



Lenten Devotions

Created for Community

In Community With Our Neighbor

-Rev. Rachael Pryor, Kansas Interfaith Action

Jeremiah 7:1-7

Jeremiah received the Lord's word: ²Stand near the gate of the Lord's temple and proclaim there this message: Listen to the Lord's word, all you of Judah who enter these gates to worship the Lord. ³This is what the Lord of heavenly forces, the God of Israel, says: Improve your conduct and your actions, and I will dwell with you in this place. ⁴Don't trust in lies: "This is the Lord's temple! The Lord's temple! The Lord's temple!" ⁵No, if you truly reform your ways and your actions; if you treat each other justly; ⁶if you stop taking advantage of the immigrant, orphan, or widow; if you don't shed the blood of the innocent in this place, or go after other gods to your own ruin, ⁷only then will I dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave long ago to your ancestors for all time.

When Christians think of caring for neighbors, the familiar chorus of charity often trips off the tongue: feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit those in prison. The language of the Roman Empire and the Ancient Near East is familiar, in which "the widow" and "the orphan" stand in symbolically for all kinds of people today who are stripped of rights and resources. Our motivation to address the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities is sincere; yet, we often forget or exclude one of the most central teachings about what it means to be a neighbor.

In verse after verse of the Hebrew Bible, there is almost always another word alongside *widow* and *orphan*: in Hebrew it's the *ger*: the sojourner, the stranger, the immigrant, the foreigner — the "other." (see Lev. 27:19, Ps. 146:9, Jer. 7:6, Zech. 7:9). When a Jewish teacher named Jesus is asked, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:15-37), he answers by using the example of an outsider, a foreigner, even an enemy.

Today, as in ancient Palestine, we don't have to look far to encounter strangers. We live in a nation, in cities and towns, full of sojourners. We are people who have relocated for jobs and people who have fled from persecution. We are exiles, refugees — and colonizers. We are oppressors and we are oppressed; and we are all in so many ways strange to one another. In many faith traditions, the response to this human condition is an emphasis on the value of hospitality. Welcoming the stranger is a value enshrined in cultures all around the world; and it is also at the heart of interfaith commitments.

"In this time of pandemic, recession, and political uncertainty, the most vital work the Kansas legislature could do would be to help working people and families maintain stable housing, healthcare, and other necessities.

Economic security and racial justice should be the name of the game this year."

Rabbi Moti Rieber,
Executive Director of KIFA





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The work of Kansas Interfaith Action is often most visible at the Statehouse in Topeka. Visiting with legislators, giving testimony, leading advocacy workshops, and hosting interfaith prayer vigils are some of the most common activities for KIFA participants. But in a sense, these



efforts are only the outward signs of KIFA's true foundation. By naming our interfaith identity, we claim the commitment to know, welcome, and care for the "stranger" as our highest shared priority. We promise to honor and learn from our differences, and to trust each faith community, each ethnic or racial community, each directly-affected person to speak to their own needs and experiences related to poverty, racism, violence, and climate disruption. Only after listening to one another do we build consensus around how to take action together.

The goal, however, isn't just to take legislative action. The goal is to enact the Beloved Community: a gathering where strangers are always at home; a society where equitable justice guides our treatment of one another; a future where charity is no longer needed, because the mighty do not take advantage of the vulnerable. KIFA engages pragmatically in actions that we believe protect and increase the dignity of all people; but we also work one step, one event, one person at a time, to build relationships that expand the idea of who "belongs" at the table in Kansas. We're thankful to partner in this ministry with the Central States Synod, and with every person who participates as a KIFA advocate.

Holy One,

you are stranger and neighbor, close to us as breathing and distant as the farthest star. You call us into human communities to serve and be served by one another, wherever we go. Open our hearts to the humanity of all our neighbors: those who are like us, but especially those whose differences create division where you see none. Guide our faith into actions that proclaim and embody your vision for justice and wholeness.

Amen.

PRE-TURNAROUND LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

KIFA has testified on the following bills in the current legislative session. Go to our website to for an update on their current status and what KIFA supporters can do!

- HB 2059 – Gun bills: **KIFA OPPOSES**
- SB24 – Limitations on Municipal Climate Policy: **KIFA OPPOSES**
- HB 2059, HB 2333 & 2319 – Limitations on Advanced Voting: **KIFA OPPOSES**
- SB 172 – Critical Infrastructure Bill: **KIFA OPPOSES**
- HB 2381 – Energy Plan Task Force: **KIFA SUPPORTS**
- HB 2189 – Payday Loan Reform: **KIFA SUPPORTS**