

Showing Up!

Organized. Impressed. Excited. Meaningful.

These words were some of those that 17 UCH members used to describe their experience of the Community Renewal Society (CRS) Faith in Action Assembly on Martin Luther King Day. We were part of a bigger UU delegation (about 250 people), organized by UUANI, from around Illinois. 1500 people in total were packed into the First Baptist Congregational Church in west Chicago, representing many different congregations and faiths. UCH went to this as an action for our Black Lives Matter Initiative as well as a member of CRS.

The member congregations of CRS establish the “asks” – the list of legislative and policy demands made of various elected officials – and the officials have a chance to make their commitments public. Even though we were just a few miles west of the Loop, only four city council members were in attendance, facing the congregation of 1500 justice-seeking people.

Our ASK to the city council members was for their support of the FAIR COPs ordinance. Each of them had his/her moment to be held accountable; we went down the line of four and asked the same “yes/no” question of support for the ordinance to each of them. When they said yes, the elected official would write their name on a board pledging to vote in favor of the ASK. If they said no, the crowd would stand up, raise their hands up, and pray, “We are all praying that God transform your heart and bend your mind toward justice.”

The same process was used for ASKS of other leaders. No one was surprised that Mayor Emmanuel didn’t show. In fact, the organizers were prepared with a large photo of him. The crowd prayed over the photo several times...”God transform your heart and bend your mind toward justice.”

State legislators by contrast had a good turnout. They were asked to support the Platform for Renewal. There were three parts to this 1) Police Accountability Reform in Illinois, 2) End Absolute Bars to Employment for People with Criminal Records and 3) Fair Tax in Illinois. Each representative said yes to these items.

The most dramatic thing that happened was that the three democratic candidates for state’s attorneys showed up and were seated just a few inches from each other. This apparently was the most newsworthy thing also because I saw WTTW Paris Schutz story later about it. They were prayed over also because they didn’t give any unequivocal “Yeses” to their ASK.

Twelve of us had lunch afterwards at Wishbone and discussed what we had just witnessed. We were all glad we went.

But why? Did we even accomplish anything?

Patrice Cullors, one of the Black Live Matter founders, answered that for me. She spoke in Naperville the next day and helped me understand what we accomplished. She put it like this. She said that they have good leadership in the black community and they don’t need more

leaders; they don't need outsiders coming in and diagnosing their problems. They need "white allies." Her words were "the goal for white allies is to show up."

This group of 17 UCHers - all white - showed up for a CRS action that put forward bills and issues that a mostly-black community had offered as important to them. By "showing up", we make clear that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We add people, and therefore power, to their already-strong numbers. We show up and make clear that we value the black community as neighbors. We show up and make clear that we know oppressive systems need to be dismantled. We show up and make clear that elected officials now have even more constituents to answer to.

Someone asked me, "what's next?" I think we look to our partner organizations to determine this. There are some important events/actions planned already. See below for some ideas.

Someone commented to me that UCHers do their own thing and they are very involved in many, many organizations. (I agree!) She said there shouldn't be one thing we are all expected to do.

But sometimes we need to show our strength together. We can bring our power to someone else's action and make it even more effective. Because elected officials notice numbers.

And, as UUs why are we doing this at all? "We affirm and promote the worth and dignity of every person." We need to remember both action words in this first principle - "affirm *and* promote." We cannot simply affirm, we must promote. We must act for dignity, not just think about it. All of the ASKS from CRS at the Faith in Action event were about worth and dignity. We have to "get on the bus" and SHOW UP for worth and dignity to get the YES vote.

Tracey Olson

PLACES TO SHOW UP THIS SPRING

April 12 Faith in Action Day with CRS
UUANI Lobby in Springfield; all day event.

April 21 Lobby Day with Faith in Place
UUANI Lobby in Springfield: all day event.