

## MAHONING VALLEY

### SOJOURN TO THE PAST

Students from Youngstown high schools participate in a ten day journey to Civil Rights sites in the South called **Sojourn to the Past**. They travel to Atlanta, Selma, Montgomery, Birmingham, Meridian and Hattiesburg (Mississippi), Jackson, Little Rock and Memphis, and they meet many of the people who participated in the Civil Rights Movement such as:

- Congressman John Lewis, icon of the Movement
- Jimmy Webb, who at sixteen stood up to the sheriff in Selma in 1965 when he asked to pray at the court house
- Rev. Clark Olson, who was with Rev. James Reeb when he was killed the day after Bloody Sunday in Selma
- Mrs. McNair, the remaining mother of one of the four little girls killed by the Klan in the church bombing in Birmingham
- Elizabeth Eckford and Minnijean Brown Trickey of the Little Rock Nine.

They also learn the lessons of the Movement such as:

- Compassion
- Nonviolence
- tolerance
- Justice
- Forgiveness
- Civic responsibility
- Not being a silent witness

Youngstown Sojourn students meet weekly for several months before taking the journey to help with fund raising and to prepare for the trip. They read Congressman John Lewis's book, Walking With the Wind, and answer study guide questions. In the spring, students fly to Atlanta where they meet Jeff Steinberg, creator and director of Sojourn to the Past, as well as many students from California high schools. This is a working trip. The students have lessons before meeting speakers or going to any historical sites, and they have homework daily such as articles to read, questions to answer, letters to write to speakers, and a journal to keep. In Atlanta, they have workshops on the principles of nonviolence and institutionalized racism. They learn that during the Civil Rights Movement, people were willing to suffer, even die trying to gain equal rights. Students are constantly asked, **"What are you willing to put your life on the line for? How are you going to make a difference when you go home?"** In Memphis, students meet as a school system to develop an action plan to implement when they return home. Youngstown Sojourn students' action plans included:

- Since many died in the South just trying to register to vote, in 2007 and 2008, Youngstown Sojourn students decided to focus on voter registered. Over 500 high school and YSU students were registered to vote.
- In 2009, the Sojourn students designed a nonviolence week for Youngstown schools which included a nonviolence workshop, PA announcements and a nonviolence word wall. Five nonviolence billboards were displayed around the city. Minnijean Brown Trickey, one of the Little Rock Nine, came and trained the Sojourn students to be facilitators for the

workshops. The students designed and sold over 1700 nonviolence t-shirts.

The mayor and city council passed resolutions declaring the week of October 2-8, 2009 Nonviolence Week in the city.

- The 2010 Sojourn students continued with voter registration and Nonviolence Week. They petitioned the school board, the city council, and the YSU trustees asking them to make the first week in October annually Nonviolence Week, which they all did.
- The 2011 Sojourn students continued voter registration and voter education. They organized the Nonviolence Parade and Rally for October 2, 2011 in downtown Youngstown and planned numerous activities for Nonviolence Week in the schools. At the students' request, **Congressman John Lewis** spoke to high school students at East High on October 11<sup>th</sup>.
- The 2012/2013 students continued voter registration, Nonviolence Week and the Nonviolence Parade/Rally, with the goal to make the parade/rally bigger and better. Awards were given for the best float and banner.
- On July 11, 2013, **Governor Kasich signed Sojourn's "Nonviolence Week in Ohio" bill**, making Nonviolence Week permanent in Ohio.

**This is a life changing trip! Students realize they have the power to make a difference in their own lives and in their schools and communities, and they can make that difference right now.**

(website [www.mvsojourntothepast.com](http://www.mvsojourntothepast.com))

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## LEARNING THE LESSONS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

### Principles of Nonviolence

- I. **Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.**
- II. **Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding.**
- III. **Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice not people.**
- IV. **Nonviolence hopes that suffering can educate and transform.**
- V. **Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate.**
- VI. **Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice.**