

Christians Respond to Oakland Shootings With Prayer Service

✖ **March 31, 2009** – Thousands of Christians are expected to gather in Oakland, Calif., tonight for a prayer service aimed at calming tensions that have been rising since a fugitive parolee gunned down four police officers March 21 in the most deadly assault on police since 1970.

“We are praying for the shalom of our city,” said Bishop Bob Jackson, senior pastor of 7,000-member Acts Full Gospel Church of God in Christ and an organizer of the event, to be held at 6 p.m. in the parking lot of Oakland’s Eastmont Mall, located just three blocks from where the shootings occurred.

“[Shalom] means not only peace but the general well-being of our city, and we’re praying for God to begin a work of healing,” Jackson added. “There is pain, hurt, anger, hatred—especially on the part of the ex-parolee community. It’s just a powder keg at this point.”

The prayer service launches an interdenominational, citywide effort dubbed “The 7:14 Crusade,” a reference to the passage in 2 Chronicles promising healing in the land if God’s people pray and turn from wickedness. Formed last Thursday during a meeting of 60 area pastors, the campaign is part of an ongoing effort to soothe tensions sparked by what local media called the most horrific day in Oakland police department history.

On March 21, two motorcycle officers were fatally shot during what police called a routine traffic stop, the *Oakland Tribune* reported. The suspect, 26-year-old Lovelle Mixon, then fled on foot to a nearby apartment building, where he shot three more officers—two fatally—before he was killed.

Since the incident, some in the inner-city community have

worried that police will target area residents whom they perceive to be a threat. "There is a lot of distrust on both sides," Jackson said. "[Some residents] can sympathize with Lovelle Mixon-not with the crimes he's committed but with the position he found himself in" as an ex-offender with what seemed to be few options.

Tension between the black community and police have been heightened recently. On Jan. 1, a transit police officer killed an unarmed black man in an Oakland train station, sparking violent protests across the city. The Oakland police chief resigned later that month to avoid being ousted by the City Council in a no-confidence vote.

"We have some fabulous officers, but like any profession, there are some that do it a disservice," said City Council member Desley Brooks, who represents the area where the shootings occurred.

After the murders, Oakland pastors and church members began walking the neighborhood where the officers were shot, praying with residents.

"We offered counseling services to people, but pastors just going out and knocking on people's doors, I can't tell you what a difference that made," said Brooks, who canvassed the neighborhood with a local pastor, offering prayer. "Churches can play a tremendous role in helping to heal a community by being there when these things occur."

Jackson said tonight the ministers will launch a door-to-door evangelism campaign to reach every home in the city.

"It's an opportunity for the church to rise up in Jesus' name and do what God told us to do in Jesus' name and preach the gospel in our communities," Jackson said. "We have a serious problem here, but not so serious that God can't solve it."

