

SPIRIT OF MEMPHIS

Interfaith MLK PrayWalk honors King's legacy

By [Alicia Davidson](#), Daily Memphian

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Several dozen people from multiple faiths walked Saturday from St. Peter Catholic Church at 190 Adams Ave. to the National Civil Rights Museum. (Patrick Lantrip/Daily Memphian)

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A diverse group of religious leaders gathered Saturday at St. Peter Catholic Church for an interfaith prayer service honoring Martin Luther King Jr., who was slain in Memphis April 4, 1968.

The event was titled MLK PrayWalk: An Interfaith Prayer Service and Walk of Hope.

Religious leaders in attendance included Rabbi Jeff Dreifus of Temple Israel; Dr. Nabil Bayakly, director of Muslim Community Center, and Bishop David Talley of the Catholic Diocese of Memphis.

The site of the service, St. Peter Catholic Church at 190 Adams Ave., is the oldest Roman Catholic parish in West Tennessee and has been in operation since 1840.

Rev. Carmen Mele O.P. is Rector of [St. Martin de Porres National Shrine & Institute](#) located within St. Peter Catholic Church and helped organize the event.

“Violence brings so much sorrow to our city and we want our children to grow up in more loving ways,” Mele said. “We decided to commit ourselves to a walk of justice in honor of promoting neighborhood nonviolence and Dr. King’s legacy.”

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Rev. Carmen Mele
St. Martin de Porres National Shrine & Institute

The commemoration began with an opening prayer from Rev. Rosalyn Nichols of Freedom's Chapel Christian Church followed by a sermon from Rev. Christopher Davis of St. Paul Baptist Church.

Davis emphasized that the legacy of King demands all individuals devote themselves to a mission of personal responsibility to create lasting positive change.

"A big part of making change is taking a look at yourself, who you are and what you do," Davis said. "We seek to be both responsible and responsive to the King legacy. We want our lives to have meaning and it's going to require some type of change — not just in the world, but within ourselves."

The St. Augustine Gospel Choir sang a moving rendition of the hymn "Give us Peace" just prior to the interfaith prayers.

Rabbi Jeff Dreifus then approached the podium to lead the sanctuary in prayer. Dreifus said Dr. King's struggle for social justice is relatable for many groups that have struggled with violence and oppression including the Jewish community.

"In just a couple of weeks Jews all over the world will celebrate the holiday of Passover," Dreifus said. "We will gather around our seder tables and recount the story of our people's exodus from Egypt from slavery to freedom, that very same exodus about which Dr. King spoke and which he envisioned."

Cheryl Obannon is a former schoolteacher and a member of St. Peter Catholic Church. Obannon said the MLK Pray/Walk is a chance to remind ourselves the importance of loving one another despite our differences.

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together as one are so important. ”

Cheryl Obannon
St. Peter Catholic Church member

“Occasions like these that allow different religious leaders to come together as one are so important,” Obannon said. “We don’t realize the world is not ‘you or me’, ‘my corner or your corner’ — the world is for everyone. We should all be about inclusion. We may be different colors, we may like different things or be different religions, but inside we are all made alike.”

After the church service the congregation walked down Main Street to the National Civil Rights Museum. At the corner of Mulberry and Main Street a gathering of students from different Memphis-area schools awaited to discuss their hopes and dreams for the future.

Sam Shiberou, 17, a White Station High School junior, was among those invited to speak. With a calm and welcoming demeanor as he approached the crowd, Shiberou said his background as a biracial Memphian gives him hope to see his dream of a more peaceful and harmonious city come true.

“I think Dr. King would be happy that I am a part of his dream. My mother is white and my father is black,” Shiberou said. “I’ve learned so much about other cultures and have come to respect each one, even if it is different from mine. Progress has been made in Dr. King’s dream, but we still have lots of work to do.”

Shiberou continued that while his own life experiences give him hope for progress, having a better social consciousness throughout the community will be the key factor to creating a better and more harmonious world.

“Where we tend to come short is that we often avoid those who look, talk and worship differently than ourselves,” Shiberou said. “My hope and dream for Memphis is that

we step out of our comfort zone and come together, allowing every person a sense of belonging and opportunity regardless of what part of the city they are from.

“I dream for every person’s voice to be heard and valued even if it is different,” Shiberou said. “I know we can build a better Memphis with each other’s help.”



White Station junior Sam Shiberou (holding a photo of Dr. Martin Luther King) was among the youngsters who spoke at the PrayWalk event Saturday. (Patrick Lantrip/Daily Memphian)

TOPICS

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Alicia Davidson is a lifelong Cordova resident and graduate of The University of Memphis College of Journalism and Strategic Media. When not scribbling about the latest Memphis news, you will find her reading historical biographies, cooking Italian cuisine and practicing vinyasa yoga.
