

Vermilion vigil for racial justice draws crowd

Dylan Reynolds
The Chronicle-Telegram
Jun 01, 2020 6:00 AM

VERMILION — A Lorain resident, Elyria Schools substitute teacher and licensed minister shared her experiences with racism at a vigil for racial justice held Sunday evening at the United Church of Christ Congregational in Vermilion.

“What I do vividly remember, still to this day as an adult, is two men riding down the street in a pickup truck and screaming the n-word violently at us kids,” said Paris Johnson, recalling her first experience with racism, walking to school as a child. “I stopped in my tracks, I turned around and I ran as fast as I could back into the arms of my mother and I was crying.”

Johnson, who is black, was invited to speak at the event planned as the nation processes through the May 25 death of a black man, George Floyd, in the custody of Minneapolis police.

A crowd of church members and others who had heard of the event online stood in the grass in front of the church, some holding signs urging an end to racism, as they listened to presentations from Johnson, senior pastor Melinda Quellhorst and missions chair Karen Rossi. The vigil stayed peaceful.

Johnson said dealing with the effects of racism is a regular struggle in black families, and she has grown weary of generations having to have conversations with their kids about avoiding suspicion from police and others while going about everyday activities like jogging.

“My oldest son is going to turn 6 July 2, and I’m not ready to have these talks with him. I’m just not,” she said, adding that their Christian household has, in a way, shielded him from the realities of racism.

Concerned citizens should write letters to their local police departments and governments, she said.

Rossi, acknowledging that she hesitated to discuss the incident, shared that her daughter had been accosted and threatened by passersby earlier in the day when holding a sign beside a local road asking drivers to “honk for justice.”

“We need to show up, stand up and speak out. Today I was told to stay home, be quiet, sit down. We almost gave in, but we didn’t,” she said.

Quellhorst said that realizing her own privilege as a white person makes her sad, recalling times when hearing stories from people of color broke her heart and motivated her to advocate for racial justice.

“Black lives do matter,” she said. “God’s spirit is moving and breathing through us, and we need to take a stand. A stand with God and a stand in love for our brothers and sisters of all colors.”

Attendees finished the vigil by praying for racial reconciliation and a collection bucket was available to be donated to charitable organizations supporting racial justice.