

Rev. Jacque Foster, Compton Heights Christian Church,
located on S. Grand in South City.

Verdict Announcement re: Jason Stockley in killing of Anthony Lamar Smith

The Compton Heights Elders and Church Board asked “What will we do?” and decided that we would be open as Safe Space/ Sanctuary Space as needed depending on the physical location of the protests and the needs coordinated with other congregations. This came out of our very direct involvement in being open 48 hours straight and hosting legal observer training, protester trainings, protester respite, a kitchen to provide food for the protest, prayer space, and conversation space following the non-indictment for officer Darren Wilson. Prior to this verdict an RN in our congregation who is an Emergency Room Nurse at a major hospital in our city was asked to train Street Medics. We set up training for Street Medics for 2 Saturdays in a row in our fellowship hall. That was carried out and was successful in helping to get medics on the street.

We expected the announcement at 3 pm on Friday that plan was altered when the announcement came at 9 in the morning on Friday. Our folks decided that we needed to be open that night. So I spent Friday getting ready for CHCC to be open and did not go downtown. However, others in our congregation did go: Rev. Brenda Booth, Rev. Meredith Jackson, Kim Litton were downtown. We opened at 7 pm and had a total of 17 people, including both congregation members and community members we had not met.

Our people were so very angry, even though they had expected this verdict. The time of prayer and reflection in the sanctuary was powerful. Some only did that and could not ‘talk’ because of their rage. The bulk of the group, however engaged in a significant conversation that lasted until about 10 pm. A Buddhist friend came, bringing his Djeridu and led us “Turtle Island Prayer” which is an opportunity to express emotion and then deepen conversation.

In Sunday’s Sermon using the Moses at the Red Sea text, I described this:

“We in the St. Louis community cry out for something very clear, something that should be very simple. Black and brown skinned people in our community are beyond asking – instead are demanding one thing very clearly and succinctly. STOP KILLING US. STOP KILLING BLACK AND BROWN PEOPLE.”

On **Saturday, Delmar Loop** hundreds of us - were sitting in a huge circle several people deep all the way around the intersection of Skinker and Delmar. We sat for six minutes in silence except for the calling of name after name of black youth, men, and women who have been killed by police in our country. As the names were called out, protest leaders wrote in large chalk letters in the middle of the intersection: YOU GONNA STOP KILLING US.

I sat there on the curb in the quiet with the names being called out, and it occurred to me that we were encircling not just any intersection, but Skinker and Delmar. Skinker, in St. Louis history was the sundown divide – black people had better not be on the west side of Skinker after dark. And now we know the power of the Delmar Divide, a socio-economic and racial dividing line between north and south sides of the city.

At that intersection, the young black woman crying out “STOP KILLING US” - Sounded like “LET MY PEOPLE GO.”