



Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel
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January 7, 2018

It was a joy and comfort to see so many of you on Tuesday night for the multi-faith community prayer service we hosted at Mt. Carmel for the victims of the Belmont fire. The church was packed with people and, more importantly, it was filled with palpable love for each other, faith in God, and hope for eternal life.

In the days immediately following the fire, we offered masses for the deceased, but as I spent more time with the families and saw the reaction of our diverse neighborhood, it became clear that we should also host a prayer service for people of all faiths. Many of those who died were not Catholic and there was a need to bring everyone together in God's presence.

A multi-faith prayer service does not portend to be a moment of perfect unity of belief. We don't cover up our differences or sweep them under the rug. We recognize we are divided in our theology, but united in our humanity. We are all children of God. Therefore, in a setting like this, more than praying "together", we are praying in each other's presence. As I looked out into the congregation and counted more than fifty clergy members from more than a dozen faith communities in our church, I tried to look at them as God looks at us. He longs for our unity, and is patient in bringing us to the fullness of truth.

One family member of the deceased came up to me at the end of the service and told me that she is Pentecostal, but comes into our church every day on her way to work to say a prayer. "I always wondered if I was really allowed in here", she said, "since I am not Catholic. I always come up to this first pew, kneel down, and talk to God. But after tonight, I know that I was meant to be here all along. God is present here, and I feel at home".

This week we will work with local politicians and Catholic Charities to make sure everyone who has been directly affected by this fire gets the help they need, especially housing. We will give you more information this weekend about how you can help.

God bless,

Fr. Jonathan