poisonous tumors that give rise to toxic thoughts and actions. What it requires is for us to act justly and to love mercy (Micah 6:8).

If we all just acknowledged our brokenness, if we owned up to our weaknesses, our deficits, our biases, our fears ... (Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson), then we could make Wauwatosa a more inclusive community. We need to drop the "them" and focus on the "we". It is in loving our neighbors as ourselves and in wanting for others what we want for ourselves that we can create a Tosa where all belong and feel accepted.