

Why I Went to Minneapolis

By Jim Ketcham

“Who knows but that you have been put in this position for such a time as this? Esther 4:14

Like so many others, I have been wondering what I could do to oppose the brutality shown toward immigrants and US citizens who spoke with an accent or had a skin color other than white. Like many of you, I've been veering from rage to despair as the current administration lies about immigrants, bullies immigrants, breaks up immigrant families, kills immigrants and more.

This isn't just about the current administration. I believe it is my obligation as a privileged straight white clergy person to spend that privilege to support those who don't have those privileges. After all, my whiteness isn't due to anything I did. My straightness was not an accomplishment. (Okay, I guess I had to do **some** work to get my M.Div. and become ordained.) Yet I have privilege beyond my accomplishments.

I have immigrant friends from several chapters of my life. They've been neighbors, co-workers and friends. I know what is being said about them is all lies.

I have fought, taught and crusaded for folk who don't have my privilege for over 50 years. I'm not anyone special. It just felt like it had to be done. I did not recognize the Jesus I know in so many statements coming from "Christian" leaders.

Who Is This Jesus? Bishop Timothy Clarke

I also related strongly to this recent statement by James Talarico, Texas candidate for the US Senate. He said to his fellow Christians: "Don't tell me what you believe. Show me how you treat your neighbors, and I will know what you believe."

The Bible has literally dozens of instructions on how to treat your neighbors, even if they are from a different country or religion. Repeatedly we are commanded to treat foreigners in our midst with kindness, mercy, fairness and generosity.

So, when a call went out for clergy from all over the nation to come to Minneapolis for a massive demonstration against ICE on Friday, January 23rd, I responded.

The group organizing clergy and people of faith is called MARCH: Multifaith Antiracism, Change and Healing (members include many mainline Protestant and other Christian denominations, Jewish groups and Unitarian Universalists)

I sat in on a national orientation call. Everything seemed to be well organized. Minnesotans were offering their spare bedrooms to strangers from across the country and congregations planned group meals. We were given checklists of things to bring, such as warm mittens, hand and foot warmers, multiple layers of clothes, balaclavas, N95 masks, goggles, snacks. For security

reasons, details of the planned actions were not discussed. They were to be discussed at an in-person training course in Minneapolis the day before.

We had to practice saying “I have the right to remain silent,” “I do not consent to any search” and “Am I free to go?”

I bought last minute airfares. I called one of my many friends from the 18 years my family lived just outside Minneapolis and immediately was offered a bed and whatever meals I might need.

I tried to register for the training. The registration system crashed due to overwhelming response! The next day, I tried again. The response was that MARCH was overwhelmed with responses and didn't have the capacity to train, house and feed all of us would-be registrants. No more registrations were to be taken.

Without registration, I wouldn't be allowed in the training, so I brought some work with me, and called some friends to get together for lunch on Thursday.

I tagged along with my former pastor from Minneapolis on Friday, the day of the demonstrations. He was going to the airport that morning, to protest the use of the airport by two airlines to deport or imprison detainees far, far from their homes and families.

Many, many of us were clergy and we wore stoles over our parkas. We were invited to go to the head of the line.

We saw some clergy with white armbands and asked what they were for. All they would say is that they were part of the demonstration.

We [joined hundreds of others](#) chanting and singing on the sidewalk outside the parking garage nearest to the departure gates. My favorite sign was apparently from a Jewish group. It read “Pestering Pharaohs for 3500 years.” Yes!

There were only 2 obvious ICE agents, in full tactical gear, including what looked like flash bang grenades, a large bore weapon perhaps for pepper balls and another weapon that had a cannister of some sort attached below the barrel. They glared at us as we chanted at them. Lining up quietly in front of a school bus were officers from the airport police, Minneapolis police, and at least 4 other suburban departments.

Union members were everywhere, supporting demonstrators by providing security, first aid – and hot cocoa and cookies.

Then, at a given sign, 97 clergy in their stoles, the ones with the white armbands, [stepped into the roadway and knelt](#) on pads the organizers had brought with them. The entire crowd prayed the Lord's Prayer with them.

One by one, the clergy were escorted by local police, not ICE agents, into the school buses. It was all calm and orderly. Legal observers on the sidewalk recorded the names of every clergy person detained. Then the buses pulled away and we left to find warmth.

I was told later all those arrested received minor infractions, were given a court date, and were released in a couple of hours.

With the airport demonstration over, my friend and I repaired to his office, shared what snacks we had and got ready for the afternoon's events – which still hadn't been revealed to me.

I knew there were some clergy standing guard outside schools and daycares to discourage ICE from kidnapping children or parents. Others joined hundreds of Minneapolis volunteers delivering groceries to families too scared to leave their homes. [Here's a great story](#) of Minnesotans coming together to care for their neighbors.

I kept posting to Facebook while I could take my hands out of my skier's mitts. Responses were coming in so fast from friends and relatives, I couldn't keep up. People I hadn't seen in person for over 35 years said "I knew you'd be there. Thank you!" Their love and concern and support often moved me to tears.

There were two singing protest groups, one called "The Bridge" and other "[Singing Resistance](#)." These songs were heard in many places around Minneapolis since the murder of Renee Good. They were a profound part of the experience.

*"I am not afraid; I am not afraid. I will live for liberation,
because I know why I was made"*

At a march in South Minneapolis in memory of Renee Good, hundreds of demonstrators sang: "[They belong to us; we belong to them](#)," in beautiful harmony!

Mid-afternoon, we drove to a different part of downtown, near several stadiums that didn't exist when I lived there. We joined a march to the US Bank headquarters. Another group visited Target Corp. headquarters. Our objective was to get major Minnesota corporations to speak out against the kidnappings and the killings.

Both corporations were founded in Minnesota, and both had a reputation for years of supporting housing justice, environmental justice, paying living wages, giving back to the community, etc., but they had remained silent while neighbors were taken away, off the streets, out of their homes and workplaces and disappeared.

One of our demands was to meet with the CEOs of these MN born and bred corporations. [Here's a clip of singing](#) during the wait at US Bank (look for the old guy with a white mustache in a red hat with green stole!)

The lobby guards listened to us sing and chant and they told us the CEO wasn't in that building, but another nearby. [More singing and chanting](#). A spokesperson for the CEO showed up and listened to our demands, took a written copy of them, and promised to return shortly with an answer.

More singing and chanting and now some preaching from several of our leaders. Suddenly, the spokesman returned and told our leaders the CEO had agreed to meet – next week. We learned later the same response was given by the Target CEO.

This was a time to celebrate, and dozens of lawn chairs suddenly appeared, and we were invited to sit. Large boxes of dozens of donuts were passed around and we chatted and got to know our fellow demonstrators. I even recognized a colleague I hadn't seen in almost 35 years and went over to him to catch up a bit on our former colleagues from "back in the day."

The lawn chairs were for those who had volunteered to remain in the building after hours if we didn't receive a reply from the CEO. We ate our donuts, folded up our chairs and headed to the next gathering, inside, at the Target Center which houses two basketball teams: the Minnesota Timberwolves and the Minnesota Lynx, as well as other large events. We were grateful to be headed back indoors instead of needing to spend hours more in subzero cold.

On Sunday, Minnesota's Chamber of Commerce released an open letter signed by more than 60 businesses and CEOs (including US Bank and Target Corp) warning that the actions of federal immigration agents had sown "widespread disruption" in the state and led to the "tragic loss of life."

"We are calling for an immediate deescalation of tensions" the letter read, "for state, local and federal officials to work together to find real solutions."

It wasn't the strongest of statements, but it was responding to the situation.

On our way to the Target Center, we passed thousands of people continuing to march and protest. We also walked past a bar and restaurant with a large sandwich sign that read: "Free Coffee Free Coffee Free Coffee." At the bottom the sign read: "Nothing else for sale!" The place was making no money but was gladly supporting the marchers.

The Target Center entrances were absolutely jammed. My friend and I hardly moved for about 10 minutes, then slowly made our way up nonfunctioning escalators. We were told that the first two tiers of the stadium were packed, and we wouldn't find a seat together there, so we went up to the third level and finally found seats in the "nosebleed" section, up a long flight of steps, just 3 rows from the outside wall.

A DJ down on the floor of the stadium was [playing songs](#) the crowd enjoyed singing along to. A local musician, Jeffrey Messersmith, played several of his compositions that included themes appropriate to the day and the times.

Then a contingent of faith leaders, including Native Americans, Jewish Rabbis, Moslem Imams and Christian pastors addressed the crowd.

Native American leaders who spoke included Rachel Dionne-Thunder, Vice President of the Indigenous Protector Movement and a Bigstone Cree Nation descendant, and Nick Estes, a citizen of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe and associate professor of American Indian studies at the University of Minnesota. Vincent Dionne (also referred to as Vin Dionne), a Native American rights advocate

who is active in "ICE-watch" patrols, opened the rally by singing the anthem of the American Indian Movement (AIM).

Other speakers included:

Imam Yusuf Abdulle, executive director of the *Islamic Association of North America*

Rabbi Arielle Lekach-Rosenberg of *Shir Tikvah Synagogue*, Minneapolis

Dr. Billy Charvez Russell, senior pastor at *Greater Friendship Missionary Baptist Church* of Minneapolis

The union leaders who addressed the demonstrators included:

Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

April Verrett, President of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Matthew Loeb, President of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE)

There were still more speakers scheduled, but the rally didn't start until hours after it was scheduled, and my friend and I were invited to a potluck dinner with a group of local American Baptists and some of us who had flown in. The food was great, and the fellowship was even more sustaining. I had not seen some of my ABC colleagues for years.

We left feeling exhausted from the day's physical and emotional toll and uplifted by the efforts of so many to stand up for their neighbors in the face of bullying by ICE. Estimates of the crowd size downtown ranged from 50 to 100 thousand.

Saturday, as I was packing to leave, local television news covered the shooting of Alex Pretti almost as soon as it happened. I paused, considering if I should stay in Minnesota longer and help provide clergy presence at the demonstrations that would surely follow.

My main concern, upon reflection, was that the previous day's events had been meticulously planned and coordinated. The immediate response to Pretti's murder would not be. That and the cost of changing my flight made me decide to go home, as planned.

And I will be back.
