

Finding Hope After the Trayvon Martin Tragedy

On Good Friday, Andy Searles, pastor of Aloma UMC in Winter Park, participated in a prayer service with a number of pastors from Seminole County for the city of Sanford, Fla., in light of the Trayvon Martin case. Below is an article he wrote about the gathering.

Many people, on many levels, are grieving because of the tragic death of **Trayvon Martin** and complex situations that have developed because of it. The Martin family is grieving and George Zimmerman and his family are grieving.

A community is grieving over injustice, over the opening of old and bitter wounds, and over the divisive nature of this tragedy that has caught the global media's attention. The lives of many innocent individuals and the Sanford community are grieving over circumstances that they had inadvertently become a part of. Many are acting out of grief.

But, as the apostle Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, those who are in Christ need not grieve without hope.

On Good Friday, when we grieve the most shame filled day in history, approximately 50 pastors from Seminole County gathered in the city of Sanford to **pray** together into the pain that this situation has created in our community. Our only agenda, through prayer, was to try and discover the hope that comes from the **gospel** as we grieve.

As we spent these precious moments together in the appropriately named Holy Cross sanctuary, we affirmed that in the midst of tragedy and grief that hope for this situation can be found in two areas.

Hope begins in our unity. This gathering was led by a

partnership of black and white and male and female pastors from a variety of church and denominational backgrounds. As we were gathered, we were united in our prayers for the Martin family, the Zimmerman family, the Sanford community and its leaders. We were together in our confession of the roles we have played in our failure to build bridges, our confession of our sin in this situation and the many ways that our brokenness has contributed to the pain that the community is feeling. We were united in the truth that ultimately we are one church, serving one Lord—the Lord **Jesus Christ**. Evil has sought to separate, confuse and destroy. Unity, beginning within the **body of Christ**, is the first step towards thwarting the enemy's obvious tactics.

Hope is found in the gospel. As we prayed together we were reminded that it is no coincidence that we were meeting on Good Friday. The Jerusalem community, all those years ago, were experiencing many of the same difficulties that Sanford has over the past few weeks: injustice, confusion, divisiveness, false accusations, betrayal and an unjust death. But as we know, Good Friday does not have the final word on such turmoil; Easter Sunday does—when out of the pain something beautiful and true emerged.

As Jesus arose He transformed brokenness to healing, injustice to righteousness, confusion to clarity, and He became the fulfillment of hope to those who were grieving. Our God is the One who works wonderful things through the darkest tragedies and the person and gospel of **Jesus Christ** are the only hope for this tragic situation.

As a faith community we deeply believe that God is not finished with the work He wants to build in Sanford. We are committed to praying and playing our part in “His kingdom coming, and His will being done” as we extend his love and support to the hurting.

As our gathering concluded, we were exhorted to “stay tuned”

to both what the next steps can be for us as a faith community as we seek to care and serve, but more importantly to God. He has not left Sanford or this situation, and that is where we, and the community, can find hope in the midst of the grief.