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PHOTO BY PATRICK SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

Portland civil rights activist Rev. Reneé Ward takes heart to the national Martin Luther King holiday as a time 'to reflect and restore ourselves to be motivated and get involved, because there is still a lot of work to be done.'

Walking Among ^{the} Everyday People

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With words soaked in experience and inspiration, she advises, "You're going to have to serve and educate yourself, strengthen yourself and empower yourself, and dedicate yourself to passing the baton on."

Celebrating the national Martin Luther King holiday, she said, is a time "to reflect and restore ourselves to be motivated and get involved, because there is still a lot of work to be done."

"I never worry what people think of me," she said. "If I were to worry about what people think from each day I step out the door, stranger to people who do, I wouldn't get much accomplished."

Unpopular conversations are an instigator for Rev. Ward. She references nature's tiny dung beetle, which slowly and steadily, but surely pushes a ball of feces to its destination.

"It's not an attractive or popular thing to be pushing," said Ward. "I deal with the real, non-conventional, uncomfortable conversations nobody wants to have."

Conversations like AIDs.

In the late 1990s, Ward watched her husband, Joseph Morman, suffer and eventually die from an HIV/AIDS-related illness. The emotional toll was painful enough, but seeing his ostracization, isolation and prejudice because of the AIDs stigma, pushed her to a tipping point.

When no one else was willing to speak up, she gave HIV/AIDS a voice and encouraged others to do the same.

"I sincerely hope to accomplish, not a selfish act, but more a selfless act of making sure nobody has to experience the pain and suffering, the isolation that many folks go through, not only with AIDs, but socially unacceptable labels and barriers that are totally unsolicited and no fault of their own."

Following his death in 1998, Ward founded Chrysalis Ministries, a faith-based agency dedicated to addressing health disparities. Today, the non-profit's many volunteers do outreach and educate communities, mainly African and African Americans

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ALL ABOARD! RAILROADING AND PORTLAND'S BLACK COMMUNITY

On display January 15–April 21, 2013



In this original Oregon History Museum exhibit, learn about the black community that grew up and worked around Union Station in the late 19th to mid-20th century, and the churches, newspapers, and businesses they built which forever changed the city of Portland.

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