

For many, the upcoming MLK Day of Service has a particular place in the history of our country. The significance of this day of remembrance and celebration of the life and message of Dr. King, coming just three days before the swearing in of the 44th president of the United States of America, Barack Hussein Obama, cannot be underestimated.

It is forty years since the assassination of Dr. King in Memphis, Tennessee. In many ways, the recent election result feels like the end of a long and harrowing journey for our country. The paradox being that at the same time, our incoming presidents' inauguration is also the start of something new. The start of change. The start of hope. Real hope renewed at a profound level for our citizens' and our country.

In honoring Dr. King's legacy this Saturday, we will see the fruition of Dr. King's work, while embarking on that journey of creating positive community change right here in Central Texas. In his "The Drum Major Instinct" sermon given in February 1968, Dr. King delivered a powerful message about the value of community service.

"You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve," Dr. King told parishioners.

"You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love. And you can be that servant."

On Jan. 17, Central Texans will be able to demonstrate they've got hearts full of grace and souls generated by love through participation in the MLK Day of Service. In honor of Dr. King's dedication to service and in conjunction with the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday, hundreds of volunteers from the Austin area will fan out across the city to build MLK peace benches, pick up trash, rake leaves, beautify schools and partake in other meaningful volunteer projects.

The program I lead, United Way Capital Area's Hands On Central Texas, engages more than 10,000 Central Texans in volunteerism annually. It is our mission to strengthen communities through meaningful volunteer action and empower people to make volunteering a regular part of their lives. President elect Obama has already stressed the need for community service, we provide a way for anyone to get involved – when you can and for what you care about. Together, with United Way and our national partner, the Hands On Network, we want to help Central Texans be the change they wish to see in their communities. We want you to Live United. Living United means being a part of the change.

You can “Live United” on Jan. 17, when United Way through our Hands On Central Texas program sponsor Austin's MLK Day of Service. The Day of Service will kick off at 8:30 a.m. Jan. 17 at Huston-Tillotson University in East Austin, where volunteers can sign up to serve for the day. We hope to see you there. If you'd like to join us, visit <http://www.liveunitedcentraltexas.org/volunteer> or give me a call at 512-225-0360.

Remember, as Dr. King remarked almost 41 years ago, you don't have to have a college degree or know about Plato and Aristotle to serve.

Armando Rayo is director of Hands On Central Texas, a program of United Way Capital Area.