

# Justice and solidarity—heart and soul

by Tom Keene

**Editor's note:** Tom has been involved with Esperanza since its inception almost 30 years ago and he is a frequent contributor to La Voz. While this commentary is not an official Esperanza stance it hits the mark on many levels.

The day after the election, many shocked Americans wondered what can we do? I believe the people of Esperanza have a different take on the matter. We know what to do. We keep doing what we have been doing for 30 years: Working for justice and peace. We call ourselves, the ESPERANZA PEACE AND JUSTICE CENTER.

These thoughts aim to explore how we go about this work and why what we do is vital to America and San Antonio and the meaning of our pledge: *liberty and justice for all*.

We have a clarity about how life works. We understand that there can be no liberty, no peace without justice. We understand that the roots of justice run deeper than our system of courts, law enforcement and civil rights. We know that justice consists of nothing more and nothing less than this: From each according to their ability, to each according to their need.

We know this because we experience and practice that idea, that truth in our homes and in Esperanza. There the bottom line is family. We stand committed to the wellbeing of all, not just our little egos. That understanding of justice and solidarity makes us profoundly different from Trump and his supporters.

Trump and his trumpsters see themselves as isolated individuals competing with one another for mere survival and the things of a consumer society: More for you means less for me. When their fragile egos feel confused and threatened—they respond with fear and hate. They look for others to blame: minorities, LGBTQ, immigrants, Muslims, terrorists, those strange folks on the other side of town in the lower economic ghettos and barrios. They look for hope not in themselves and one another but to a brash billionaire offering nothing but promises and pizzazz.

*The tyranny of a prince in an oligarchy is not so dangerous to the public welfare as the apathy of a citizen in a democracy.*

—Charles de Montesquieu

Their puny experience of solidarity comes in Trump rallies where they chant together: Lock Her Up. They don't know it but their deepest need is to encounter and learn from the people of Esperanza as we build nourishing communities.

Another thing is the nature of power. The people of Esperanza have clarity on what makes for real power. We know that real power comes not from money and guns. It comes from personal dignity and group solidarity. Real power is not power over others but power with others. That kind of power is the root of Esperanza's work. We know that to foster justice we need to realize both our personal and collective powers and exercise them in all our doings.

Finally, the people of Esperanza understand that our activism is, in itself, not enough. We take time to reflect on what is going on in our hearts and souls. We say, "Heart, how are you feeling? Soul, what do you need?" We let music, art, poetry, story feed us. We find strength in soul mates whom we trust and with whom we can speak truth and share what life means to us. That is how we avoid burnout.

For now, we consider what American politics will look like under the dictates of hate and fear, under a corporately driven political party that since the Nixon years has employed a "Southern Strategy" to divide us along racial and economic lines.

How shall we respond? We have our answer: We be Esperanza. We be the hope of our people. To paraphrase June Jordan: *We are the ones America has been waiting for.*



Artwork: Favianna Rodriguez

## My Dream

Slowly chipping a concrete wall  
Until it comes tumbling down;  
What has made us so hard and cold?  
For what has light and warmth been sold?

Why were the walls of defense put up?  
Why bomb shelters inside and out?  
From one another hearts are withheld;  
And no bond of spirit can we weld.

Come comrade, with hammer and chisel  
Help break walls down, let light stream through,

We're all sinners we know,  
We all build walls high and low.

Not walls but bridges we need  
Not stumbling blocks, but gates,  
Not with bombs but fresh bread  
Can our starving world be fed.

Chip, chip till we hear the walls crack,  
A tiny hole is better than none,  
May the light break through to our low desire;  
Lord, purge us with both water and fire!

— Jan. 17, 1962 Selma Platt

