



# Life Matters Journal

V. 6, ISSUE 3 — MAY 2018

## Justice

Is Only Justice When  
It Is for More Than JUST US

How has justice been defined through history, and how should we define it today?

On the Preservation of Human Dignity:  
Social Justice and Sonder

Ellen Finnegan reflects on experiences that opened  
her eyes to the inherent dignity of human beings.

Mister Rogers' Social Justice:  
Community and Creativity

What can we learn from the way Fred Rogers approached justice?

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear friends,

What is this weak, lame-duck cry of: “For nonviolence!”? How negative and how weak! Nonviolence, by definition, is a not-something. Is our age so timid it can only bawl “don’t hurt me” when the world rumbles over it?



Perhaps you can tell these thoughts have been scraping my mind. With them have come encounters. Medley, a girl at the March for Science in Boston, quite literally expressed the timidity in her reasons for attending the event: “Stop hurting us, ok? Like, why can’t people just leave other people alone?” In Downtown Chicago, a fellow from Birmingham, Alabama — Randy — asked me for a meal. “And maybe if we all just get color-blind enough, people can leave each other alone.”

But is that what we want? To be left alone? Do we end abortion so as to “leave women alone,” with their joys or their agonies? Do we abolish sex trafficking so we can just “leave each other alone”? Dump trafficked victims somewhere where no one is violating them? Do we crush the concept of capital punishment so that the inmates can just be *left alone* to rot in cells until kingdom come?

These questions are timely, because the theme in this issue revolves around a concept, which while still abstract, is positive.

“For social justice!” For *presence*, not abandonment. When we demand an end to violence, the underlying demand should not be *ending something*, but *restoring something*. Something relational. Fair. Empathetic. Social justice is a relational act that commits to giving our fellow human beings their due: removal of violence, recognition of intrinsic worth, dignity, and due rights.

Ellen Finnegan addresses the social and relational aspect of social justice in her short personal essay “On the Preservation of Human Dignity,” and I think Cessilye Smith’s passionate cry in this issue in “Justice Is Only Justice When It Is for More Than JUST US” encapsulates most clearly the positive life-affirming stance that we must hold, in all ages, because of the intrinsic value of each human being.

It is the cry of *family*. Don’t hurt me? Don’t make me laugh. We need to be more ambitious, and more passionate, than that. In this issue, every piece discusses social justice — and by that we mean giving what is due to our fellow humans, which is *not* simply leaving them alone, relieving them from violence. It means loving them.

Yours for peace and every human life,

*CJ Williams*

This journal is dedicated to the aborted, the bombed, the executed, the euthanized, the abused, the raped, and all other victims of violence, whether legal or illegal.

We have been told by our society and our culture wars that those of us who oppose these acts of violence must be divided. We have been told to take a lukewarm, halfway attitude toward the victims of violence. We have been told to embrace some with love while endorsing the killing of others.

We reject that conventional attitude, whether it’s called Left or Right, and instead embrace a consistent ethic of life toward all victims of violence. We are *Life Matters Journal*, and we are here because politics kills.

Disclaimer: The views presented in this journal do not necessarily represent the views of all members, contributors, or donors. We exist to present a forum for discussion within the consistent life ethic, to promote discourse and present an opportunity for peer-review and dialogue.

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# Life Matters Journal

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# Different Orbits, Worlds Apart

By Kelsey Hazzard

They said I'd have a loving home  
with wife and kids someday  
but only ever taught me  
how to hunt Venusian prey.

*The dating game has many rules  
but boils down to this:  
You lose when you have most to lose.  
Least vulnerable wins.*

The battle of the sexes  
has become an endless war,  
and swiping right won't help me find  
the love I'm looking for.

*I blend into the background so  
that Martian eyes won't stare.  
I'm not a victim-blamer, but  
I do watch what I wear.*

If women are from Venus and  
if Mars is man's domain,  
where do the human beings live?  
Where can we soothe our pain?

*What dangers do you bring for me?  
What schemes are on your mind?  
I wish I'd met you sooner,  
I no longer trust your kind.*

It's true, you shouldn't trust me,  
for the Martians paved my way.  
I'd say I'm unlike others, but  
that's what others say.

*The battle of the sexes  
has become an endless war,  
and swiping right won't help me find  
the love I'm looking for.*

The dating game has many rules  
but boils down to this:  
You lose when you have most to lose.  
Least vulnerable wins.



# Mister Rogers' Social Justice: Community and Creativity

By CJ Williams



Since social justice necessarily implies relationship, we must look at justice not as an abstract but concrete, moment-by-moment scenario, played out in our individual human hearts and encounters. The term has become a catchphrase. Throw anything around long enough and it becomes dull and ratty. Neither justice, nor our relationships with others, however, are matters to be discounted — and neither one is rubbish now because it's been used frivolously. But if they are not worn worthlessly thin, and if social justice is concrete and relevant to our lives today, how are we to approach them?

One answer to this question has been given by a television personality. His answer made both terms as concrete as the pavement outside your front stoop.

His answer was creativity and community. His answer was television.

Foundationally, his answer was relationship. Like the word *sonder*, beautifully lifted and applied to restoring human dignity by one of Rehumanize International's founders, Aimee Murphy, Fred Rogers decided to address society (others) and justice (the right way of treating them) through contemporary media and timeless human creativity.

Television, he observed, was a mess — in fact, he hated it. It was inundated with programs pushing the objectification and commoditization of people. When *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* first aired in 1968, violence and racism were already key aspects on this type of broadcast media. “In many ways, television shaped and escalated the conflicts of the 1960s the same way that the internet shapes and escalates current ones, simultaneously expanding and shrinking our sense of community,” writes Hannah Andersen, author of *Humble Roots*.<sup>1</sup> Advertisers used television programs as a

platform for using and *programming* people. Visual media, however, are no more than tools: human beings use them, and human beings convey beauty, justice, and a respect for the dignity of others through images. Or they convey injustice, disrespect, violence towards others.

I think it is key in reflecting on Rogers' holistic, relational, and creative response to mending a culture of violence and disintegration that he saw the difference between what a tool had been used for, and what it *could* be used for. In creating *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, he took a dark and dangerous city-scape and revived it with a community garden.

“Very frankly, I am opposed to people being programmed by others. My whole approach in broadcasting has always been ‘You are an important person just the way you are. You can make healthy decisions.’ Maybe I’m going on too long, but I just feel that anything that allows a person to be more active in the control of his or her life, in a healthy way, is important.”

The previous quote, from his address to Congress in 1979, contrasts a view which treats human beings with dignity with a prevailing attitude in entertainment media which treats human beings with disdain.

*You are important. You can make healthy decisions.*

For social justice, we must, of course, say *no* to many acts of violence. We must use laws, and the negative of the “police powers”.

Yet in the final run, no law and no *no* and no *programming* will create social justice. We create a society that respects and dignifies individuals by telling them, and showing them, *you are important. You can make healthy decisions.*

We create environments where the option to live life fully and with purpose is available — gardens and families.



Fred Rogers observed the tear in the social fabric, the dehumanizing weaponization of the power of broadcast television to create capital, but not community, to create conformity, but not solidarity. Rather than letting his frustration or dismay push him into a hole, he looked for the opportunity. These were concrete matters, and television a concrete tool: Rogers addressed both head-on. No, he addressed *us* head on. Social justice is and always will be a matter of human relationship. To use the seemingly superficial and distant media of images via TV as a way to *sonder* was Mister Rogers' contribution to justice in his world. It was common sense. It was innovative. It was simple.

"Justice is taking care of those who aren't able to take care of themselves," he said once.

We create and use systems, and tools, geographic areas and political structures; and then we form a culture of *neighborhood* or a culture of violence through how we utilize each. We weaponize images, and dehumanize our fellow human beings; or we relate through images, telling our fellow human beings *you are important. I see you.*

We can learn a lot from Fred Rogers, and we don't have to be children any longer to do it. When making social justice concrete, instead of abstract, we only have to look to ourselves. Like Mister Rogers, we can mend the injustices, and throwaway bad uses of power, technology, and creativity, instead of throwing away people. We are always either breaking or honoring the ties of the human family: social justice exists in the creative community in which we see and treat each *other* with dignity, not with violence.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Andersen, Hannah. "Won't You Be My Neighbor". <https://christandpopculture.com/wont-you-be-my-neighbor-mister-rogers/>





# Justice Is Only Justice When It Is for More Than **JUST US**

By Cessilye Smith



## *I once was blind but now I see, that justice isn't justice to you or me.*

What is justice? It seems that too often an individual's perception of justice equals "just us" rather than, as Merriam-Webster would put it: "the quality of being just, impartial or fair." But even with that definition, what does being just, impartial or fair mean? To whom?

Just us?

Just the pre-born?

Just the Christian?

Just the Evangelical?

Just the Catholic?

Just the American?

Just the White man?

Just the cis-gendered?

Just the privileged?

I have witnessed a tremendous amount of "just us" lately, and maybe it is because for quite some time I lived as though I was wearing glasses that blocked my peripheral. The tunnel was narrow yet the focus was like a laser. Seeing the unborn dehumanized and speaking out against it. What a beautiful desire to fight for such a thing. But was it enough? What is enough?

Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "No one is free until we all are free."

Well...I agree.

So justice isn't justice until we are set free. Set free from the people we've been conditioned to be. People who fail to see the overlap in our humanity.

Let me take you on a journey that unfolds like an umbrella. As simple as an umbrella may seem it is intricate in detail and each part has a key function. If you take away a fold in the fabric it won't work, neither will it work if you take away a piece of the metal that holds it up. It may work partially but it will clearly be broken. You'd have to hold it up in a strange way in order to protect you from the rain.

There are people that have a relentless desire to save the lives of the unborn, and through my experience with people throughout the movement, that relentless pursuit extends beyond the child to the lives of the mother and her family.

It's beautiful...

### **Black women.**

Black women die in childbirth at three to four times the rate of white women. Black babies die before they reach the age of one at two to three times the rate of white babies. Normally what I hear from those who hold a pro-life view are statistics about abortion within the black community: how high they are and how Planned Parenthood targets the black community. In our pursuit for justice, we must look at and beyond these things.

First off. When throwing out stats about abortion without context it makes the black community look like fools. Like women do not care about their babies and/or that Planned Parenthood has cast a spell on them and they are incapable of making decisions of their own. Logic has gone and ignorance has prevailed. This is what it sounds like. This is what it feels like. This is my attempt at rehumanizing people that are often spoken of through the lens of statistical data without feeling the gravity of what they are facing.

Nuggets to chew on.

### **Black women were forced to reproduce.**

Black women were forced to breed slave labor for the economic gain of our country. Raped. Bred like animals; strongest woman mated with the strongest man. Their

children were sold to the highest bidder. Let that sink in. American — black — children were disposed of like goods. America was literally built by slaves. All of the prosperity we think of was due to the chattel slave labor of black human beings. Without the sugar, rice and cotton plantations we may have never been the economic powerhouse that we are today.

Reparations please.

### Black women were then sterilized against their will.

Dream with me for a moment and imagine the history of your ancestors constantly within a state of dehumanization — constantly used in a way that was described then as “*just, impartial or fair.*” Now imagine your life today, with that as your history. I know in my mind I would be screaming “LEAVE ME ALONE!” I wouldn’t want anyone to have any say over my body or that of my child.

### Black women are still dying at disproportionate rates during childbirth and shortly after.

One study found that a black woman with a graduate degree is more likely to have a negative birth outcome than a white mother without a high school diploma.<sup>1</sup>

Why?

There are many factors here, with the primary one being *racism*. Uh-oh, I said the word that automatically labels me as leftist. The reality is that we cannot look at the above information and blame it on women. We just can’t. We must look at how history plays its role in our present. We must look at the history of chattel slavery, Jim Crow, redlining, white flight, the “War on Drugs” etc. We must look at unethical medical practices that used slaves such as Anarcha, Lucy and Betsey.<sup>2</sup> We must look at the Tuskegee experiments. There are reasons why many black Americans do not trust doctors. For a bit of historical context I suggest the books *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty* by Dorothy Roberts; *Medical Apartheid* by Harriet A. Washington; and *The Color of Law: Forgotten History of How our Government Segregated America* by Richard Rothstein.

We must see more than *just-us*.

Introspection allows us to rid ourselves of our own biases, implicit and explicit. It hurts, it’s not pretty, it’s raw, but it’s rewarding.

The reward is *JUSTICE*.

Justice is justice when every life is valued.

Justice is justice when institutional racism is acknowledged and dismantled.

Justice is justice when the system works FOR women and not against them.

Justice is justice when the backyard becomes our front yard.

Justice is justice when black women are heard and not ignored.

Justice is justice when the unborn are safe outside the womb.

Justice is justice when communities are thriving.

Justice is justice when we make it more than *JUST US*.

When we consider every part of the umbrella protecting us from the rain. When we recognize every crease, every bend of the metal, every layer of the fabric, every part. Only then will we understand how it was made and how it became whole.

*Only then will we see how our present came to be. Only then will justice become a reality.*

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Williams, Timothy. “Tracking Infant Mortality Rates Among Blacks” *New York Times*. 14 Oct. 2011 Web. 08 April 2017.

<sup>2</sup> The ‘Father of Modern Gynecology’ Performed Shocking Experiments on Slaves <https://www.history.com/news/the-father-of-modern-gynecology-performed-shocking-experiments-on-slaves>



# Pressing Social Justice Issues Are Integral to Being Pro-Life

By Ifeoma Anunkor

I got into the pro-life movement during law school, where I focused on public interest law and family law. Reproductive health rights kept coming up as part of the solution for women in poverty or in vulnerable situations. This was unsettling to me because I was raised in a similar situation to these women, and I am so grateful for my four younger sisters and the strength my mother had to raise us while getting her doctorate degree in education. Shortly after law school, I began working at the *Human Life Review*, a pro-life journal, as director of the young adult initiative.

The toughest challenge I have seen is making sure our message is very clear, so that we get maximum support and not alienate likely allies. Our challenge is different from the challenges met by those opposing police brutality, for instance. If an activist is against police brutality, those affected by it support her. But if she anti-abortion, those affected by it may think she is anti-women or harsh on women. But the opposite of this stereotype is true. The anti-abortion activists I know are working hard to bring down the high infant mortality rates and maternal mortality rates in the African American communities. Reproductive justice is the pro-life fight. It was a *Planned Parenthood* affiliate that recently boasted in a tweet that it is safer for a black woman to have an abortion than to give birth.

I stood with Rehumanize International during the March for Life because I am pro-life, which means I am for social justice. I attend community board and social justice meetings in Harlem, and a

**It does not make sense in New York to be pro-life and not acknowledge that we need criminal justice reform.**

pressing social justice issue is police brutality.

A recent town hall meeting I attended in Harlem discussed closing Riker's Island, which is a prison infamous for abuse. Over eighty percent of detainees at Riker's are simply awaiting trial because they cannot afford bail or were denied bail. They haven't been convicted of a crime! The prison complex is slavery by another name. Slavery is a direct attack on the right to life. This is also a pro-life issue!

To make an impact in urban areas, where abortion places its biggest threat, our movement can't afford to be written off as only a "right-wing conservative Trump-supporting" group. It does not make sense in New York to be pro-life and not acknowledge that we need criminal justice reform. As millennials, we need to lead the way for the pro-life movement to grow and be ever more effective.

*Ifeoma Anunkor is director of Expect, an initiative of The Human Life Review.*



# On the Preservation of Human Dignity: Social Justice and Sonder

By Ellen Finnegan

## A couple of summers ago,

I was moving to Denver, and on my way, I careened into the parking lot of an Anthropologie in Boulder with a screech of tires and a twinge of guilt. Anthropologie is one of those stores that smells like cherry blossoms and caters to single women in their thirties with no kids and disposable incomes. “Yes,” this shop says, “you can still wear shirts with butterflies on them after the age of twelve.” It is my kryptonite. The weekend before, I had seen two items I desperately wanted but I’d walked away empty-handed because they were not on sale. Bingo! I found them on the sale rack but now I was reticent: I had spent the weekend purging my life of clothes, shoes, books, beauty products. Why was I buying more stuff?

I was about to start a new job as a live-in House Facilitator with an organization called Christ in the City that worked with the poor. I was going to be living with twenty, college-aged, urban missionaries in an old rectory in a rundown part of town, in a tiny room off the kitchen with bars on the windows, probably once the maid’s quarters. I would have one dresser and a small closet. There was no room for stuff. I was looked forward to a leaner life, yet for some reason these items screamed: “You must have me!”

The cashier was tall and slender, with impossibly dewy skin (for Colorado) and silky brown hair pulled back from her face by a glittery headband. She had that “former model” look. We made small talk as she wrapped my pretty items in pretty tissue paper. When she found out I was moving from Estes Park, her eyes lit up. There was a store there where she was hoping her boyfriend would buy her an engagement ring. She complained that her first husband never cared to find out what she liked before he bought her a ring. It was like he never really knew her, she said. Her current boyfriend knew — because he had asked — that she liked antique jewelry. I told her I hoped she would get her ring and admired her headband.

“We sell them over there,” she said, handing me my bag. “I love sparkly things!”

Don’t we all? I averted my eyes from the sparkly things as I left the store.

When I exited I-25, there was a homeless man standing at the intersection, a common sight in Denver. Before I had met the Christ in the City missionaries, I would have rolled up my window, looked straight ahead, not made eye contact. But I had attended the organization’s training and a couple of their lunches in the park, where the missionaries and other volunteers served the homeless, picnicked with them, played cornhole with them, and talked to them. It had made me braver. Even if I wasn’t yet perfectly prepared with a surplus of socks and water bottles in my car to hand out to the needy, I was at least confident that just because the guy was homeless did not mean he wanted to kill me. (This was the main reason why I had never talked to homeless people before: I had been afraid of them. Also, I thought they might want something from me.)

I wanted to do more than just serve the missionaries in my new job; I wanted to embrace their mission. So I rolled down my window and the man walked over to my car. His face was severely sunburned, with patches of skin peeling off and a red nose that looked meaty and raw. I asked him his name, how he was doing, and where he was headed. He told me his name was Roger; he had gotten out of jail after 43 years and was headed to Miami. I said it sounded like a second chance and thought of the lady in the store, who in her own way was hoping for a second chance. He shook his head, said he doubted if it was possible.

I asked if he had any family in Miami. He said he did at one point, but he didn’t know where they were now. Then he added: “But someone gave this to me today!” He pointed at the bright red baseball cap on his head. He didn’t ask me for anything; but he seemed so happy to share this with me. He didn’t have anyone else to tell, I guessed. The light turned green. I smiled and

said I had to go. I repeated his name back to him, “Goodbye, Roger! Good luck.”

I had learned from the missionaries that there is something like the power of love in saying a person’s name aloud. It makes the person feel acknowledged. This makes sense to me. “To acknowledge”

**I repeated his name back to him: “Goodbye, Roger! Good luck.”**

# I remember so many faces, so many stories, so much of their suffering as well as their shocking strength, resourcefulness, resolve. These were tough people.

means “to accept or admit the existence or truth of.” So even if I didn’t have anything to give to Roger, money or material goods, I could at least pay him my attention, smile, say *hello*. It had never occurred to me before that this small action could be enough, that it had the power to help preserve a person’s dignity.

One day at lunch, our Managing Director told us a story about a time she struck up a conversation with a homeless man outside her local grocery store. She had purchased for him some socks and chocolate milk, which he had requested, then sat down next to him, which surprised him. At the end of a long conversation, she said he was rubbing his eyes. She asked him if there was something wrong with his eyes, then realized he was crying. He told her that he hadn’t heard his name spoken aloud to him, by another person, in over six months.

Then he said to her: “Girl, you have one sparkly soul.” She said she would never forget the compliment that he had paid her.

The word “acknowledge” contains the word “knowledge.” The mission at Christ in the City was to know, love, and serve the poor – in that order. You cannot love what you don’t know. This is why the missionaries spent four hours a day walking the streets of Denver, sometimes at night, talking to the homeless, getting to know them, and often seeing the same people week after week, month after month. They did not bring the homeless any *thing*. They simply talked to them and became their friends. Again, I think back to that beautiful cashier, who seemed as if she could have had anything and anyone she wanted in life, but her first marriage had been a disappointment: because she had felt unknown.

What does it mean to know? In the age of information, we tend to think of knowledge as the accumulation of facts and information. But “knowledge” is an awareness or familiarity *gained by experience*. We all know *of* the poor. But how many of us try to know them?

Having a full time job, I was not able to get to know the missionaries’ friends on the streets as well as they did, but I am amazed by the way my encounters with the homeless during that time have stuck with me. I remember a young man named Travis who wore a tattered red towel around his waist because his jeans were so threadbare. His stiff, blonde, dreadlocked hair reminded me of a bale of hay. When I reached out to shake his hand, he declined, silently rotating his wrists to show me the fresh knife wounds, stitched up in the emergency room the night before, all up and down his hands and forearms. When I told him about the station

where he could obtain a new pair of pants, he declined with a shake of his head. Something about his tattered appearance and reticence to speak, sadly, reminded me of a scarecrow, and those stitched-up wounds their makeshift smiles.

I met a gregarious man named James who dreamed of building artists’ studios in tree-houses in the mountains, far away from the city, where rappers and tattoo artists could converge, make art, commune with nature, and grow their own pot. His girlfriend, Becky, was there too. She explained that she was estranged from her abusive father as well as her sister, because her sister had married

an abusive man and Becky just couldn’t take it. When I asked Becky if she had a job, or what she did with her days, she said, “I’m a butterfly whisperer.”

“What does that mean?” I asked.

She shrugged, petting her dog. “They follow me wherever I go.”

“I can attest to that,” James said.

I remember so many faces, so many stories, so much of their suffering as well as their shocking strength, resourcefulness, resolve. These were tough ass people. I can’t for the life of me remember what those two things were that I wanted so badly at Anthropologie that day. In fact, during my whole stint at Christ in the City, even with the fruit flies infesting the kitchen and the mice running through my room and the mornings spent throwing out vats of moldy leftovers, I never once felt the compulsion to shop there.

They had a game at Christ in the City for newcomers. It was called the Hot Seat, and we played it on my first day. The missionaries and staff would surround you like a pack of hungry wolves. They had three minutes to shout questions, one after another; they could ask you anything they wanted. You had to answer — and fast, without thinking. It got a little loud and crazy until Carl shouted: “What superpower would you *not* want to have?”

“I wouldn’t want to be invisible!” I blurted.

There was a collective pause. All present sighed. I didn’t understand how I had managed to suck the fun out of the room until one of the missionaries explained: “That’s what our friends on the streets always say. They say they feel *invisible*.”



# Interested in getting involved?

Want to join the movement against aggressive violence? For information on volunteering or writing for the next issue of *Life Matters Journal*, send an email to [info@lifemattersjournal.org](mailto:info@lifemattersjournal.org).

For information about available internships and upcoming events, check out our website:

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