

South Shore UMC Taking It to the Street

One Matters Award

South Shore United Methodist Church

Chicago, Illinois

Last year, South Shore UMC in Chicago began a campaign of prayer and fasting that led to efforts to increase the engagement of the church in the community. We started by inviting members, business owners, and other community representatives to dinner for conversation regarding concerns in the community. This led to our joining with community partners to conduct prayer vigils on a troubled corner in the area that was plagued by vagrancy and illicit activities. The pastor, Rev.

Adonna Davis Reid and members offered prayer to those passing by on foot and even in cars and buses with signs that read “Honk if You Want Prayer.”

The ministry expanded and the church began offering prayer and coffee in front of the church which is located on the same busy street, across from a school. As children, teachers, and parents gather on the playground before school, they are serenaded by upbeat, inspirational songs and, of course, prayer through our sound system. This has proven to be a great witness to our concern for our neighbors and the power and presence of God as we continued this practice even through the winter months. We have gained at least one new member, in part, through this ministry.



As the weather permitted last year, we also took the congregation outside the church for the celebration of communion, a practice we expect to continue this summer. On the first such occasion, as the elements were being passed by the Communion stewardesses, Rev. Reid prayed aloud and encouraged people to pray with their eyes open—noticing everything that was going on around us.

We prayed for the people passing by, for the workers in the schoolyard across the street, for the mega-church across the parking lot from us, people in the buses and cars. Some drivers honked in acknowledgement of what we were doing. Perhaps the most memorable moment was when the stewardesses went across the street to offer communion to the people at the bus stop and the police officers who had stopped their cars to observe what we were doing. Two young men came to take communion with the police. Given the stereotype of the strain and mistrust between the African-American community and the police at the time, it was so moving for everyone involved to see the power of the Table to bring people together on earth as it is in heaven!

We baptized 12 people the following week, several of whom chose to receive that sacrament in Lake Michigan (a first for us) and this year, we have taken in four new members so far. We began and continue to persevere in prayer both inside and outside of the church, following where and to whom God leads us.

