

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 3/27/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, March 28 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for women and girls throughout the world. Pray that they might be treated with dignity and respect. Pray that they might have equal opportunities for education, employment, and other areas of life. Ask that acts of discrimination toward females might be eliminated.*

Richard Gill has been an educator in Montclair, NJ for more than fifty years in the field of social studies. Mr. Gill keeps a single empty chair in the back of his classroom, which serves as an important metaphor and lesson for his students. Today, generations of students understand what the empty chair symbolizes, and Mr. Gill's story has inspired other schools to do the same.

Richard Gill grew up in the South Bronx. When he was nine years old, the fellow students of his class were invited to a birthday party. Richard and his friend, Archie, went to the party together. However, after they arrived the birthday boy's mother answered the door, took one look at Archie, and said he would have to leave because there weren't enough chairs. The mother was white, and Archie was black, and it was very apparent that Archie wasn't welcome because of the color of his skin. Archie and Richard both left and cried together. They remained friends until grade school ended and then Richard never saw Archie again.

When Mr. Gill graduated college and became a teacher, he started using an empty chair to teach about the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. One student told her father the story and he encourage Richard Gill to write it down. It was at that point that Mr. Gill realized he should keep an empty chair in his classroom year-round to teach and remind his students "the concepts of opportunity and acceptance." Obviously, the chair symbolizes a chair for Archie. But it also serves as a metaphor. It represents an empty chair for anyone and everyone.

This story is a wonderful reminder for Christians of what we are called to do. The actions of JESUS in the Bible clearly show that HE rejected no one—everyone was welcome. HIS interactions with foreigners (considered unclean by the Jews), lepers (shunned by communities), prostitutes (looked down upon as extremely sinful), and many others gives evidence that GOD'S love is for everyone. That was a hard concept for many to accept because they had come to believe that those people were not loved by GOD. The empty chair is a good reminder for us that whenever we draw a line in the sand to show who is welcome and who is not, JESUS will always be on the other side of the line. The invitation of JESUS, beginning with us in our own sinful unworthiness, is for everyone. We, who are called and invited to follow JESUS are to extend that invitation to all others, and to always make sure there is an empty chair for everyone.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey