



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

January 13, 2021

As we look forward to 2021 and all that the new year holds, I find myself reflecting on the significance of the social unrest and societal divide that has marked so much of the past several weeks and months.

As an organization, the Eugene Family YMCA does not endorse a political party or platform. While acknowledging that fact, we also remain focused on a core area of emphasis as an organization: Social Responsibility.

While we do not lobby for a particular party or platform we remain committed to relentlessly advocating for people and the truth. In fact, one of our core values is honesty. Along with our other core values of caring, respect and responsibility, honesty rests at the center of our mission and the community we strive to build as an organization.

Over the past several weeks and months, there are actions that warrant clear condemnation and concern. Indeed, protests in our own state went from peaceful to violent and destructive. Last week a riot at the Capitol cost lives.

Our YMCA celebrates civility, protests, petitions, and activism. At the same time, we oppose and condemn violence, hostility, illegality, and insurrection.

We also acknowledge that just as attacks do not lead to agreement, silence does not bring about solutions.

Our society has to start having hard conversations and really learn to listen with empathy and respect to those we fundamentally disagree with.

Recently I started reading a wonderfully-recommended book entitled 'The Anatomy of Peace'. In it, the authors share a quote that struck me, "So if we are going to find lasting solutions to difficult conflicts or external wars we find ourselves in, we first need to find our way out of the internal wars that are poisoning our thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward others. If we can't put an end to the violence within us, there is no hope for putting an end to the violence without."

As individuals, particularly those of us with identities or positions of power and privilege, we have to become much better at identifying our own limiting beliefs and sincerely seeking to understand the fears and concerns that are held by others.

There is no escaping the fact that our nation is divided, angry, and hurt; this is plainly conveyed each day in the news, regardless of the source you follow. In order to begin to heal we have to acknowledge this fact. However, we also must have the leadership to understand what it takes to heal and grow.

Choosing a path of social responsibility also acknowledges the reality that to truly inspire societal change almost always involves advocating FOR something; rather than advocating AGAINST something.

In 2020, we launched our YMCA's first-ever Diversity, Inclusion, and Global engagement committee. The focus of this committee is to seek understanding and solutions to the historic injustices, challenges and heartache that members of our community face. Each one of us is individually associated with various dimensions of diversity that are personal and special. As an organization, our goal is to relentlessly help our community celebrate the diversity that is within each of us so that we can more fully recognize the destiny that awaits all of us.

It can often seem energizing to feel anger, but to feel empowered we need solutions, not soundbites.

At the Eugene Family YMCA, we have been saddened and heartbroken by so much of the anger, violence, and pain that our friends and neighbors are trying to process. We also know that simply pointing out the injuries is not the most important position for us to take; we have to acknowledge historical wrongs, and we have to be part of the solution that brings lasting change.

With great hope,

Brian Steffen
CEO, Eugene Family YMCA