

MLK WANTS YOUR VOTE

It was in the mid-60s. We were in Los Angeles soon after leaving our church in Washington. Not long after the Kennedy assassination. Before the infamous Watt's riots. Just across the Alameda separating white suburbia from Central Los Angeles.

Some of the ministers in our inter-racial urban cluster of Christian Churches were talking. Some were going to Alabama. Something to do with Martin Luther King. He was organizing people to register voters.

I didn't go. I didn't get it. Go to Alabama? Register voters?

Clergy and seminarians were going by the planeload and busload to Selma, Alabama. TV news would show crowds walking down the middle of streets. There would be other people along the sides of the street taunting and shouting. There were police and police dogs. I worried about my friends. What was the point?

They would be marching to Birmingham. I didn't know where Selma was. Not even Birmingham. But soon everyone would know and it wasn't pretty.

I don't remember anyone talking about voting.

Over the years I began to see that there was more to the Civil Rights movement than getting equal access to schools and parks and busses and universities and public places and jobs and housing. Non-violent sit-ins and marches and going to jail were the big news people talked about.

But the big issue was voting. The powerful economic and political establishment did not want everyone to be able to vote. King believed voting rights were essential.

Here we are over 50 years later celebrating only the 3rd individual with a designated national holiday. I always observed Martin Luther King Day celebrations. I've attended many. I've walked. I've helped plant trees in the Martin Luther King Grove.

But I know this just doesn't do it. Hearing "I have a dream..." doesn't do it. Naming a street or park or school after him doesn't do it. Praising him for his place in history doesn't do it. Lighting candles and joining hands and singing "We Shall Overcome Some Day" doesn't do it. Going on a walk arm in arm in a parade down Main Street doesn't do it. A million people marching on Washington doesn't do it.

What will do it is voting. In our last election almost half of us did not vote. Nothing else does it if we don't vote. MLK still wants your vote.