

Reflections From Phoenix

Rev Jake Morrill - UUA Trustee, Thomas Jefferson District

I was in Phoenix yesterday for the same reason I went to D.C. last fall to march for Marriage Equality: because what is at stake is the safety of families. Because what is at stake is which future our nation will claim. And because the church I serve in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, has taught me that showing up matters.

I support a sane, comprehensive immigration policy. Scapegoating low-income workers--whether in Arizona or my own Tennessee--is not the way forward. A few weeks ago, with teens from Oak Ridge, I was able to spend time in Mexico, learning first-hand about the over-population and poverty that send people north. I was humbled by what people would suffer for the sake of their families. I have been inspired by how Arizonans, including those of our faith, have stood on the side of love in the face of vicious and cynical treatment.

So, at 4:30 in the morning, I arrived at the Arizona State Capitol, where a group--mostly Latina women--maintained a continuous prayer vigil for the 103 days since Senate Bill 1070 was passed. Behind a banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a few dozen of us made a slow procession from the Capitol toward Trinity Cathedral, where there would be a 6:00 AM worship service. Uncharacteristically for Phoenix, the dawn sky was mottled and gloomy. There had been rain. Even though the women I walked with sang songs in Spanish that were rich in faith, I myself wasn't so sure what the day might hold. The night prior, three Phoenix officers had been shot--one fatally--so the police could be expected to be full of feeling. We had been warned we'd encounter angry counter-demonstrators. But as we approached Trinity, someone pointed to the sky and said, "Look!" There it was: stretched out over downtown Phoenix, a rainbow. In the story of Noah in Genesis, a rainbow appears as a sign of the enduring presence of God. For me, this rainbow had the same message. When I say the presence of God, I mean the courage in the grandmothers I walked

with. When I say the presence of God, I mean the power and the joy in the yellow-shirted Unitarian Universalists out front of Trinity--and seemingly everywhere throughout the hours after, from the church to the streets to the county jail. When I say the presence of God, I mean the reassurance that welled up in me at the sight of that rainbow. The reassurance that love is stronger than fear, that a stubborn, unifying faith will prevail over hot anger and spite. It was in this spirit that I joined my brothers and sisters for a day of public witness on the day that SB1070 went into effect. Even though a partial injunction had delayed some of the bill, Maricopa County's Sherriff Joe Arpaio had promised raids and sweeps, and the environment which would allow such a law remained. It was important that people show up, walking, singing, praying, and chanting in the light of love. In the face of hatred masquerading as law, it's important that people stand up, unafraid, as agents of love. And so we did, from every corner of the country, of many ages and colors, stretched out across downtown Phoenix like a rainbow vanquishing gloom. Like the presence of God. As the body of love.

Helmeted police and election-year legislation may present themselves as the face of power. But yesterday, in Phoenix, I was reminded what real power looks like: grandmothers singing and marching amid a rainbow of people joined together, unafraid. It is this power in which my faith resides. *Estamos en la lucha*. We are in the struggle. And it's love that will win.