

Martin Luther King Day, which will be observed on January 17, 2022, is about more than honoring the **legacy** of the American civil rights activist. It is the only US federal holiday designated as a national day of service — a "day on, not a day off." The Millennium Group **encourages you** to celebrate the occasion by **participating** in service activities to help our local community.



Born in Atlanta, Georgia, on January 15, 1929, Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) grew up in a part of the country where **segregation** was the law. Black and white people dined at different restaurants, attended different schools, and even sat apart in specially marked areas on buses and trains. It was only when he went to work in the tobacco fields of Hartford, Connecticut, in 1944 that MLK realized life was different in other parts of America. In a letter to his father, the then 15-year-old said, "*After we passed Washington, there was no **discrimination** at all. The white people here are very nice. We go to any place we want to and sit anywhere we want to.*"

MLK returned to Atlanta to attend Morehouse College and, in 1954, became an **ordained** minister. He could have become a **pastor** at a church in a **progressive** state like New York or Massachusetts. Instead, the clergyman, and his wife, Coretta King, chose Montgomery, Alabama, where segregation was alive and well. MLK's **quest** to **achieve** racial equality began in December 1955 after civil rights activist Rosa Parks was arrested for not giving up her bus seat for a white passenger.



Upset at the **injustice**, MLK called on the city's African American residents to avoid taking buses. Despite having no other means of transportation to get to work, they agreed — not for a week or month, but for an entire year! As news of the **boycott** spread, African American residents from the other Southern States also joined in. The first-ever **concerted** effort to fight racial **discrimination** ended in 1956 when the US Supreme Court declared segregation on public transportation **illegal**.

Buoyed by the success, MLK began traveling across the country to **encourage** Americans to protest existing segregation policies with peaceful sit-ins, boycotts, and marches. The activist's **inspiring** speeches **spurred** millions of people to take action. His most memorable address, '**I Have A Dream**,' was delivered in 1963.

The events leading to the oft-quoted speech began in June 1963, when President John F. Kennedy asked the US Congress to **approve** a bill giving all Americans equal access to public places. To **persuade** government officials to sign it into law, civil rights leaders asked Americans to stage a peaceful rally in



Washington, DC. On August 28, 1963, over 200,000 people from across the country came to the capital to **participate** in what became known as the "March on Washington." That day, MLK, standing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, **revealed** his dream of living in a country where everyone was treated equally.

The first major milestone towards achieving MLK's dream came with the passing of the Civil

Rights Act of 1964, which ended segregation in public places. The law also **banned** employment discrimination based on race, color, **gender**, or national origin. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, allowing African Americans to **exercise** their right to vote in US elections, further helped close the **inequality** gap. The Fair Housing Act of 1968, **prohibiting** racial discrimination in the sale, rental, or financing of property, was the final victory in assuring equal rights for all Americans. Unfortunately, MLK was **assassinated** in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968 — just seven days before President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the bill into law.

The clergyman-turned-activist's **courage** and efforts have allowed all Americans to follow their dreams. It is now up to all of us, both young and old, to protect MLK's footsteps by standing up to **societal** injustices and helping those in need, especially during these **unpredictable** times. This January 17, establish your legacy by helping **community** members **impacted** by the COVID-19 **pandemic** — not just on MLK Day, but on an ongoing basis.

