

Neil V. Getnick

Acceptance Remarks Upon Presentation of

Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Southern California Beloved Community Award

Chateau Marmont – Saturday, June 15, 2024

I am honored and humbled to receive this Beloved Community Award from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Southern California. This is particularly meaningful for me because Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. has been my spiritual guide since I was seventeen years old. And perhaps the most important lesson Dr. King taught me is that LOVE WILL FIND A WAY. But for that to happen, we must first find our way to love and, once we do, to stay on that path of righteousness.

My friend Andre Balazs and I found our way onto that path when we were university students fighting together for social responsibility in our university's investment portfolio, focusing on U.S. corporations doing business in Apartheid South Africa. We continued on that path when, in the 1990's, we successfully fought for the liberation of our Kenyan classmate who had been unjustly imprisoned for his pro-democracy and anti-corruption activity. And once he was freed, Andre and I worked together supporting the Kenyan high school scholarship program that followed, launched together with the Hon. John Lewis. For the last decade, Andre has turned his efforts to the fight against human trafficking. Most recently I have begun serving on the Arts Advisory Council of the African Leadership Academy in Johannesburg, South Africa, an institution dedicated to educating Africa's next generation of leaders.

So, in a way, it was only natural for us to find ourselves in the presence of Pastor Smart along with Kurt Petersen, the co-President of Unite HERE 11, and his counsel Jeremy Blasi,

after being invited by Pastor Smart on Pentecost Sunday 2022 to meet with each other. It is said that the Holy Spirit descended on Pentecost Sunday and Pastor Smart brought that spirit into the room with him for that first meeting. Kurt had found his way onto that same path as a young man, continuing on it thereafter. After graduating Notre Dame University and Yale Law School, he could have taken a cushy job in a big law firm. Instead, he took off to join the United Farm Workers in Washington State. Indeed, the wine we are having tonight is a tribute to his contributions to the successful organizing efforts in winning the first UFW contract in the Washington State wine industry.

So, it is not coincidental, but more a product of destiny, that love found a way. As we gather this evening, we do so in the spirit of the future, an alliance of the Chateau Marmont, Unite Here 11, and the SCLC of Southern California, joining together as brothers and sisters advancing the cause of social and economic justice. And that is something to be celebrated.