

*Copy of letter sent to Virginia Public School Superintendents*

Dear ...

On behalf of Virginia Tech's (VT) School of Public and International Affairs and Virginia Union University (VUU), we are pleased to announce, and to invite your junior and senior high school students to participate in, the **Ancestors of the Beloved Community Essay Competition**. This contest will provide students in high schools across Virginia with an opportunity to explore the backgrounds and careers of individuals who actively pursued Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s notion of the Beloved Community—a community based on social and economic justice and shared love for fellow human beings. As superintendent of schools we ask for your support of this effort by sharing this opportunity with relevant high school principals, teachers and students in your district and encouraging their support and participation.

This competition is the first effort of a multi-year VT-VUU initiative to examine and develop Martin Luther King's conception of the Beloved Community through scholarship and engagement. This essay contest will provide an opportunity for a share of our youth, Virginia's next generation of leaders, to engage with and learn from their forebears and, as they do, to develop new insights into the character of the challenges now confronting those who labor for social justice in today's society.

Dr. Virgil Wood, a church leader, educator, civil rights activist and long-time associate of Dr. King, is leading this initiative. It was his realization that the pairs of individuals this competition highlights had, at some point, acted in partnership or were connected in history that sparked the idea for this contest. These individuals have played vital roles in America's quest for racial and social justice and their relationships and interactions reveal important facets of that struggle for change.

Information about the essay contest, guidelines and resources for teachers and students, can be found [here](#). The site also provides background information concerning the past civil rights leaders Dr. Wood has identified that students may use to begin their research for their essays. We are now developing the criteria that a panel of evaluators will employ as they review submitted essays to ensure that relevant English and History/Social Science Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs) are considered in their deliberations. We will begin in the next several months to provide support and resources for teachers concerning how they might connect grade level-appropriate SOLs to essays developed for this competition.

The Center that bears his name has described Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision of the Beloved Community:

BELOVED COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

*Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict (<http://www.thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy#sub4>).*

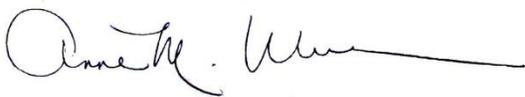
We hope that by engaging in this essay competition, participating students will come to understand better their individual power to help shape or reshape their community. We hope too they will be encouraged, by the lives and values they explore, to spend at least a share of their personal and professional efforts helping society chart a path toward a more Beloved Community.

Please let us know if you have any questions or if we can be of assistance to principals, teachers and students in your district interested in becoming involved in this possibility.

Sincerely,



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Dean and Professor of Religion and Society, Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology



Anne Khademian  
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