

# A Call to Community

America is at a crossroads. One road leads to community; the other to the chaos of competing identities and interests. We have all hurt one another, often unconsciously, in ways we would never intend. We need each other. We need to eradicate the scourge of racial division. We must demonstrate that our diversity is our greatest strength and that out of this diversity is rising a new American community. We can offer hope to a world torn by divisions of every kind.

We invite everyone to join us in a renewed commitment to an American community based on justice, reconciliation and excellence. The original promise of this country, that out of a rich diversity of peoples a great nation would rise, has only partially been fulfilled. This unique experiment remains incomplete because the promise of equal opportunity and dignity for all has not been fully realized. Much of the distrust, resentment and fear in America today is rooted in our unacknowledged and unhealed racial history.

For many of us, race determines where we live, where we send our children to school and where we worship. Because racism is deeply embedded in the institutions of our society, white individuals are often insulated from making personal decisions based on conscious racial feelings and do not experience the daily burden that their brothers and sisters of color have to carry. We must change the structures which perpetuate economic and racial separation. But no unseen hand can wipe prejudice away. The ultimate answer to the racial problem lies in our willingness to obey the unenforceable.

The new American community will flow from a spirit of giving freely without demanding anything in return. In the new American community, when any one individual is injured, exploited or demeaned, all of us will feel the pain and be diminished. It will be a place where hearts can put down roots and where each feels accepted and at home. Some painful memories cannot be erased. But forgiving is not forgetting; it is letting go of the hurt.

To build this new American community, we must empower individuals to take charge of their lives and take care of their communities. In cities across America, bold experiments are taking place. Citizens have initiated honest conversations - between people of all backgrounds - on matters of race, reconciliation and responsibility. They have chosen to move beyond blame and guilt, beyond hatred and fear, deciding to face the past with courage and honesty. They are demonstrating that through honesty, a willingness to embrace each other's painful experiences, and with God's power to change us, the wounds of the past can be healed and our nation become one community.

This approach calls us to a new concept of partnership and responsibility. It means:

- ❖ Listening carefully and respectfully to each other and to the whole community.
- ❖ Bringing people together, not in confrontation but in trust, to tackle the most urgent needs of the community.
- ❖ Searching for solutions, focusing on what is right rather than who is right.
- ❖ Building lasting relationships outside our comfort zone.
- ❖ Honoring each person, appealing to the best qualities in everyone, and refusing to stereotype the other group.
- ❖ Holding ourselves, communities and institutions accountable in areas where change is needed.
- ❖ Recognizing that the energy for fundamental change requires a moral and spiritual transformation in the human spirit.

Together we will share our lives and the resources God has given us to make America a community of hope, security and opportunity for all.

**This document was launched at the National Press Club in 1996 by Hope in the Cities/Initiatives of Change in partnership with Everyday Democracy and signed by city mayors including the mayors of Atlanta, Baltimore, Cincinnati, Austin, & Louisville, as well as members of Congress of both parties, national civil rights organizations and leaders of all major faith denominations. [www.iofcusa.org](http://www.iofcusa.org) 804.358.1764**