

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Beloved \_ Beloved-Community

Multicultural Team Members

(Lora Batterson, David Schmidgall, Joel Buckner, Marion Mason)

**Pastor Lora Batterson:** You know what that video tells me? It tells me that you belong here. No matter what's your background, your ethnicity, your language, your age, your gender, how you express yourself, the way you look, YOU belong here. That is such a beautiful picture of the Beloved Community.

2000 years ago, a revolutionary movement began in the city of Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost. What made it revolutionary? Well, among other things, it was multicultural. The Holy Spirit broke down cultural barriers, creating a diverse community defined by unity. On the day the church was born at least 15 ethnicities, 15 languages were represented. That is our history and that is our vision. The book of Revelation in chapter seven gives us a glimpse of heaven, *"A great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language, was standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."* The destiny of the church is becoming a beloved community.

In 1996, Mark, and I moved to Capitol Hill with our six month old baby to lead a small gathering of people in this city with such a rich, multicultural history. We didn't know at the time what we were stepping into; you never do at that age. In fact, the neighborhood at that time was 27%, white. We didn't know exactly what that meant for us but the Lord knew what he was doing when he drew us here. And I can't describe it any other way but that we were drawn by the Holy Spirit. We put our heads down and did the hard work of church planting, of learning how to live and move and breathe and enter the flow of such a unique and diverse city. There is none other like it. I still get that flutter in my stomach when we come back into town after being away because I know I'm home. We walk the streets where presidents and politicians walked and where slaves were bought and sold and we live with the consequences of that dichotomy still today. If you haven't read *Chocolate City*, it's a good way to get to know our history as a city. Let me tell you, this has been a long learning journey for us. And with every catalyst moment of awareness, we grow, and we learn.

When we started handing out lunches after church on Sundays back in the late 90's we didn't engage friends experiencing homelessness with a full understanding of the obstacles they faced and still do today but we took a step and we tried to learn. When we came alongside the southeast White House, we didn't fully understand the magnitude of being a house on a hill for all people, a house of reconciliation but in that partnership, we grew. And now we get to be a part of the impact that the Dream Center is having in southeast and throughout the city. When we witnessed the stories and the visceral images of the refugee crisis in the Middle East, many were awakened to communities that had sought refuge from war and violence in our own cities. So many NCC'ers responded and continue to this day, to share in

hospitality, to join in education and employment opportunities, opportunities that give dignity and value to their lives. And when we joined hands with churches across the city, we didn't know everything about the rich history and contributions that the African American churches have made in the city but we were invited into the story and we listened, one conversation at a time, one relationship at a time.

We have always been on mission following where the Holy Spirit would take us, seeking to bless a city, to be a dream factory, where we become solutionaries to problems in our communities, to be peacemakers, in a city that is known for its division. We're still learning what it truly means to be a beloved community, because we are still becoming. We are the beloved community and we are becoming the beloved community. It's both/and. Just like Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is here and the kingdom of God is coming".

So many of you know this past year has put our learning curve on warp speed. And has it been hard for all of us? A resounding yes. I would imagine every single one of you has had a hard conversation that made you want to retreat back into your echo chamber, back to your safe space, but family, we are pushing through. And we are defying the world's message that we should all stay in our own lane. That is not what Jesus called us to. We will keep going back to the Sermon on the Mount. We want to be as it says, in Isaiah 58, repairs of the breach, restores of streets to dwell in.

So what if? What if we all hung in there? What if we all doubled down on our commitment to the work of reconciliation? What if in time, we realized our potential to be a place where everyone in their uniqueness, in their own culture, in their own expression felt fully known and celebrated in this community we call NCC? And what if, as 1,000's of change agents spread out across the DMV, impacting our world around us? What if our beloved community had an impact on this nation, and on this world? Now, I'm not the optimist in the family so I am depending on all of you, collectively, to join your faith with mine to believe that this is possible. What if the obstacle is the way? Don't let what you can't do keep you from doing what you can. I release you in the name of the ultimate reconciler, Jesus the Christ, to be the peacemakers and change agents that you are.

**Pastor Dave Schmidgall:** Y'all appreciate Lora? Such a beautiful spirit, beautiful anointing. Hey, this is fun. We're actually doing like a TED talk style. You're getting like five minutes, five minutes, five minutes. We're part of the multicultural team and an opportunity to share some vision. What did you hear as Pastor Lora was sharing? As I was listening to her I just kept hearing, seeing, celebrating, valuing others - seeing, celebrating, valuing others - seeing, celebrating, valuing others, just kind of over and over and I kept thinking to myself, man, how much do I miss seeing others? I just do. I misunderstand, I'll say something wrong and like she said, "What if we just stuck with it, as we kind of kept moving?" And it made me think of that goose bumpy kind of trailer that we watched earlier, where we're hearing the love chapter of Paul, "Love is patient and kind." And you're hearing these core convictions of love. And what wasn't mentioned is at the very end of that passage, it says, Paul gets really honest, he says, "But we still see dimly." And as I was hearing that it made me think of a story.

When I was in my early 20's I was a wedding photographer. And this is a true story, I was in Chicago, we're at a wedding and it's very dark, dimly lit church. And right after the ceremony you go to take those like great photos, the couple comes together and the families there and this is like the moment the photographer's got to nail it. And I get up and I go to snap the picture and my camera dies. True story. And so I go to my backup camera, and realize that I had brought the wrong camera and what it was like that old school film camera and it hadn't been used in so long. And so I went to snap the photos with this film camera and a week later when I process it, I came to discover that none of them had developed properly. Yeah. So I was no longer wedding photographer I became a pastor. But one of the things that I saw in this moment is there's a big difference between a very expensive lens and a cheap lens and here's the difference. In low light situations, it has the ability to absorb more light in its lens. In other words, it has the capacity to widen its aperture to receive more light in these atmospheres. And what I think the picture I'm trying to show you is, this is a picture of beloved community. What it is is it's the ability to borrow more lenses. And instead of just being able to see dimly by myself, in beloved community together, it's like we're building lenses in our toolkit so then we're able to absorb more light. Does that make sense? Are you tracking with me? And so that's what we're trying to do, she gave you a snapshot of some of the background and the history, I just want to give you like a two minute, literally, I'm going to just flood you with a two minute picture of the way in which our staff has tried to look at this space of widening the aperture of the lens within our community.

And so this past summer, we were heartened to form a team, a multicultural team that was able to capture some of the vision of what life in the beloved community looks like. And how do we pull that thing forward, develop some strategy, as we're leaning into this space together. So it's not just, you know cosmetic practices, or changes or just habits that we shift but this is like core level material that we're engaging in. This is discipleship lever space. And so we brought in Bridge Leader Network. It's a consulting company that we have relationship with, with Dr. David Anderson. So you've heard him share before. He wrote a book called Gracism. You got to get that "gra". Say it - Gracism. And he wrote that book and we have as a staff begun the process of six sessions that are enabling us to begin that sort of aperture widening space, to be able to add some more tools to our toolkit, to enable us to move from diversity, to unity, to a beloved community. And so I just want to highlight some of them, I'm just going to fly through them, you can go ahead and post them right here.

These are six sessions that we have been going through developing a multicultural matrix. You'll see in demographics throughout the country, there's kind of four different ways in which churches tend to operate, there's unique color and unique cultural, which is 80%, more homogenous of the same culture or color. And then you have multicolored churches, which is churches that are diverse in congregation but not always reflected in its decision making and leadership. And then you have multicultural communities that are seeking to celebrate, see and value at all levels within the church. Are you with me? And so we've been learning into that space, we've been engaging in what's called the 5 S's, which is looking at our statements and structures and strategy and our staffing and our staging. We've been trying

to unlock diversity and unity: What is it and what is it not? We've been trying to look at creating community the capacity for conflict. We've been looking at ally ship developing solidarity training. And we've been looking at how do we communicate well across cultures. This is just beginning to open up this space of what it looks like. So how can we as a staff spill into our leadership, spill into our congregation, so we can learn to live from that lifestyle of beloved community? Amen? Amen.

**Pastor Joel Buckner:** Well, to go after him, Pastor Dave, he has a unique way of, you know, going deep real fast. And I'm always trying to catch up with him in any conversation I have with him. But as he talked about, he talked about where our staff is - how we've been pursuing this work, both individually and collectively. And now I want to make some statements or give you some, maybe tools on how you can engage with us in this process. See, we've been, we presently are and will continue to evolve in becoming a beloved community. When I say **WE** I'm speaking of something bigger than NCC. I'm saying we as a creation have been on a journey of becoming beloved community since the beginning of time. It's when God created earth to be the glory of heaven that he gave us the responsibility to rule and have dominion and since then, it's been an ever evolving story of the beloved community that has been here before us. And trust me, if you were Martin Luther King, he probably would have said the same thing. This work goes on long after me. Right. And so what we have to listen to right now as individuals in our church is Holy Spirit, "Now, how do you want us to engage at this time of eternity? What part of the story do we play?" And so we must open our ear to hear that.

You see, it's easy to live life when it's just me. It's a little bit more challenging when it's we but its one chaotic, beautiful mess when it's everybody. That's why we got problems right now. Yet, that's what the journey looks like, right? It looks like hard work and getting past our ego to see the image of God in another. It's studying and listening and understanding the story and history of another. It's the invitation to be wrong and at that point, drop your guard. It's the acceptance of awkwardness and realizing that we all are in some way, shape or form. And yet God still says we're fearfully and wonderfully made. I don't know if I get that yet, I'm working on that because I know a lot of awkward people.

But in Ephesians, 4:11, through 12, it says, "*his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*" And if we skip down to <sup>11</sup> So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip verse 16, there it says, "*16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*"

See, this scripture right here is inviting us into this journey of becoming a beloved community. But if we're not careful, we'll miss it. Many of us tend to think that the work of our church, or our pastor, or our leaders, or that other side, that needs to do all this work, that doesn't think the way I think. We'll think it's all about them doing that. But when you read verse 16, it says, where "*every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love and each does its work.*" I'll say it again, "each does its work." That's us, that's our responsibility. Its each of us being called into maturity. That's where the pain

comes in. That's where the uncertainty comes in. That's where the unknown comes in. It's when we're being called by the Spirit into maturity. Right. So it's our responsibility, then to become aware of the blind spots that and things that we overlook. And we do this by having conversations. We do this by being in relationship with other people that have opposing views, through life experiences, through having conversations with people that have different ages, or gender, or maybe even religion. We lay down our pride, our story, and our need to be right. And then we will see with fresh eyes. We'll see with a new lens.

A few years ago, I was approached by a gentleman here at NCC after I got done leading worship, and he comes up to me and he says, "Hey, thank you for singing all those songs but you sing a little too high for me to join in with you." And I was like, yeah, you probably got that right sometimes I sing high for myself. I'm shot. Yeah. Alright, so then he laughed a little bit about that. But then he said, "You know what's funny, I come here every Sunday, and no one sees me. They walk right past me because on the surface, they don't see who I am. They see a homeless man. But I wanted to let them know I'm human too." That one talk shifted my perspective and it challenges me to continue to remove the word 'they' in my vocabulary, because it puts a divide between how I see you that he is my community, that this is my community. It's maturing from me, too we, that when someone else is in pain, then I'm in pain, too. When someone else is crying, I'm crying too. When someone else is celebrating, I'm celebrating too. It's maturing from me to we. So we all have work to do. So may we listen and ask the Holy Spirit where our hearts need to be expanded. Let's start this process with kindness towards ourselves and towards each other as we are a part of this unfolding story that of what God sees his church, his children where everyone has a seat at the table, his beloved community

**Pastor Marion Mason:** Part of our collective unfolding story is that God says that we are his beloved, and that everyone has a seat at the table. What this means is that we celebrate each other's victories and we help shoulder each other's challenges. We walk with each other, not on each other. We laugh and we cry with one another. We listen and we share our stories and we enter into each other's lives. We value the similarities and we value the differences. We invite each other into our lives in such a way that we are walking with them, and they're walking with us, and we embrace and build upon our oneness as we follow after Christ.

Pastor Lora challenged us, she released us, she commissioned us to wrestle, and to wrestle with those what ifs in our lives. Those questions that each one of us has, that help us to grow and continue to grow into the beloved community.

Pastor Dave shared the intentional steps that we're taking as a church that allows us and drives us to be fully known, that allows us to appreciate the unique spaces that are created for us to celebrate each other. And that allows us to be led by the Spirit of God when we are shaped into the beloved community.

Pastor Joel shared the value that each one of us brings, the unique roles, the unique responsibilities, the unique giftedness, that God gives each one of us as the values of the beloved community permeates every area of our lives. Family as we grow, as we're shaped, and as we embrace God's values, making sure that everyone has a seat at the table this is our place of wrestling, this is our challenge. This is where we depend upon the Spirit of God, to lead us, to guide us, to give us wisdom, to give us discernment. It's recognizing that the table is literally the landscape of our lives, and God is the owner. What it means is us sitting down at this table inviting people into our lives, pulling up the empty seat and say, "Hey, sit down beside me, let's do life together family."

It's embracing Genesis 1:27 that says, "*So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*" The Imago Dei - we're created in the image of God. Your neighbors, those that you see every day, those that are in your families, those that you work with, each one is created the image of God. Family it's believing that God created each one of us in his image, not just that we only deserve a seat at the table everyone deserves that seat at the table. But God ordained each person worthy of that seat at the table.

The reality is that the beloved community family is impossible, without Jesus Christ in our life. And if each one of us has that place as we depend upon the Holy Spirit, as we depend upon that relationship with Jesus, what we find is that we're following after him and he's leading us, he's guiding us he's molding us and shaping us daily.

As the worship team comes, we're going to have a moment where we have the opportunity to celebrate communion together. You see this other tables not just figurative, but it's the table of the Lord, the Lord's Table in which we celebrate communion together. You know, as we dive into this time of celebrating community, if you want to grow and understand and learn more about what it means to be the beloved community, you can check out [NCC.re/beloved community](http://NCC.re/belovedcommunity). You may be at home right now and you may just need someone to pray with. I invite you just to click that prayer button. We have a team that's waiting for you. They love to pray with you. They love to share with you more about who Jesus is, and the impact that he could have in your life.

Family communion is given to celebrate that broken body of Jesus and the shed blood that he gave for each one of us. It is an opportunity for us to remember that sacrifice. It's also an opportunity for us to celebrate new life that we each find in him. The emphasis is on what he did for us and what he's doing in each one of our hearts.

One thing that was happening in the early church is that some were being omitted from communion. At times, they were overlooked, they probably felt invisible. They probably were hurt and felt pushed away and pushed to the side. At the Lord's Table, everyone is welcome. Everyone should feel valued. Everyone should feel seen. One of the ways that we do this, in being the body of Christ in this beloved

community is that we journey with each other. I like to invite my colleague, my sister, my friend, Pastor, Jenni Clayville, to join me as we do communion together with each one of you all.

You see, earlier this week, a young man took the lives of eight people, six of them being Asian, and Asian American this at the height of violence toward people of the AAPI community. Today, I stand with my sister, valuing her friendship, valuing the way that she steward's over her call as a pastor, as a mom, as a wife, as a friend to many of us. And I stand here supporting you, in solidarity with you, Sister, journeying with you. As you hurt, I hurt too. As you hurt, our church hurts. And each one of us, as we embrace being that beloved community, we journey with each other through those painful moments in the same way we journey with each other through those high moments.

**Pastor Jenni Clayville:** I am so very grateful that you're my friend, you're my brother, you're my family. I'm so grateful for this church in this week that has been extremely devastating for the Asian community. It's been a year. And if you're watching, if you're in the room, and you feel isolated and alone, unseen invisible I want you to hear that you are seen. You are loved. You belong here.

This week, I had calls and texts and emails from staff members, from friends, from friends from way back and even though I felt alone, I knew I was not because of the proof in my phone bill. And so I want to encourage you that as you are feeling, it might be because the enemy is wanting you to feel that way. In a minute here, we're going to you guys can start coming in, and then we're going to start worshipping.

When I was growing up, I went to a Chinese church and this Chinese church had two different dialects in it plus English. And so when we sang, we sang every single verse of the hymnal, and we sang it in three different languages. And so as you're singing, you could hear Mandarin, Cantonese and English. That's all I ever knew. And today, we are still singing in our own languages. As you approach worship, as you approach the table of communion, you can worship in your language of grief, you can worship in your language of lament, you can worship in your language of joy, and you know what, you may be angry, but God is not so small that he cannot handle your anger. So bring it to the table, bring it. And this family we're gonna worship together and we're going to believe as we worship that God who is greater than all this has already reconciled all of it. Let's sing.