

Unconditional love, honesty help overcome differences (11.25.04)

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It has been said, "Singing is praying twice." This seems especially true when we look back at the past year and think about things we're thankful for in our work with a congregation-based justice organization called Justice Organization Sharing Hope & United for Action.

"So carry your candle, run to the darkness, seek out the hopeless, confused and torn. Hold out your candle for all to see it. Take your candle and go light your world." We sang these words last May at the coalition's Covenanting Ceremony, in the glow of candles passed from person to person. There was a deep sense of gratitude that night at Union Congregational Church. The church was packed with a diverse group of people, including representation from different faith traditions, community organizations and public leaders -- all of us grateful for the hope and energy we were feeling as we stood together, pledging to work for fair and lasting improvements in our community.

What we are most grateful for is the relationship-building that impacts all our actions. The bottom line is not uniformity, but unity. If we wait until we all agree on everything, nothing will ever get done. We don't all belong to the same political party, or the same religious denomination, but we do all feel passionately about uniting -- not polarizing -- faith communities and the larger community, by focusing on things we all agree on: truth and fairness, accountability and generosity.

"I want to take this friendly song: "To whoever might need it. I want to have a million friends. And so be able to sing stronger." These are words we sang two months ago on Sept. 18 at a bilingual send-off rally at St. Matthew Catholic Church. There were 150 of us, from more than 20 different congregations in the Green Bay area, who boarded buses to attend an event called Rolling Thunder at the US Cellular Arena in Milwaukee. It was invigorating to be part of this racially and religiously diverse gathering of thousands of people from around the state. Also attending the event were elected officials and candidates, from both sides of the political aisle, who joined us in making a public commitment to work together for the common good. The closing song, "We Are One," sung in English, Among and Spanish, was a powerful affirmation of the shared values that can bring us together. "Great is the Lord, he is faithful and true, by his mercy he proves he is love."

At our gathering Nov. 6, this song became a prayer that set the tone for a discussion about the Nov. 2 election. It proved to be an important time of listening and healing, as we experienced unconditional love and honesty taking precedence over partisan or doctrinal differences. Our lives have become richer through opportunities to listen to people coming from different points of view. We see amazing possibilities for faith communities when they join together to overcome divisions and stand united for action around common values of justice. For this we give thanks and for this we want to sing.

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