

January 16, 2023

Dear campus community,

Few leaders are quoted as often as Martin Luther King Jr. His words, even on the page, are as resonant today as when they were spoken from the pulpit or the peaceful march.

But King's work focused on far more than just words; he was a man of impact and action. With that in mind, on this year's Martin Luther King Jr. Day holiday, I find myself thinking about something he said in 1957, to an audience in Montgomery, Alabama:

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'"

What we do for others, that service, is how we can elevate humanity, alleviate suffering, find common ground, and create community. We can eliminate divisiveness and work toward unity.

That's what Dr. King was talking about, and it's what we focus on at USC Upstate every day, in ways large and small:

- As part of Spartanburg Community Indicators Project, we have worked with community and government organizations to inspire dialogue, strategy, and positive change that improve quality of life for residents in Spartanburg.
- We have also been part of the Racial Equity and Economic Mobility (REEM) Commission in Greenville, which convenes around matters of social justice and disparities that impact the Black community in Greenville County.
- Our South Carolina Centro Latino (El Centro) programs in Hispanic/Latino interdisciplinary studies, the public humanities, and translation and interpretation help build bridges to belonging, civility, and equity.
- Our partnerships with the United Way have helped address poverty, economic gaps, and inequality issues, and our partnerships with NAACP branches across the state have improved voter participation among minority and youth voters.
- Our students are also carrying forward Dr. King's words and work. These young people are cultivating relationships with community organizations and building advanced skills. These students are among the thousands across the region who approach MLK Day as a day on and not off. To them, it is a day of service — a day to be "doing for others."

We live in a challenging time, a time when politics threaten to pull us apart, a time of war in Ukraine, a time of racial injustice here at home, a time when we are recovering from an unprecedented pandemic.

But we also live in a time of great possibility — a time when we can work together, side by side, to improve our community and make sure everyone has access to education and a better life.

Today and every day, we have the opportunity to do what is right and just. We have the opportunity to ask ourselves that most persistent and urgent question — what are you doing for others? — and answer, with utmost certainty, that we are doing everything that we can.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bennie L. Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Dr. Bennie L. Harris
Chancellor