

## THE DAY MARTIN LUTHER KING CAME TO FIRST IMMANUEL

On July 7, 1966, Martin Luther King Jr. held a community rally at First Immanuel Lutheran Church in Chicago. It was part of his campaign to end the pattern of housing segregation.

For the previous ten years the nation had witnessed the heroism of hundreds of people in the American South: Going to jail for refusing to move to the back of the bus; having their bus set on fire for riding into the South as a racially integrated group; being bloodied, even murdered for attempting to register to vote.

People from the American North, black and white, streamed south to join in the struggle. And now, in 1966, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and their president, Martin Luther King, brought their campaign against racism to the American North.

"In my travels to the North," Dr. King had said, "they welcomed me and showered praise on the heroism of the southern Negroes. But in virtually no major city was there a mayor possessing statesmanship or compassion when the racism in their own cities was mentioned. Their language was polite, but the rejection was firm and unequivocal."

As expected, Mayor Richard Daley was furious when he heard of the plan. "We don't need anyone from the outside to tell us how to run our city," he said. Local politicians, business leaders, and the news media all agreed.

The leadership of most churches, black and white, decided to stay quietly on the sidelines, although many of their individual members actively supported Dr. King's announcement.

At First Immanuel some of the members did some real estate testing. White couples first, and thirty minutes later black couples, would go to a real estate office asking for a list of homes for sale. They were always given radically different lists depending on their race. The evidence was given to the mayor's office.

Some of First Immanuel's members were in the marches. One of the marches went to a real estate office in Marquette Park to demand equal access to the purchase of homes there.

The marches consisted of men and women of all ages from all ethnic groups and economic status. It was three blocks long.

The streets were lined with home owners shouting threats and racial epithets. Police stood between them and the marchers, and arrested those who tried to break through the line. Rocks, bottles, and fire crackers were thrown at the marchers. One rock struck Dr. King on the head, and he fell down on one knee. "I've seen many demonstrations in the South," he said, later, "but I've never seen anything as hateful as I've seen today."

The pastor of First Immanuel was invited by WBBM-TV to broadcast a rebuttal to one of WBBM'S television editorials saying that Dr. King should stay away. The pastor listed the many reasons from his personal experience why a man like Dr. King was exactly what Chicago needed.

Meanwhile, a growing number of young Black Americans were becoming restless. New **leaders were saying that the practice of non-violent resistance was too slow and out of date.** Direct action was needed. Dr. King was under great pressure to show that his method would still work.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, in coordination with Chicago's black community organizations, decided that a large rally in Soldier Field on Sunday, July 10, would be the kickoff for an intense period of non-violent demonstrations, rallies, and marches. The goal was to pressure the powers in Chicago to end the practice of preventing Black people from **purchasing homes in all white areas.**

To prepare for this rally, smaller rallies would be held throughout the city. First Immanuel, in coordination with the West Side Community organization, offered to hold the rally for the Near West Side.

The rally was set for 8:30 p.m., on July 7. People began coming at 6:30. By 7:30 the church was almost full. Dr. King had three rallies on the west side that night. We knew that he would be late. But no one seemed to mind.

It was like no other crowd that First Immanuel had ever seen. There were lots of smiles. Strangers were greeting strangers like old friends, exchanging stories. Blacks and whites and browns. Men, women, and a few children, Lutherans and Baptists and Methodists. Two rows of nuns in their black habits. Jewish merchants from the community. And many who had never seen the inside of a house of worship except for weddings and funerals.

We used the time to celebrate that we were together for this common purpose. There was a lot of singing: Well-rehearsed and impromptu choirs, talented and not so talented soloists, and of course freedom songs.

A lot of speech-making. In his welcome the pastor of First Immanuel reminded the assembly that the civil rights movement began in a church in Montgomery and from the beginning was empowered by faith in God. Today the movement includes people of all persuasions working together for justice, but to be in a church is the right place for tonight.

Dr. King finally arrived at 9:30. Accompanied by a dozen coworkers. It would not have **been wise for him to travel alone at night. He looked tired after having had rallies all day. But** in two minutes he became the orator we had all heard on radio and TV.

He quoted the Bible, focusing on the prophets' call to justice. He spoke briefly about the dream. But mostly he talked about the urgency of our task, and that non-violence was the way to bring justice that would endure. He encouraged us to believe in the future, and to join him in the campaign.

After he had finished the audience didn't just stand, they leaped to their feet. The applause was thunderous. It wasn't so much for the speech. We all had heard that speech before. It was for the man.

He acknowledged their applause politely for about two minutes. The applause was not about to stop. When it showed no signs of weakening, Dr. King and his entourage

acknowledged the applause once more and went down the side aisle and out the door. And for another 30 seconds the crowd applauded the empty door.

On the following Sunday there were about 35,000 people at the Soldier Field rally. A group of about 700 followed him to the Chicago city hall where they taped the call for open housing to the door. You can't drive nails into solid steel.

Dr. King and Al Raby, who represented the Chicago community organizations, met with Mayor Daley and other prominent city leaders over several weeks as demonstrations and rallies continued. Eventually, the meetings resulted in the Chicago Real Estate Board agreeing to end their opposition to open housing legislation in exchange for an end to street demonstrations.

It wasn't a dramatic victory, only a good faith verbal agreement. But before long black families began to purchase homes throughout the metropolitan area. They were typically welcomed as bona fide customers in the home buying business. And the cultural shift that began years earlier in Montgomery was beginning to take root in the entire Chicago metropolitan area.

## Martin Luther King explains "Non-Violent Resistance"

### Stride Toward Freedom. 1958

(First) Nonviolent resistance is not a method for cowards; it does resist. If one uses this method because he is afraid or because he lacks the instruments of violence, he is not truly nonviolent. Nonviolence resistance is ultimately the way of the strong man. The method is passive physically, but strongly active spiritually. It is active nonviolent resistance to evil.

(Second) It does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding. Protest through noncooperation or boycotts are means to awaken a sense of moral shame in the opponent. The end is redemption and reconciliation, while the aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness.

(Third) The attack is directed against forces of evil rather than against persons who happen to be doing the evil. The tension in this city is not between white people and Negro people. The tension is, at bottom, between justice and injustice, And if there is a victory, it will be a victory not merely for fifty thousand Negroes, but a victory for justice.

(Fourth) Nonviolent resistance is a willingness to accept suffering without retaliation, to accept blows from the opponent without striking back. Unearned suffering is redemptive. Suffering has tremendous educational and transforming possibilities. Suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears to the voice of reason.

(Fifth) It avoids not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. The nonviolent resister not only refuses to shoot his opponent but he also refuses to hate him. At the center of non-violence stands the principle of love. Someone must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate.

We speak of love which is expressed in the Greek word *agape*. *Agape* means understanding, redeeming good will for all. It is the love of God operating in the human heart. *Agape* seeks the good of his neighbor. *Agape* makes no distinction between friend and enemy; it is directed toward both. *Agape* springs from the need of the other person.

God's love is eternal. St. Paul assures us that the loving act of redemption was done "while we were yet sinners" It is love in action. The cross is the eternal expression of the length to which God will go in order to restore broken community. The resurrection is a symbol of God's triumph over all the forces that seek to block community. All life is interrelated. All men are brothers. To the degree that I harm my brother I am harming myself.

(Sixth) it is based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice. The believer in nonviolence has deep faith in the future. For he knows that in his struggle for justice he has cosmic companionship.