

Opinion: Like Minneapolis, Memphis doesn't have an 'immigration problem'

By G. Scott Morris, Special to The Daily Memphian

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SPECIAL TO THE DAILY
MEMPHIAN

G. Scott Morris



The Rev. Dr. G. Scott Morris, M.D., is founder of Church Health. He is a regular contributor to The Daily Memphian.

On the Saturday of the ice storm, when Memphis felt hushed and fragile, something quietly remarkable took place.

At Global Cafe, a small restaurant based at Crosstown Concourse born from the courage of refugees, the stoves stayed on.

Politics roundup: Trump non-endorsement, ICE and ice, campaign reports

While streets glazed over and the city held its breath, the staff cooked and delivered more than 200 hot meals for people who were at risk of being left out in the cold.

Hands that once crossed borders now crossed counters. Steam rose. Food went into boxes. Neighbors ate.

No sirens, no speeches — just care.

That same spirit unfolded in smaller, ordinary ways on my own street.

One neighbor baked cookies and delivered them to our door. My wife, Mary, made dinner for an elderly couple who have always looked out for others but now couldn't safely get out. A University of Memphis professor cleared ice from the sidewalk, not because it was required but because it was needed. Then later, his two boys, ages 12 and 13, came over to our house to watch football, bringing noise and laughter and the unspoken confidence that they belonged.

Federal troop deployments to US cities cost taxpayers \$496M and counting

None of it made the news. All of it mattered.

I've carried those images with me as I've watched events unfolding in Minneapolis where immigration enforcement has surged beyond what even Chicago experienced.

Federal agents killed two protesters, more protestors filled the streets and the presence of Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents has driven a sense of unrest.

It is a city, proxy to us all, grappling with profound questions about power, trust and belonging.

Memphis' story is different.

Sanford: Is Memphis cooperating with immigration crackdown? The answer is debatable.

Mayor Paul Young has chosen, again and again, a path grounded in what is best for this city. Faced with unacceptable levels of violent crime, he has worked with local, state and federal partners to reduce violence, and the results have mattered. Fewer shootings. Fewer grieving families. Lives spared.

At the same time, like authorities in Minneapolis, Young has been clear and consistent in opposing the presence of ICE. He understands what many of us see every day.

Like Minneapolis, Memphis doesn't have an "immigration problem." We welcome our neighbors. Introducing immigration enforcement into our neighborhoods does not make us safer; it fractures trust, drives fear underground and harms families who are already contributing quietly and faithfully to the life of this city.

The National Guard's role here has been supportive, not threatening, an extension of care rather than control. During the ice storm, guard members cleared roads, assisted stranded drivers and helped keep people safe.

Even in public safety efforts, their role has been bounded and purposeful, aimed at stabilizing a city under strain, not policing belonging.

Memphis mayor responds to Noem: 'There has been no collaboration with ICE on immigration'

These distinctions matter.

At Church Health, we care for many immigrant families. They are parents and workers, neighbors and friends.

Lately, fear has been arriving in the exam room before they do. Fear of being noticed, fear of driving, fear something ordinary could suddenly become dangerous.

That fear puts a knot in my stomach because health depends on trust — and so does community.

You can't heal a body, or a city, when people are afraid to show up.

Herrington: Noem invoked Memphis to defend Minneapolis killing. She's wrong about both cities.

That is why in the last week I keep returning to the icy Saturday.

People who once knew displacement chose generosity. Neighbors chose one another. They baked cookies, cleared sidewalks, shared meals and watched football. For a moment the city felt held together not by authority but by care.

Minneapolis shows us what happens when enforcement becomes the loudest voice in the room. Memphis is showing there is another way.

We can pursue safety without sacrificing dignity. We can reduce violence without exporting fear. We can draw clear lines that protect public safety while affirming immigrant families belong here, that a visit to the doctor, a walk down the street, a knock on the door from a neighbor should never feel dangerous.

Every ice storm teaches the same lesson: We are vulnerable. Systems fail. Plans collapse. And what saves us is not power, but people: neighbors who show up, leaders who choose wisely and communities that refuse to let fear have the final word.

In defense of Minneapolis shooting, Noem invokes Memphis

Community isn't something we declare. It's something we practice; in kitchens and

clinics, on frozen Saturdays and in every choice we make about how we care for one another.

This is the work before us. And every day we have the chance to do it again.

TOPICS

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