



November 20, 2020

Dear friends,

2020 is a year we'd love to forget but will always remember. It has been full of pain, isolation, and injustice. But it has also taught us about grace, community, and home.

The pandemic has forced many of us to slow down and listen, to compromise and find our way back to each other day after day. That's because, if my family's experience is any example, the pandemic has left us little choice. My house is packed with a college student studying remotely, two high schoolers, my 91-year old mom recovering from a broken hip, our 3-legged deaf dog, and my sainted spouse. The other day my mom was streaming daily Mass at the volume of a Metallica concert while Thomas attended a college class, Jeff was being interviewed by a local TV station through Zoom and I worked on TJC's budget. 2020 has turned a place to lay our heads until the next obligation into a home filled with grace, humor, and lots of forgiveness.

We say "I love you" more and mean it, not taking one minute for granted. We pray for the many who will never again get to say those words to a beloved lost during this cruel year to illness or injustice.

The year confronts us with profound questions. Have we learned from months of social isolation just how much we need each other, and how much our own wellbeing is affected by our neighbors'? Having been ranked this year as the state with the greatest wealth disparities in the nation, are we ready to reexamine economic policies that condemn one in four Tennessee children to poverty and privation? Will we make Tennessee part of an America that will at last "be the dream the dreamers dreamed... that great strong land of love" of which Langston Hughes sang?

We can answer these questions only in community. **Since its founding 25 years ago last month, TJC's mission has been to use the law to help achieve a community that includes every person, that values every person.**

We do that work *in* community, which is what makes our small organization so effective. TJC's staff is only part of a "mighty cloud of witnesses" that makes success possible. Even in social distancing, 248 volunteers devoted 3,123 hours. Another 4,410 organizations, advocates, and professionals from across the state participated in 76 TJC trainings, then used their knowledge and skills to improve the lives of thousands of other people. Generous co-counsel from Tennessee and across the nation donated hundreds of thousands of dollars in pro bono services. Over one hundred other organizations, big and small, made common cause with TJC in the quest for a more just and compassionate Tennessee.

And inspiring all of us were courageous, selfless clients like Jasmine. She aged out of the foster care system and had no health insurance. When the pandemic hit, she was suddenly unable to support herself as a hairstylist. She wanted to get back to work but knew she needed health coverage to do that safely. She found TJC, and we got her

covered as a former foster child, thanks to a little known provision of the Affordable Care Act. The next week she contracted COVID-19. Like so many of the other storms of her life, Jasmine weathered this one and emerged stronger and more resolute than ever in her determination to help others. She set about to ensure that no other foster child leaves custody without the health coverage they need to thrive. She will work on this project with TJC as one of a handful of fellows in the prestigious Annie E. Casey Foundation leadership program for former foster children. Despite all of the chaos, setbacks, and uncertainty of this year, Jasmine has made a path to enrich the lives of thousands of her young peers.

It is hard to quantify such miracles, but the metrics contained in the enclosed bookmark provide a partial measure of TJC's impact this year. That impact is the work of the beautiful, diverse TJC community who, like Jasmine, has stood with us in advocating for our vulnerable neighbors, so that Tennessee can live up to our beloved nation's ideals. She, and you, make us so grateful.

Thank you for being part of that community, and please stay well.

Warm regards,



Michele Johnson
Executive Director

P.S. Every dollar you gave last year resulted in \$165 in health and nutrition benefits for Tennesseans. [Join us](#) and help us do the same in 2021!