

Christian Teen-Agers Demand Return Of School Prayer at Washington Rally

Thirteen crosses from Colorado's Columbine High lined the Mall between the U.S. Capitol and the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C., as Christian youth and adults gathered to "Take a Stand" and to petition the nation's leaders to return prayer to public schools.

In addition to a slate of speakers, musicians and bands, the May 19-21 rally focused on the signing of petitions and a "Jericho prayer march" around the Supreme Court Building, which took place hourly on May 20, beginning at 10 a.m.

As participants circled the building, they petitioned God to intervene and restore prayer in public schools. The seventh and final march took place at 5 p.m., concluding with public prayer and the blowing of Jewish shofars.

Teen delegates from several states carried boxes of signed petitions to the steps of the

Supreme Court building. Later in the week, these petitions were to be hand carried to each state representative. Volunteer Carolyn Eudy estimated that between 10,000 and 15,000 people had signed the petitions.

Rally organizers expressed their belief that the dramatic increase in the rate of violence in American public schools is a direct result of removing prayer from the classroom. "What the Supreme Court was saying in its 1963 decision was that they didn't believe it made a difference whether children prayed in school or not," stated Linda Furr, rally director and president of Truth Broadcasting Company in Charlotte, N.C. "But now they are seeing that it did make a difference—a horrible difference."

Following on the heels of the Million Mom March on the Mall on Mother's Day, which called for Congress to enact stricter gun laws, Take a Stand participants urged Congress to get to the real heart of the matter and return prayer to schools.

"We don't believe that guns do anything. It's the person behind the gun," Furr told Charisma. "We're approaching it from the heart and head. Returning the Bible and prayer to the schools will make a difference where it counts."

Darrell Scott, father of Rachel Scott, one of the 13 victims of the 1999 Columbine High School shooting, told the audience, "Legislation and politicians are not where the answers lie—the answer lies in prayer and in our youth. We should not allow legislation to dictate to our consciences. We need to be obedient like Daniel and pray despite legislation."

Heidi Johnson, a survivor of Columbine, spoke of the emotional aftermath still plaguing students in her school. "Faith in Christ and the return of prayer to our schools is the only answer," she said.

Chip Gillette, a police officer and first on the scene at the

Wedgwood Baptist Church shooting in Fort Worth, Texas, on Sept. 15, 1999, shared a dramatic firsthand account of the gunman's attack. Rebekah Gillette, Chip's daughter who was in the Fort Worth church as the shooting transpired, told Charisma: "What happened has brought the youth closer together. We're more willing to take a stand for what we believe in."

Bad weather forced the cancellation on May 19 of scheduled activities, including speakers William J. Murray, son of Madalyn Murray O'Hair, and Steve Fitzhugh, a former football player with the Denver Broncos.

"We need to empower youth to be bold about their faith," Fitzhugh said. "When they realize they have the Word of God, the power of the resurrection and the person of Jesus Christ on their side, they won't have to worry about taking a stand in their schools."

Whitney Casey, 13, who attended the rally from Grove City, Ohio, said she came to the Washington rally because she believes that "God will hear and answer our prayers in His time."

"It's become so evident to me that we are engaged in a spiritual battle," Furr said. "We've been sitting back hoping for others to do something. But the only way we're going to get prayer back into our schools is to wake up, take a stand and go into the battle."