

Pastor Braves the Midst of Baltimore Riots

Physically, Bishop Angel Nunez is in Orlando, Florida, for the all-important Reconciled Church conference, part of a movement to help spark healing the racial divide not only in the church, but in all of America.

Nunez's heart, however, is back in his home of Baltimore, Maryland, a city drowning in chaos and turmoil and plagued with riots following the arrest of a young man black man that was put into a police van after being taken into custody, only to be taken to a hospital where he lapsed into a coma and died.

The senior pastor of Bilingual Christian Church, Nunez, who found himself squarely in the middle of the riots Monday night in Baltimore, is a panelist during Wednesday's day-long Reconciled Church event. During a pre-event dinner Tuesday night, Nunez sat in the audience with his mobile device receiving and sending texts to keep up with up-to-the-minute news from Baltimore.

"I'm here in Florida because I need to be here with other national and international leaders to help spread this crucial message of The Reconciled Church," Nunez said. "But there is so much going on back home. [Tuesday] morning, I attended a press conference and a pastor's breakfast, where we had over 100 pastors there. We finished up and I got on a plane to come here. As soon as we're done here, I'll be back on a plane to Baltimore. I've called for a special prayer meeting at my church Saturday night, and we're planning so much more."

Monday evening after a plea for help from friend and associate Lt. Col. Melvin Russell of the Baltimore Police Department, Nunez walked from his office at Bilingual Christian Church to

a spot where rioting had become heavy. After just coming back from Freddie Gray's funeral, Nunez still adorned his clergy attire and said that, despite being maced, it was only by the God's hedge of protection around him that he wasn't injured badly.

"Without knowing it or without a plan, I found myself right there on the front line," Nunez said. "In front of me 15 feet were police officers with their shields and masks. Behind me were the protestors. I was caught right smack in the middle of it. The grace of God was so beautiful because it just covered me. The CVS pharmacy was on fire, and the smoke from it just filled our lungs. The fire department had put up a hose to put it out, but people had stabbed the hose with knives, so water was shooting all over the place except for on the fire.

"Through it all, these people would see me with my clergy shirt and they would grab my hand and they would say, 'Thank you for staying with us, thank you for being here.' And then they would throw a rock and cuss. But they were thanking a man of God for standing in the gap for them."

The riots had calmed down into Tuesday evening. Nunez said he and other pastors met with some of the inner-city gang members Monday night, and that gang members agreed to work with city officials to "keep young people from getting injured or killed." Nunez said he believed that agitators from outside Baltimore had infiltrated the city and were encouraging and provoking youth to violence.

"That's a huge challenge, and we're praying for that situation," he said.

Nunez says he and other pastors have led a multicultural prayer movement for the city of Baltimore for more than five years. But, he said, the city has been a powder keg waiting to explode all during that time.

"Freddie Gray's death was only a tipping point because this

situation has been building up and building up for years,” Nunez said. “When you have young people that are broken, that have no hope, that have been abused and rejected and have been abused by people in authority over them that are supposed to be protecting them, you’re going to have this kind of reaction. Their chant was, “no justice, no peace,” and our chant was, “we want justice, we want peace.”

For the second consecutive year, Nunez and other pastors are heading up an initiative called Bless Baltimore Motorcade, where church officials, with a police escort, will pile into 30 church vans filled with intercessors and circle the city on June 20. They plan to stop at specific places where heavy rioting has occurred and pray.

Churches will also come together Somebody Cares Baltimore to sponsor Day of Hope, where police, churches and community serve more than 5,000 individuals in an atmosphere of fun and safety by connecting them with service providers and improving their lives by finding solutions.

And finally, Nunez says he plans to bring back some of the initiatives from The Reconciled Church to Baltimore.

It’s imperative that pastors in the city have a relationship with each other,” he said. “If we don’t build these bonds, then it simply isn’t going to work.”