

September 19, 2017

Dear CRC Family,

There have been various news and social media reports about this past Friday night at CRC. It's important to us that we relay what actually happened for our community.

Prior to Friday evening, we had decided to make CRC a safe place for people protesting the verdict of the Stockley case. The First Unitarian Church (across the street) had also decided to keep its doors open. Many holy spaces are opening their doors in a similar capacity. However, we did not know that the Central West End would be the main site for that evening's protest. Our Shabbat services happened per usual and ended around 9:00 pm.

When services ended, somebody noticed that a march was moving west on Waterman. A number of our congregants with our Rabbis went outside and watched a peaceful group of around 1,000 people go by.

Around 10:00 pm, demonstrators started to stream into the synagogue. Rabbi Randy went outside and spoke to one of the dozens of officers in riot gear standing in formation across Waterman. The officer explained that there had been a few people in the march who had peeled off and committed acts of vandalism including throwing something at Mayor Krewson's home. At that point the police mobilized, said that the demonstration was no longer sanctioned, and pushed the protestors east. The protestors were blocked by police vehicles at Kingshighway and eventually were dispersed East and West by officers clearing the intersection with tear gas. The officer said that anyone could go into the building and they wouldn't be perused.

In this instance, our building and that of the Unitarian Church were accessible at the right time and in the right place. We were able to accommodate the protestors (numbering at least 200) fleeing the scene who were tired, scared, relieved, grateful to be inside, and above all, peaceful. There were a number of CRC members who had come in from the march, including young adult children of CRC members who had grown up in our congregation. Many of our local clergy friends and Wash U students were part of this group as well. Once they were inside, Rabbi Susan and Rabbi Randy stepped out to have a conversation with the officers present. Our Rabbis were told that anyone who came into CRC needed to remain inside while the police cleared demonstrators on Kingshighway, but would remain safe. They informed them that if anyone left, they would be subject to arrest, and as soon as they had cleared and secured Kingshighway, those inside would be free to leave. The one caveat was that if anyone leaving matched people they had on video committing the earlier vandalism, the police would reserve the right to arrest those individuals.

Our Rabbis relayed to the people in the synagogue that information. All streets were blocked, so even those congregants who had been with us for services and had not previously left were unable to leave CRC. We all took care of each other inside, one of the teenage sons of our congregants had a great time serving cups of water, and we were able to accommodate and comfort as we could.

Nobody left the synagogue, and nobody came in during this time. People gathered in the oneg room, the living room area, library, and the sanctuary. There was no agitating of the police. There were no negative incidents.

At around midnight, we were told by an officer that people were free to leave. Nobody who left was arrested. By 1:00 am, everybody but Rabbi Susan, Rabbi Randy, KB Frazier, Ron, Terrell, and Shira had left CRC.

We believe we provided a holy service to peaceful demonstrators. If our doors were not open, many innocent people may have been hurt or arrested for being in an illegal gathering. We talk about being a 'shelter of peace,' and a 'sanctuary,' time and time again. One of the reasons we are a Jewish congregation in the city is to be a supportive voice, an ear, an outlet to people seeking justice. We are proud that we again lived up to our most precious values.

If you have questions, please feel free to direct them to Nancy at 314-361-1564 ext. 105.

B'Ahavah (in love),

*Rabbi Randy*

*Rabbi Susan*

*Nancy Weigley*

Executive Director