

It is so humbling to be standing here to receive this award this evening. Thank you to everyone for being here to celebrate this occasion with me. As a few of you know, hearing the testimony from past award winners has been some of the most spiritually nourishing experiences I've had at Epiphany. The messages have inspired me to go forth and make a difference in this world through action and I hope my words today will inspire others to do the same.

I stand on the shoulders of giants. Father Flynn, past recipients, and others in our Louisville community justice organizations have all lifted me along the way. More so than any other faith group, I have grown through my time spent with the Undoing Racism group at Epiphany. If you have been a member of that group would you please stand to be recognized? The Archdiocese program Moving Toward Oneness helped me to learn and grow immensely as well.

I stand on the shoulders of my family as well. My mom, dad and brother Neal have helped shape me as much as anyone. My brother Bernie, his wife Robin, Bernie, and my niece Brynn are all here to support me tonight as well.

I would also like to acknowledge that I stand on the shoulders of the beautiful public elementary school students and Epiphany youth that I've had the privilege to work with over the last twelve years. I have learned as much from them as they have me. I would like to dedicate this award to them.

Preach the gospel everywhere you go, use words when necessary. I am much more comfortable doing rather than talking about it, especially talking about it in front of a bunch of people. I've made it part of my personal creed partly because it works for my personality/fears (namely public speaking and intimacy) and partly because talk can be real cheap in this world. The Jim Flynn award, for me, is not about writing beautiful theory or designing great position statements. It is about going forth in the world to take actions that reflect the gospel teaching. Otherwise, James Baldwin my say to me "I can't believe what you say because I see what you do."

So here goes. What else to talk about in February of 2019 but building walls? It has been part of the fabric of human existence since the beginning of recorded history. So why do we build walls? Ask audience:

Self-defense

Shield ourselves from the elements

Protect what we have *** (Note – what we have as Caucasian Americans was built from oppression and slavery)

To not see or hear others

To keep out the riff-raff

The reason I bring up walls is that I built a number of them growing up here in East end Louisville and while completing my high school degree at Trinity while attending Epiphany. I bought into a number of fallacies that allowed me to justify my position in the greater human community as earned rather than injustice. People were poor because they did not know how to or have the inner strength to pull themselves up by the bootstraps as I imagined I had. I had no social responsibility to address racial justice as Dr. King and the civil rights movement of the 1960s had long since addressed that problem. I had nothing to do with racial inequalities because slavery and Jim Crowe had nothing to do with today's world. It was not until I got out in the real world for a while that I began to question these beliefs.

It was completing my undergraduate degree in Economics and seeing the disparity of educational/economic statistics around racial lines that I began to realize that I might have been mistaken in my belief that what I had in life had been earned. I was skeptical of my church and the belief system I developed from my education I had received within it. I had built walls in my mind to insulate myself from the cold hard reality of the oppression that is alive and well in today's world. As much as I would have liked to deny it, the statistics I studied during my Economic degree only served as a modern day portrait of racial oppression.

This was an awakening for me and once awoken, I had to take action. I am so thankful the Church of Epiphany had people involved that were also woke - namely the Undoing Racism and Social Responsibility Steering committee. If it were not for these groups presence at Epiphany after I completed my degree, I may not consider myself Catholic today.

Where are we building walls today?

- Public schools - \$300 mil. Capital building deficit w/in JCPS – keep an eye out for upcoming proposals that may seem balanced between East and West, but do little to address the existing deficit that lands heavily in the communities of most need.
- Affordable housing as long it is in another neighborhood
- Amusement parks – Fountain Ferry style- like Disneyland: Money not color is the wall, but if we are talking money, then we can expect a disproportional impact on communities of color as well.
- Gated communities
- Private clubs/courses
- 4th street live
- Prisons – make it private now (construction based on third grade reading scores now)
- Jails with an economic preference for treatment – If you have the money, then move on with your life with little worry. If not, it can have a monumental impact on your life.
- Prevent a collective liberation – we find ways to separate groups that should be working together to end oppression
- Deny the human experience of homosexuality
- To say that women are less than men

How do we tear down walls that society has put in place for us to reach a Just Community?

I was chatting with Father Flynn a minute ago and asked him what the design idea behind the transparent worship center at Epiphany was. He said it was to emphasize our interconnectedness to nature. I wonder if it does not also serve to remind us that there are no walls for God.

- Need for action – Epiphany’s design with chairs – we are on a journey
- Education / Research – Know your facts, do your own research for much information out there today is indeed perspective challenged.
- Contemplation/ Reflection/ Music – Thank you Linda for reminding us each week of what we should be focused on. The speed of American life, in my opinion, is designed to prevent thought. It is critical to slow down in order to center ourselves.

In closing, I’d like to challenge everyone in attendance to spend some time looking inward to challenge their own belief systems to identify what walls they have in place – mentally, physically, and structurally. Once you have those identified, spend some time thinking of why those walls are there. Finally, take action to remove the personal and societal walls we have in place that are keeping us from reaching the Just Community we all deserve. For me, that action has been effective through two key ingredients – walking with the oppressed and staying committed to do so.

Again, thank you for the honor.