

# MLK Jr. Day & Enlightened Living Days 2026

## 2026 Enlightened Living Days Theme: Curious Compassion

**Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**

**Monday, January 19, 2026**

8:00-9:00am **Breakfast Discussion** *Golden Eagle Commons*  
**Registration required / 75 people in person**

9:30-9:45am **Welcome Remarks – President Roth** *Geary Auditorium*  
President Marty Roth will inaugurate the University of Charleston's 2026 celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Enlightened Living Days. This year's Enlightened Living Days theme is "Curious Compassion."  
**Live streamed**

9:45-10:00am **Introduction: What Is Martin Luther King, Jr. Day?** *Geary Auditorium*  
The presenter will discuss Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s leadership of the civil rights movement and the struggle for equal voting rights in the 1960s.  
**Live streamed**

10:00am- **Film Screening: *Selma*** *Geary Auditorium*  
12:00pm *Selma* is a 2014 historical drama that follows Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders as they fight for equal voting rights in Alabama in 1965. The movie shows how unfair laws and intimidation kept Black citizens from registering to vote, and how peaceful marches from Selma to Montgomery brought national attention to the problem. Even though the marchers faced violence and danger, their courage inspired people across the country. Their efforts helped convince President Lyndon B. Johnson to sign the Voting Rights Act, which made it illegal to block people from voting because of their race. The film highlights the importance of standing up for justice and how ordinary citizens working together can change history.

12:15-1:15pm **Lunch & Learn** *GSU Ballroom and Online*  
Hosted tables, invited guests, and MLK Day discussion topics over lunch for Charleston campus students. UC faculty and staff will host virtual MLK Day discussion on Zoom during the lunch hour for online and Beckley students.  
**Registration required / 75 people in person / No limit for Zoom meeting**

4:00-5:00pm **String Art Installation Kickoff: UC Strands of Unity** *Riggleman Hall Rotunda*  
This session will kick off the weeklong collaborative string art installation open to all UC students, staff and faculty. Participants will choose a yarn color, each representing a type of kindness, and connect it between two nails while reflecting on or sharing their act of kindness. Through simple yet powerful participation, students, staff, and faculty will contribute to the

piece—symbolizing how small acts of kindness weave together to strengthen and unify our campus. The installation will be available through Friday afternoon.

5:00pm	<b>Unity Walk &amp; Celebration</b>	<i>Riggleman Hall Rotunda</i>
	The Unity Walk will begin at the Rotunda, continue outdoors through campus, and end outdoors at the Innovation Center. An alternative indoor route to the Innovation Center will be followed in the event of inclement weather. Rance Berry will lead the walk and offer a brief reflection.	

### **Activities for Enlightened Living Days – Curious Compassion**

**Tuesday, January 20, 2026 - Friday, January 23, 2026**

#### **Enlightened Living Days: Curious Compassion**

**Tuesday, January 20, 2026**

8:00am-	<b>String Art Installation: <i>UC Strands of Unity</i></b>	<i>Riggleman Hall Rotunda</i>
5:00pm	The UC Strands of Unity string art installation remains available for students, staff, and faculty who would like to contribute to the creation of the artwork as well as for those wishing to view it in progress.	
2:00-3:00pm	<b>Curious Compassion on Campus: Mental Health, Safety, and Therapeutic Use of Self</b> <i>This session is for faculty only. The student session is at 4:00pm.</i> Presenter: Jackie Hurt, OTA Program Director College classrooms are running hot. Students are overwhelmed, and faculty are exhausted. Conversations are loaded with crisis language in the moment – “I can’t do this.” “I don’t feel safe.” “You’re not helping me.” This session focuses on how to respond without inflaming the situation. We’ll practice curious compassion: slowing down, staying present, and asking to understand before we react, while still holding clear boundaries. Framed through occupational therapy’s concept of therapeutic use of self, we’ll explore practical ways to communicate, deescalate, and protect safety during high-stress moments in the classroom and on campus. <b>Hybrid format – In-seat and Zoom</b>	<i>Erma Byrd Gallery</i>
3:00-3:55pm	<b>The Emotion Advantage: How Emotional Intelligence Shapes Academic and Professional Success</b> Presenters: Physician Assistant Studies Faculty This session will define emotional intelligence and its core components, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Presenters will share how emotional intelligence influences academic performance, stress management and teamwork. They will share case challenges demonstrating deficits in emotional intelligence and how having more refined emotional intelligence can improve certain situations. Participants will develop a personal plan to enhance one aspect of their own emotional intelligence. <b>Hybrid format – In-seat and Zoom</b>	<i>Erma Byrd Gallery</i>

4:00-4:55pm	<b>Curious Compassion on Campus: Mental Health, Safety, and Therapeutic Use of Self</b> <i>This session is for students only.</i> <i>Presenter: Jackie Hurt, OTA Program Director</i> College classrooms are running hot. Students are overwhelmed, and faculty are exhausted. Conversations are loaded with crisis language in the moment – “I can’t do this.” “I don’t feel safe.” “You’re not helping me.” This session focuses on how to respond without inflaming the situation. We’ll practice curious compassion: slowing down, staying present, and asking to understand before we react, while still holding clear boundaries. Framed through occupational therapy’s concept of therapeutic use of self, we’ll explore practical ways to communicate, deescalate, and protect safety during high-stress moments in the classroom and on campus. <b>Hybrid format – In-seat and Zoom</b>	<i>Erma Byrd Gallery</i>
7:00pm	<b>Be Kind Bingo</b> Students are invited to play a fun compassion-themed Bingo game and compete for prizes!	<i>Geary Auditorium</i>

### **Enlightened Living Days: Curious Compassion**

**Wednesday, January 21, 2026**

8:00am-	<b>String Art Installation: UC Strands of Unity</b>	<i>Riggleman Hall Rotunda</i>
5:00pm	The UC Strands of Unity string art installation remains available for students, staff, and faculty who would like to contribute to the creation of the artwork as well as for those wishing to view it in progress.	
12:00-1:00pm	<b>MBA Speakers Series: Rooted in Resilience</b>	<i>Erma Byrd Gallery</i>
	<i>Presenter: Tonya Riven, Freelance Reporter, WCCB Charlotte</i> This presentation focuses on how a vision to maintain her grandfather’s legacy forced Tonya Riven to develop a business model that is “rooted in resilience.” Her narrative includes stories of overcoming challenges by improving her communication, problem solving, leadership, and financial management skills. She will also share the benefits of adapting to change. <b>Registration Required</b>	
3:00-3:55pm	<b>Weight Bias</b> <i>Presenter: Debbie Amos, Assistant Professor of Biology</i> This presentation focuses on both overweight and underweight individuals and the challenges they face related to weight bias. Due to weight bias, many patients have been refused health care treatment or have been unable to receive treatment due to inadequate equipment, and as a result, some have never returned for treatment. The presentation will address how to raise awareness about weight bias and possible steps to reduce it in clinical and hospital settings. <b>Hybrid format – In-seat and Zoom</b>	

4:00-4:55pm	<b>Empathy—A Clarifying Workshop</b>	<i>Erma Byrd Gallery</i>
	<i>Presenter: Emily Wikane, Assistant Director of Residence Life</i>	
	This workshop frames empathy for participants so they can walk out of the session with more confidence in approaching conversations with empathy. Video clips will be used to demonstrate the difference between empathy and sympathy and introduce specific communication skills.	
	The workshop will conclude with an activity to apply what has been learned.	

**Hybrid format – In-seat and Zoom**

**Enlightened Living Days: Curious Compassion**

**Thursday, January 22, 2026**

8:00am-	<b>String Art Installation: <i>UC Strands of Unity</i></b>	<i>Riggleman Hall Rotunda</i>
5:00pm	The UC Strands of Unity string art installation remains available for students, staff, and faculty who would like to contribute to the creation of the artwork as well as for those wishing to view it in progress.	
3:00-4:25pm	<b>Empathy Role-Playing Workshop</b>	<i>Erma Byrd Gallery</i>
	<i>Presenter: Allyssa Covert, Program Manager, Downtown Innovation Hub</i>	
	This workshop features a role-playing activity in which participants are assigned a persona facing a significant challenge (for instance, unemployment or lack of affordable housing) and a goal to be achieved. Their persona cards state the resources they have access to as they visit different required checkpoints simulating real-world necessities (for example, renting an apartment from a landlord, applying for a job, obtaining documents from government agencies). Participants will develop a greater appreciation for the difficulties many individuals face without a stable support system, transportation, and safe living arrangements.	
	<b>Hybrid format – In-seat and Zoom</b>	
4:30-5:30pm	<b>Resiliency Roundtable</b>	<i>Erma Byrd Gallery</i>
	<i>Presenter: Katie Everson, MSOT program</i>	
	This presentation describes the MSOT program's Resiliency Roundtable, a virtual student concierge service designed to support mental and emotional well-being while navigating the rigors of graduate studies. This interactive session will introduce how the Roundtable fosters connection, empathy, and compassionate curiosity through monthly peer gatherings, mindfulness practices, and wellness check-ins. Participants will explore how this model promotes student engagement, professional growth, and retention through meaningful dialogue and support rooted in curious compassion.	
	<b>Hybrid format – In-seat and Zoom</b>	
7:00-8:45pm	<b>Film Screening: <i>Ireland West Camino: A Pilgrimage Reborn</i></b>	<i>Geary Auditorium</i>
	UC Digital Media Storyteller Thomas Breiter was the cinematographer who followed an inspiring group of pilgrims as they walked the 181-km traditional pilgrimage route from Rathcroghan in County Roscommon, Ireland, to Croagh Patrick for the first time in nearly 400 years.	
	The 2025 documentary narrates the story of the pilgrims' pioneering journey across western Ireland as they engage with ancient and modern sacred sites, local communities, musicians,	

farmers, clergy, craftspeople, and tradition keepers along the way. The film explores the deeper reasons behind each pilgrim's journey, inviting viewers to connect with the pilgrims' experiences throughout.

### **Enlightened Living Days: Curious Compassion**

**Friday, January 23, 2026**

8:00am-	<b>String Art Installation: <i>UC Strands of Unity</i></b>	<i>Riggleman Hall Rotunda</i>
5:00pm	Final day of the UC Strands of Unity string art installation: The artwork will remain available for students, staff, and faculty who would like to contribute to it as well as for those wishing to view it as it reaches completion.	
7:00-9:00pm	<b>Film Screening: <i>Between Borders</i></b>	<i>Geary Auditorium</i> <i>Between Borders</i> (2025) tells the true story of Violetta Petrosyan and her family as they flee escalating anti-Armenian violence in Baku, Azerbaijan, during the late 1980s. Forced from their home and treated as outsiders wherever they go, the Petrosyans first seek safety in Russia, only to face continued discrimination. Their journey becomes one of endurance, faith, and hope as they connect with a church founded by American missionaries and ultimately pursue refuge in the United States, striving to rebuild their lives after years of displacement.

