



**WITNESS  
FOR JUSTICE**

A weekly commentary from the  
United Church of Christ

Issue #1273 | September 11, 2025

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## **Porch Talks: Sacred Space for Community Thriving**

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I grew up in Hyde Park near the University of Chicago. During walks in the neighborhood, I rarely saw people sitting, lounging, or having conversations on their porches. Some of the houses were grand, architecturally opulent designs by [Frank Lloyd Wright](#).

In African American communities in the North and South, families, friends, and neighbors who could afford homes often sat on the front stoops and outdoor or enclosed porches. This was the gathering space where community conversations took place. It was also the place where parents could watch their children play and summon them home when the streetlights came on.

During my visits to be with my great-grandparents in Durant Mississippi, I'd watch with awe and curiosity at my great-grandmother on the front porch at the crack of dawn with a broom in her hand beating her [tick mattress](#). The tick mattress was an added layer of support and went on the top of the main mattress. I learned this process was meant to refresh the mattress by beating the dust out from the previous night's sleep.

The porch was sacred. It is where sweet tea, homemade ice cream, and church gossip happened. It was also the space where neighbors shared their concerns about racism, segregation, lynchings, and ongoing injustices in their communities, small towns, and across the country.

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I grew up in a Black church that



preached liberation and freedom from Jim Crow Laws and racial violence against Black communities. As a child of the sixties, I listened to sermons and speeches by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Even as a child I knew he was bringing about legislative changes towards desegregation and anti-discrimination, advocating for voting rights, and talking openly about America's racist practices and injustices across the country. When the news story broke that King was assassinated while standing on the balcony of the [Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee](#), I wept. I remember speaking these words out loud that one day I would be a [Drum Major for Justice](#).

On August 23, 2025, my Drum Major instincts kicked in as I stood on the porch where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stood 60 years ago. It was a gift and blessing to be with the members of [East View UCC](#), [Plymouth UCC](#), and [Heights Christian Church](#)—all located in Shaker Heights, Ohio. Rev. Dr. Monica Dawkins-Smith extended the invitation to be this year's [Porch Talks speaker](#).

One of the major highlights of the 60th Anniversary Porch Talks for a Beloved Community was listening to the scholarship winners of the MLK Essay Contest. Their essays were in response to the prompt, *"What can be done to ensure that everyone in the diverse Greater Cleveland community has an equal opportunity to share their gifts and talents?"*

Porch talks are spaces for nurturing and encouraging youth and young adults' gifts and talents. Porch talks are sacred spaces where neighbors gather and develop ideas for addressing the government's anti-democratic policies, and eradicating legislation ensuring voting rights, inclusive cultural education, and advocating for antiracism and climate justice. Porch talks can be spaces where Drum Majors for justice discover their gifts and talents and become community organizers, movement makers, and build beloved communities of solidarity and transformation. Thanks to the [Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) a *Drum Major for Justice* (1929-1968), porch talks are sacred for community thriving.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Velda Love serves as the Minister for Racial Justice and the Lead Minister for Join the Movement in the National Setting of the United Church of Christ.

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