

# Mayor Fights Crime With Prayer

*An Alabama mayor invited city residents to put on sacks and ashes and gather for a series of prayer rallies to repent. Photo: Mayor Larry Langford and his wife, Melva.*



[] An Alabama mayor pulled out an unusual weapon to fight his city's worsening homicide rate: prayer. Birmingham Mayor Larry Langford invited pastors and city residents to put on sacks and ashes and gather for a series of prayer rallies to repent in an Old Testament-style revival.

"Man has made a mess of things," he said. "Let's try returning our city to God and letting him lead." Langford, who has been in office less than a year, came up with the "sackcloth and ashes" idea after reading the book of Jonah. He was touched by the compassion God showed the city of Nineveh when they repented. "If it worked then," he said, "it will work now."

Roughly 1,000 people attended an April 25 rally held at Birmingham's Boutwell Auditorium. During the prayer meeting, about 20 ministers dabbed everyone's foreheads with ashes, then clothed them in burlap sacks the mayor had purchased. The lights were dim, and a CD playing actor James Earl Jones' narration of the Scriptures filled the room. Banners read "Jehovah" and "Holy." Large TV screens on each side of the stage displayed, "A City Not Forsaken."

Olivia Turner, director of the American Civil Liberties Union in Alabama, told the Associated Press that her group received complaints about the prayer rallies and has been discussing them as a possible violation of church-state separation. A few days after the event, reports of another murder hit the news, but Langford wasn't disheartened. "People were expecting an instantaneous miracle, but the miracle was all those people coming together to pray. I think we are going to see hearts changed." —**Marie A. Sutton in Birmingham, Ala.**