News
EarthBeat



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Our country needs systemic change. That's one of the main things I have learned from my time at Loras College, a Catholic college in Dubuque, Iowa. The last three and a half years have completely reshaped who I want to be and what I want to spend my life doing.

These years have also been a time of increasingly loud cries from Americans seeking structural change. There's a growing awareness, reflected in the outcome of the recent national elections, that our country needs to act swiftly to address the COVID-19 pandemic, economic justice, systemic racism and the climate crisis.

It's becoming clear to many Americans that we can't solve any of these challenges without addressing all of these interrelated issues together.

I see the Biden-Harris administration being responsive to Americans who demand societal transformation, from a culture reliant on individual philanthropy to one that prioritizes collective action committed to systemic justice. The administration's agenda echoes the calls of Americans for large-scale change, and my faith demands that I hold them to it.

I grew up in Jesup, a rural town in Iowa, attending small Catholic schools my whole life. As a Catholic, I was constantly reminded that people are called to serve others, share what they have and give what they can to those who need it.

My generous and hard-working parents exemplified these lessons. Helping out others when they needed it was simply what we did and how we lived. I was surrounded by people who were willing to make personal sacrifices to help others, and I am grateful for the culture of service and philanthropic action in which I grew up.

At Loras, I learned I could take my passion for serving others and apply it to preventive justice and systemic change. I came to understand most injustices do not exist because of a few bigoted or selfish individuals. Throughout our nation's history, our country has promoted, even depended, on oppressive structures.

This is not a new observation or understanding of the injustice in this country. Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color (BIPOC) have been resisting this oppression for hundreds of years.

They have also repeatedly rebuilt our nation into something better. They have given so much over generations and continue today to dismantle systemic injustice. And they are improving the lives of all Americans as they do so.

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As I become aware of unjust systems, I am called to follow BIPOC leaders and work with them for change. As Americans, we all need to work together to tackle this pandemic, to start working on economic recovery focused on equity, to tear down systemic racism and to solve the climate crisis. Taking these steps together toward systemic change is the best way that we can show our love for country and neighbor.

If we truly want to be a free country that prides itself on equality and liberty, our society requires large-scale change. In the case of the climate crisis, for example, individual efforts like recycling and carpooling are important and fantastic, but they simply are not enough.

We need proactive systemic change through just policies. We already have the tools and capability to address this problem; we just have to implement these measures. In advancing regenerative agriculture, challenging fossil fuel infrastructure and promoting clean energy, BIPOC leaders are developing the diverse coalitions that are critical to solving this climate crisis.

Personal actions can be powerful for both the giver and the receiver, but they will not change society in a way that can save the planet. When we embrace the challenge of systemic change, we can literally make a world of difference.

What we can accomplish while working together toward structural change is exponentially more than what we can accomplish in our individual lives.

My values and faith inspire me to do individual actions of service and love, but they do not allow me to stop there. They demand that I also work toward systemic change.

With the new administration, we have a great opportunity to work together for justice by advancing COVID-19 solutions, equitable economic recovery, racial justice and climate action. And in order to do any one of these effectively, we need to work together on all of them simultaneously.