

# Glastonbury Martin Luther King Community Initiative conversation to feature social justice poetry

By STEVE SMITH | [ssmith@courant.com](mailto:ssmith@courant.com) | Hartford Courant  
PUBLISHED: April 13, 2023

The Glastonbury Martin Luther King Community Initiative is known for its thoughtful and insightful community conversations on important issues.

The organization's next conversation will be a bit of a departure from the typical structure, as it will also feature poetry as it relates to social justice issues.

GMLKCI Co-President Quan Tran said the idea came from thinking of social justice as a broader endeavor, one that transcends into other aspects of life, including the arts.

"It's one that is ongoing and really hard work," Tran said. "We really need all hands on deck. All aspects of our society should be thinking about social justice, in the various corners that we operate in, and this includes the work of poets, artists, and musicians."

Just as the music of the 1960s and 1970s are thought of as part and parcel of the Civil Rights movements of that era, arts are integral to current social justice efforts.

"Cultural producers' voices, labor, and work have been quite instrumental in the ways that we think about social movements, and the ways that we inspire, enable and empower people to think that they can make a difference," Quan said.

Participating poets include: Dr. Jose B. Gonzalez, poet and scholar recognized for his efforts in improving access to education for Latinos and his poetic style that mixes humor and social commentary; Maryam Ivette Parhizkar, poet, interdisciplinary scholar, teacher, Ph.D. candidate in American Studies and African American Studies at Yale University, and member of the U.S. Central American collective Tierra Narrative; Ryan Parker, Poet Laureate of Manchester (2019-22), educator and empowerment activist, who focuses on race in education and seeks to challenge and disrupt educational norms; and, Rhonda M. Ward, inaugural Poet Laureate for the City of New London (2017-21) and current co-host of the annual Langston Hughes Community Poetry Reading at the Mystic Museum of Art.

Tran said poetry is a passion of hers, and the poets were recruited because she noticed their work in the state's social justice scene, or were suggested by other poets.

"I tried to look for a diversity of voices, and people whose work can give us a glimpse of just how rich the interaction between social justice and poetry is," she said.

Each poet will present for approximately 15 minutes, including reading their poetry and talking about their composition process. Some will also be presenting spoken word pieces. A discussion moderated by Tran will follow, in which audience members can ask questions of the presenters.

Audience members will also be able to submit their poetry, to be included in a future GMLKCI event.

The community conversation is free and open to the public, and will take place on April 28 at South Church, 949 Main St. in Glastonbury. A reception starts at 6 p.m. and poetry readings and discussion begin at 6:30 p.m.

For more information, visit <https://glastonburymkci.org/>.



Maryam Ivette Parhizkar, author of three books and member of the U.S. Central American Collective Tierra Narrative, will speak about her poetry at the South Church in Glastonbury on April 28.



Dr. Jose B. Gonzalez, contributor to National Public Radio, who has been published in Boston Review and Acentos Review, will be one of four featured poets at the community conversation on April 28 in Glastonbury. Courtesy photo.