

Good morning and welcome to our annual Shared Services celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr – a servant leader whose life and words continue to inspire people around the world. The video we just saw provided a glimpse into how BJC and our hospitals have been focused on living out one of those less-quoted quotes by Dr. King: “...at the heart of all that civilization has meant and developed is community.”

At BJC, we provide needed and valuable services to our community that go far beyond the delivery of care in hospitals, doctors’ offices and clinical settings. As demonstrated in the video and as compelled by Dr. King, we go to where the need is in moving from dreams to action. As we sit just nine short years away from Dr. King’s 100th birthday, I want to read to you a short letter I wrote – not from a Birmingham jail, but from the warmth of my very comfortable living room sofa that I recognize I have the privilege of enjoying thanks in part of the work of Dr. King and those like him who fought for me.

Dear Friends,

Like many of you, I have long been encouraged by the most famous of speeches by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The notion of having a dream compels us to move forward. I will admit that when I was younger, most of my dreams were about what I wanted for myself – education, career, family, friends, travel, clothes, jewelry, shoes.... However, as I got older, I realized that there had to be an AND to those dreams. As my grandmother used to tell me, “Junebug, when you know better, you do better.”

So friends, if we are to truly move forward and live out the words of Dr. King, I think we have to put others at the center of our dreams. Especially those whose life circumstances keep them from believing in dreams or even hope. We don’t have to look far to find a place to start. But, we do have to decide, individually and collectively, that the current reality for many of our communities, not too far from where we are sitting, is unacceptable.

At BJC, we have decided just that. I don’t know if it was the first, fifth or 15th child killed in the St. Louis region in 2019 – but as that untenable reality happened on our collective watch, we had to say, “no more,” and begin to develop actions focused on doing what we can to make “no more” a reality.

Do we have all the answers? No, but we know some of the important places to start. Engaging in the education of young people, removing barriers to employment, partnering with others to help fulfill needs of stable housing, food and health care are among the places to start. When you are hungry, you dream of food and when you are homeless you dream of shelter and when you are sick you dream of being well. And, unfortunately, when all around you seems hopeless, sometimes you make really, really awful choices.

We have to ensure different dreams and the opportunity to make better choices for those who have not yet been able to enjoy the prosperity of our region. It's a big lift, but I cannot think of anything more important.

In my dream, we work together with others in our region to ensure longevity of life for our community's children, education that prepares students to progress with confidence, and meaningful employment that changes the trajectory of families for generations.

As I close this letter, I encourage you to ask yourself – what is my dream for others and what will I do to help make that dream a reality? If we all commit and act, I truly believe that by Dr. King's 100 birthday celebration in 2029, our community will be better.

Sincerely and with love,

June