

NAACP's Esther Lee: "We're done dying"

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing June 7, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts on the George Floyd killing 

"To end the vigil, Lee called across Payrow Plaza to two Bethlehem police officers, asking them to stand beside her. She then led the crowd in the singing of 'We Shall Overcome,' an anthem of the civil rights movement."

Does anyone know if the police complied? Pictures? Maybe those of you who dwell in Facebook will know.

from Jon Harris, "Somber Bethlehem vigil, energetic Allentown youth march, calls for change following killing of George Floyd." Morning Call, June 6, 2020.

As mourners gathered in George Floyd's North Carolina hometown for his funeral Saturday, demonstrators marched in Allentown, prayed in Bethlehem and protested in cities across the country, demanding that the 46-year-old black man's death at the hands of police triggers change.

Leading that call at a midday vigil in Bethlehem that drew a couple hundred people was Esther Lee, a longtime activist and president of Bethlehem's NAACP who has been organizing peaceful rallies for equality and against injustice for decades. Wearing a mask and her signature hat, the 86-year-old said the pandemic and a bad knee couldn't keep her from speaking out. She started the rally by reiterating Floyd's last words: "I can't breathe."

"I'm just as fired up as I was when I was 16," Lee said. "I like to tell people, 'I've got a bad knee, but there's nothing wrong with my mouth.'"

Like most of the demonstrations that Floyd's death ignited across the country, the ones in Bethlehem and Allentown were peaceful.

“Coming out of here, it’s really where we go with it,” [Allentown Police Chief] Granitz said of the community engagement.

That’s where the attention of Lee, longtime leader of the Bethlehem NAACP, is focused. She said the group will be meeting with Bethlehem police to make sure good comes out of the protests, rallies and vigils.

Lee, who fought much of her life to overcome bigotry and was the first African American elected to the Bethlehem Area School Board, said they’re going to work in Bethlehem to help combat racism.

“It’s not over, and we’re done dying,” she said. “We’re done dying.”

To end the vigil, Lee called across Payrow Plaza to two Bethlehem police officers, asking them to stand beside her. She then led the crowd in the singing of “We Shall Overcome,” an anthem of the civil rights movement.

The crowd then went silent, for 8 minutes and 46 seconds — how long Floyd lay handcuffed in the street with Chauvin kneeling on his neck.

When the silence ended, Lee spoke again — as she plans to keep doing.

“I can’t breathe,” she said once more. “Amen! Bless you.”