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1 March 2019

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Greetings:

How often do you truly attempt to understand the people around you? Sometimes we get so caught up in social roles and labels that we forget what is at our core as humans. We are all very similar: we all have the desire to live, and we seek happiness and human connection. Perhaps we are from different countries, or different races, or genders, or sexual orientations, or from different sides of the metaphorical tracks. Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. were two notable social justice activist and nonviolent protesters who left a lasting impact on our culture. Their beliefs were centered around the idea that all humans deserve equal rights. Lack of understanding has led to countless murders and wars throughout history. I believe that the true path to peace and equality requires understanding and respectful communication. Rather than attempting to discuss how we can achieve world peace, I believe the focus should be on creating equal and peaceful communities.

I work in the service industry, where I encounter people of all ages, genders, orientations, races, and political stances. I quickly realized that no matter how tired or frustrated they are, when approached with kindness, they typically respond with kindness. When the inevitable political conversations come up, ideas for improvement never progress beyond "I don't know." These conversations are difficult, and we often avoid them out of fear, but as Gandhi said, "the votary of non-violence has to cultivate the capacity for sacrifice of the highest type in order to be free from fear."

College is a turning point for students. We are open to new ideas as our political beliefs take shape and we establish our places in society. Our peers are the first people we share these ideas with. The issue of discrimination will be at the center of these conversations, as it is the root of many problems. Ignoring acts of discrimination is contributing to the problem. The most important step is opening people's eyes to what is happening around them. When Gandhi was in South Africa and India, he saw the people had resigned to their circumstances. The indentured servants were either committing suicide or running away from their contracts. Gandhi helped them regain their dignity and sense of worth, and offered them a nonviolent form of resistance.

Kishwaukee College has approximately 4,475 students who will be going in 4,475 directions. With world populations above 7.5 billion, that doesn't seem like many, but Gandhi and Dr. King were two individuals who left a lasting impact on peace and protest concepts.

Whether you call it the Golden Rule, Matthew 22:39, or karma, teaching people to address others with understanding and respect will create a foundation for peaceful communities. In Dr. King's words, nonviolence "does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding." As Gandhi stated, "In a gentle way, you can shake the world."

Respectfully, let us commence the shaking.