

MLK memories

Continued from Page 1

The event kicked off with an annual interfaith prayer gathering in front of the Gallup Cultural Center that drew about 75 people. Led by members of the McKinley Worker Justice Coalition, the group marched to the city recreation center, where a larger crowd was gathering. The marchers were accompanied by police and fire department escorts and followed by a city bus and garbage truck – symbols of the Civil Rights Movement's battles for equality.

While waiting for the program to begin, local Catholic Sister Marie Rachelle Cruz talked about her participation. Cruz, originally from the Philippines, read the Christian prayer during the interfaith prayer gathering.

"I really relate to the legacy of Martin Luther King – peace and justice and nonviolence and equal rights," Cruz said, explaining that as a member of the Daughters of Charity, her religious vocation is to serve the poor and those in need of justice and equality.

Civil rights memories

Jijon, the first speaker, explained she grew up as a white student in predominately black schools, and she grew up within the Jewish faith tradition "where we are taught to always remember our teachers and to believe in the power of sacred stories." After King was assassinated, she said, the country was gripped with both grief and fear.

Jijon said she went to school the next morning and experienced an amazing day created by compassionate



Cayla Nimmo/For the Independent

A group of about 50 people cross Miyamura bridge as they marched from the cultural center to Larry Brian Mitchell Recreation Center Monday for Martin Luther King Day.

teachers who – in the midst of a national tragedy – grasped that teachable moment and spent the day supporting and comforting their students.

"And the seed was planted, from that day forward I knew I had to become an educator," Jijon said, explaining she has spent more than 40 years as a teacher, mostly in the field of adult education where many of the students come from the margins of society.

Rogers shared his civil rights era memories of being a Midwestern college student who volunteered to conduct a survey in a black community in Mississippi.

"When you come down and you cross the Mississippi River into Mississippi, the police will be waiting for you," Rogers recalled volunteers being warned. They were told

not to bring pocket knives or have bottles in their car, and they were instructed to stop at every railroad crossing so police wouldn't have an excuse to stop them.

As Rogers and three fellow volunteers drove across the state border, the police were indeed waiting. And when the group arrived at their host's home later that evening, they learned the house had been firebombed in the past.

"I had a hard time falling asleep," Rogers said. "This was America, the land of freedom? So I was in shock."

As he conducted his survey work, Rogers said, family after family showed him the bullet holes in their homes where white teenagers had conducted "target practice shooting" in black neighborhoods.

Drum major of justice

Frazier shared her memories of growing up in segregated New Orleans, where she and her siblings attended all black schools, studied with battered textbooks handed down from white schools, rode in the back of public buses and sat on the black side of her family's Catholic church.

"That was the most Deep South you can get as far as racism," she said of her childhood.

"Dr. King wanted us as children at those days to be able to have the same privileges as the white students did," Frazier said, adding she went on to become the first member of her family to attend an integrated school.

Frazier urged the audience

to honor King's legacy in their own lives.

"Just continue to live the life that you're living and treating each other as you want to be treated yourself," she said. "We're all human, and we're to love each other as God loved us."

Davis, a native of Georgia, offered the crowd a rousing speech in the tradition of King and other African-American preachers and civil rights leaders. He began by describing King as "one of the greatest drum majors of justice the world has ever known."

Noting President Donald Trump's history of "racial behavior" and the "crazy and ignorant things that come out of his mouth," Davis told the audience, "We still have a fight to fight."

"Whenever you see racism or prejudice rear its head, don't step back," Davis said. "Don't be afraid. Confront it. The only way evil can stand is when good people step back and say nothing."

After concluding his remarks, Davis led the crowd in singing "We Shall Overcome," an anthem of the civil rights movement.

Ettie Anderson, a Gallup resident formally from Sawmill, Arizona, held a stranger's hand and joined in the singing. Afterward, Anderson said it was the first time she had attended the MLK event, but she came because of her frustration with current American politics and government.

"We have to make a change, make a difference," she said of her motivation.

Anderson said she was glad she attended, adding, "It was a really positive message that they shared."