

UU the Vote MTM Video

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

UU the Vote, voter suppression, public discourse, faith-based strategy, community building, Covid-19 impact, virtual organizing, multiracial democracy, spiritual response, public policy failure, election calls, partner organizations, theological grounding, action items, relaunch.

SPEAKERS

Nicole Pressley



Nicole Pressley 00:05

Like many of you, I remember President Susan Frederick-Gray's call to UU the Vote at General Assembly in 2019. So many were energized after witnessing the 2016 election, where political violence, racism, misogyny all became normal public discourse, and the 2018 election, where voter suppression and disenfranchisement played a significant role in states like Georgia. We know none of that was isolated. We were living through a moment of deep pain and suffering, but like today it was also a moment of tremendous possibility, more and more people were waking up to how deeply exclusion and oppression were embedded in our systems and institutions. Now, as a person of faith, I tend to believe that we can speak things into existence, but one speech, one call to action cannot create an intentional plan to reach a goal. Behind that speech was coordination to make sure UU the Vote was not simply a get out the vote initiative, but a plan to combat voter suppression, to bring our values into the public square, and to confront the consequences of leaders choosing their voters instead of voters choosing their leaders. When I joined the UUA as the UU the Vote national organizer, I saw how leaders across the Association developed a strategy that connected the urgency of the moment with our values and our unique role to play. I saw organizers, staff, volunteers, partner organizations help shape the program. I saw surveys and listening sessions to help us understand where our efforts could have the greatest impact. I saw communication strategies developed to inspire resources raised to sustain the work and theological grounding offered to remind us why it mattered, and I saw partner organizations with our state action networks grow across the country. All of that assessment, all of that relationship building, and visioning made it possible for hundreds of people to answer the call when UU the Vote officially launched in January 2020. And then, just a few months later, many of those plans disappeared. Covid 19 changed everything. And there's another lesson about strategy: It is not a rigid plan. Strategy is a roadmap. It provides clarity of purpose while remaining adaptable to changing conditions. When circumstances force us to pivot, and they will, strategy helps keep our north star in sight. And because strategy is built in relationships and in community, it ensures that our most valuable resource - hint, it is your people - it can help determine what comes next. The work that happened before I arrived allowed me to call state action networks, congregational leaders, partner organizations, and ask, What do you need? How are you adapting what skills and assets exist in your communities to forge a new path, not simply because we could no

longer organize in person, but because we were living through a public health crisis and a profound failure of public policy that was at the heart of what UU the Vote was seeking to address. Lives were being lost, and we knew our organizing needed to be responsive to the moment, the political moment, but also the spiritual one. In March of 2020 I began taking late night walks, mostly because there was nowhere else to go. The streets were empty. I would pass homes glowing with light, with families gathered around kitchen tables and television screens. I would walk past dark storefronts and shuttered businesses. I remember seeing a hopeful message on the church sign in my neighborhood, and I would just cry, and as I walked, I listened to one song over and over again. We shall be known by the company we keep, by the ones who circle around to tend these fires. We shall be known by the ones who sow and reap the seeds of change alive from deep within the earth. It is time now. It is time now that we thrive. In a month later, with the help of Jen Heyman and her team, we organized a virtual choir to sing. We shall be known as a part of the UU the Vote relaunch called How We Thrive. We leaned on AV teams, tech staff, volunteers, organizers, trainers, and countless dedicated UUs across the country. Together, they helped 1000s of people learn new technologies, organize virtually, make more than 600,000 calls in that election, and over the past six years nearly 14,000 people have taken some action with UU the Vote, because we have returned to the same cycle again and again, assessing the moment we're in understanding the conditions and anchoring in our values. UU the Vote is the practice of faithful and courageous strategy, and one that has helped us build a multiracial democracy and a world where we can all thrive. Thank you.