News



Lori Lightfoot speaks April 13, 2016, at a Chicago Police Accountability Task Force press event at the Harold Washington Library's Winter Garden in Chicago. (Flickr/Daniel X. O'Neil, CC-2.0)



by Heidi Schlumpf

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Lori Lightfoot made history April 2 in Chicago, winning a runoff election that will make her the first African American woman to lead the city and its first openly gay mayor.

A relative unknown who had never held public office before, Lightfoot noted in her acceptance speech, "Nobody gave us much of a chance."

"We were up against powerful interests, a powerful machine and a powerful mayor," she said to her supporters.

But recalling the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s advice that "faith is taking the first step when you can't see the staircase," Lightfoot said her campaign had an "abiding faith in a city, in people and its future" and took those first steps.

"As Father Mike says, we let our faith overcome our fears," she said.

"Father Mike" is Michael Pfleger, the longtime pastor of St. Sabina Catholic Church on Chicago's South Side, an outspoken antiviolence and justice advocate for people of color.

Although she is not Catholic, Lightfoot and Pfleger are friends, he told NCR.

Pfleger said he was excited about the victory, in which Lightfoot won all 50 of Chicago's wards against longtime Chicago politician Toni Preckwinkle, who is also African American.

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>
> —Lori Lightfoot
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"I think she's going to be great," he said. "But people need to undergird her and support her because she has a hell of a task in front of her."

Financial problems as well as neighborhoods plagued by gun violence are among the challenges Lightfoot will inherit from outgoing Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

Pfleger also attended a "unity event" the morning after the election, which brought together Lightfoot, Preckwinkle, the Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr. and other religious and community leaders at the Rainbow PUSH Coalition National Headquarters on the South Side.

At the event, Pfleger expressed optimism and hope for the future.

"I believe if we all come together ... and do what's best for the people of Chicago, Chicago ain't seen nothing yet," he said. "It's a new day."

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