



LISTEN TO THE CHILDREN

a Plea for Peace in Plainfield

“Love One Another”

by Sharleen Leahy

PLAINFIELD, NJ – May 20, 2011



A few weeks ago a friend of mine lost her son, an innocent bystander who was a victim of gun violence in Plainfield. He passed away at the age of 45. His crime was being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

On Friday, May 20, 2011 the rain stopped, the sky opened and the children, mothers and grandmothers of Plainfield pleaded for peace. Steven Hatcher, a local organizer for Peoples Organization for Progress (POP), along with church leaders and peace activists from the surrounding area, joined residents who marched along West Third St. from

Prescott Place to Plainfield Ave. Carrying signs and peace flags they chanted: "Stop the Killing . . . Love One Another."

This past year, a record number of lives have been lost to gun violence in Plainfield but statistics which count the dead and wounded do not convey the full measure of the damage done in this community of 50,000. Devastated families left behind are struggling with their pain. During the march a local woman wheeling a baby carriage pointed to a toddler no more than two years of age. "My granddaughter here lost her father to a shooting just last year" she explained as the little girl watched.

"People here have become prisoners in their own homes," lamented Steven Hatcher, an organizer of the rally, as he told of his encounters with fearful residents earlier in the week as he attempted to hand out flyers. However, as the march began a few residents, some too terrified to even open their doors during the past week, peered out their windows, saw the demonstrators and came out to cheer and applaud what was happening. Soon local residents witnessed an even



Plainfield Mayor Sharon Robinson-Briggs

more hopeful sight: members of rival gangs appeared and began marching together.

At a post-march rally Mayor Sharon Robinson-Briggs spoke movingly as she stood beside the leaders of the two gangs who earlier in the week had publicly signed a truce. The young men pledged to stop the bloody feud that had fueled so much senseless death and terror in the city.

They pledged to seek common ground to find solutions to the crises gripping their young lives. As she reminded the young men that the children of Plainfield and their parents were counting on them to make good on their promise, Mayor Robinson-Briggs sealed their agreement with a warm embrace. She declared her commitment to let this "historic day be the beginning of a movement to bring hope to the devastated community where youth are lacking basic services, especially vocational education and job opportunities. As the rally came to a close one young man in the audience took the microphone to share his story:

"I was locked up in the State Penitentiary for 5 years where I earned \$1.47 A DAY!
Now I'm back home and all I want is a JOB... I'll do anything ... cut grass, wash cars... anything.
And I can't find a single job to earn money just so I can SURVIVE."

A great poet once said, "when truth is replaced by silence, silence is a lie." The mainstream media constantly reports on gang violence and crime in our cities but what they hardly ever mention are the TRILLIONS of our tax dollars being wasted in the endless wars in the Middle East and over 800 foreign bases all across the globe. The violence that our political class inflicts on the peoples of other nations manifests in violence right here in the streets of our cities. The politicians in power have drained our communities by denying funds for education and jobs, denying hope for millions of youth. Gangs, crime, drug addiction and senseless violence are the result. If we care about the future of the children in Plainfield we must stop telling other nations how to make peace and end our own violence. We must demand of our politicians that they end the wars and use our tax dollars to take care of our people here at home. As Martin Luther King once said, "There is nothing, except a tragic death wish, to prevent us from reordering our priorities, so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war."

For more information contact Steven Hatcher, Peoples Organization for Progress (Plainfield Branch) at (908) 731-1518.

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