

Dr. Josie Johnson honored by Temple Israel

Written by

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Upon the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington, Dr. Josie Johnson has been honored with the prestigious Rabbi Max A. Shapiro Tzadik Award at Temple Israel in Minneapolis for her lifetime commitment to the struggle for civil rights and social justice.

Johnson joins Father Michael O'Connell, former Vice President Walter Mondale and Associate Supreme Court Justice Alan Page as the fourth annual recipient of this award given by Temple Israel. The award is named for the late Rabbi Max A. Shapiro, who served Temple Israel and the greater community for more than 40 years. Rabbi Shapiro was a visionary with a passion for learning, a quest for social justice and an undying faith in humankind.

"Rabbi Shapiro believed we needed to do more than applaud or support civil rights legislation," Johnson said upon receiving the award on October 18. "He declared, 'We must do more. Now, my friend, it is time to do more! I ask you to do more!'"

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“The March on Washington 50 years ago called for the redress of the evils of white supremacy and economic deprivation,” Johnson continued. “These old grievances still exist and may be more deeply etched in the fabric of our society than we realize.

“I would like to have seen the dream of the 1963 March on Washington come true. I thought the election of President Obama represented Dr. King's dream that ‘...some day my four little children will be judged by the content of their character, not the color of their skin.’ However, unfortunately...the laws of denial were too deeply rooted in the fabric of American life for Dr. King's ‘child,’ President Obama, to be judged by the content of his character alone.

“The Rabbi urged us to do more, and I ask you to do more,” Johnson said.

Presenting the award before dignitaries, past award winners, congregants and friends, Temple Israel Senior Rabbi Marcia A. Zimmerman declared:

“Tzadik is the Hebrew word for righteous person. It is said that such righteous people live among us, and in Josie Johnson, we know that is true. She has fought for many years for fair housing practices, equal voting rights, equal employment, full educational opportunities, and the elimination of poverty and racism. We are blessed to be able to call her our friend and honor her with the Rabbi Max A. Shapiro Tzadik Award.

“Josie Johnson has been a friend to Temple Israel and the Jewish community since the early years,” Zimmerman added. “She and Rabbi Shapiro found themselves on the same side of many issues over many years as they fought for civil rights in Minneapolis and sought to strengthen cross cultural ties.

“When her own daughter died in a tragic plane crash with Congressman Mickey Leland in 1989, it was the Jewish community that Josie partnered with to memorialize her daughter's passion for social justice.”

In memory of her daughter and Congressman Leland, Johnson founded a nonprofit organization called Leland-Johnson Common Vision, which brings together African-American and Jewish high school students to dispel myths and stereotypes, promote understanding, and develop leaders who will fight racism and anti-Semitism.