

Love in a time of angst

By Bob Morse Ashland Culture of Peace Commission

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Ashland's mayor recently named a type of love, agape, as a possible antidote for the divisiveness rampant in our country. As an ambassador of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission (ACPC), I've been listening to local and global voices on how love would be expressed in a culture of peace.

The essence of agape love is goodwill, benevolence, faithfulness, and commitment. Agape is also the unselfish love of one person for another without erotic implications. In the words of Philippe Hamer, "In a culture of peace, agape love is the basis of all expressions and actions."

Agape was central to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy of non-violent social change. Alma Rosa Alvarez reflected on King's 1958 essay "An Experiment in Love" in her MLK Day celebration keynote address. Subsequently, in his 2017 State of the City address, Mayor John Stromberg referenced Professor Alvarez, noting the value of agape in Ashland's functioning as a (beloved) community.

To King, agape was "unconditional love for every person, regardless of race, religious or political beliefs, whether they are just or unjust, or whether they respect or hate and abuse you." King incorporated this concept into the non-violent movement for civil rights, empowering thousands of people to engage in transformative direct action by accepting suffering without retaliation and returning good for evil.

"Love is believing that everyone's perspective adds to the betterment of all, especially if I strongly disagree with some of those perspectives," explained Rich Schaeff, one of several fellow peace ambassadors who responded to my query about the look of love in a culture of peace. "Love is reaching out to understand those different than I in pursuit of strengthening the bond between all people."

Schaeff added, “In a culture of peace, love would be expressed through the respect and acknowledgement of other people’s unique points of view. I define love in this context as an embracing and acknowledgment of all human beings’ uniqueness and belonging in the larger family of humanity.

The Ashland Culture of Peace Commission has made a practice of “pressing pause” on agenda items when emotions or contentions arise within meetings, temporarily shifting priority to hearing diverse perspectives or examining perceived lack of belonging.

Recognizing how fear and anger can override love, several peace ambassadors introduced me to Valerie Kaur’s blogs and videos. She’s a lawyer, filmmaker, and interfaith leader who speaks to the significance of consciously responding with love regardless of the emotional temperature of the situation.

“Love is not a passing feeling; it is an act of will. It is the choice to extend our will for the flourishing of others and ourselves. When we pour love in places where there is fear and rage, we can transform an encounter, a relationship, a culture, a country. Love becomes revolutionary.”

Related to transformation, peace ambassador Jackson Mayes captured how our “evolving culture of peace is expressing love as we, individually and collectively, adopt the love-based ‘dialogue paradigm’ to replace our old, worn-out, default fear-based ‘debate paradigm’ for all our interactions.”

What guides the movement from debate to dialogue, from fear to love? “In my highest vision for a culture of peace,” stated peace ambassador Mira Sophia, “human beings know that love is their essential nature and live from that place.”

Peace ambassador Jill Iles noted that “No matter what ‘kind’ of love, it must always begin with self. Treating oneself with respect, kindness, intelligence.” Such self-care and self-knowledge prepares us for agape love. Putting such knowing into practice is a movement toward a culture of peace.

Kaur has described how a groundswell of people can “make love” in response to hate. “I share your sadness and anger, uncertainty and pain. I am not asking you to suppress these emotions — I’m asking you to honor them and choose love anyway.” This is an agape remedy for overcoming divisiveness and building stronger community.

— Bob Morse is an ambassador of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission. Email comments and questions to ashlandcpc@gmail.com. The ACPC website is www.ashlandcpc.org; like the commission on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission; follow twitter.com/AshlandPeace on Twitter. All are welcome to join the ACPC's Talking Circle at 11 a.m. each Tuesday and Community Meeting at 4 p.m. each Wednesday, both at the ACPC office, 33 First St., Suite 1, diagonally across Lithia Way from the Ashland Post Office.



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