

Florida Bishop Offers Advice on Discussing Trayvon Martin

Much has been said about **Trayvon Martin's** untimely death in Sanford, Fla. But the 17-year-old was from South Florida, not too far from Bishop Henry Fernandez's megachurch.

Fernandez is the pastor of The Faith Center in Sunrise, Fla. with its 10,000-plus members. His congregation is multicultural—and they are still talking about two things: George Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin.

Charisma News caught up with Fernandez to discuss how he is handling the controversial shooting of Martin with his congregation.

Charisma News: What's the sentiment among your congregation about Trayvon Martin's death?

Fernandez: It's tragic and unacceptable, if you will, for us to still be dealing with racism and classism in 2012 in America. It's an embarrassment to our country and for the world to see the hypocrisy of our justice system. Our members are outraged. The community is outraged. As a pastor who represents a multicultural group of people, I really share their feelings. It's just wrong.

We're not here to judge anyone and to speak prematurely about the case because they are still gathering the facts. But based on what we have heard and seen on television, I think we can come to the conclusion that something has gone wrong here. This is something that has been going on in many parts of America for a long time and has just been brought to the forefront on this incident.

Charisma News: Indeed, this issue has been blown open by the media.

Fernandez: I just don't understand how we in America can be so passionate about going overseas to countries such as Iraq, Syria, Libya and demand justice, freedom and liberty for their people when right here in America ordinary citizens cannot get justice. I'm speaking on the broader scale now. There is still racism and classism in this country and it needs to be rooted out.

America has come a long way. Whether we voted for the man or not, we have a president who happens to be African-American and that lets me know that America has grown up somewhat to accept all cultures. The death of **Trayvon Martin** is an opportunity to bring to the forefront the flaws that are in some of our laws.

Charisma News: Racism is taught. How do we reverse the tide?

Fernandez: I am going to speak from a pastor's heart. I think Christians nationwide can understand this comment. I am a firm believer that we will not change things for the better in this country until the heart of a man is changed. That's my message. I'm coming from the Word of God now.

We are trying to fix our problems in America with money. We have a huge deficit. We made some mistakes. But I've got a simple answer. How do we fix the corruption in government, the corruption in elected officials, the root of racism and classism? "If my people who are called by My name will humble themselves, pray, seek my face and turn from their wicked ways," God says, "I'll bring healing to the land." The only way to defeat the devil is not with earthly principles but with the **Word of God**. He cannot withstand the Word of God.

Charisma News: How do we heal our congregations? It's not just African-Americans who are upset about this. Everybody wants to see fairness and justice.

Fernandez: Here's what I've done. I've addressed this with my congregation. In fact, I had a Circuit Court judge who is a

member of my church, Judge Ilona Holmes, address our members by explaining first of all the law that was protecting Mr. Zimmerman. Why was the law put in place and what are the flaws within the law? The first move is to have understanding. The Bible says to get understanding.

I am encouraging my congregation to be informed about this law and not to respond negatively in any way. The first thing we need to do is to pray for Trayvon's family and healing for the community.