

Police Chief: 'The Whole World Is Watching Sanford'

Contrary to what some might have anticipated, the city of Sanford, Fla., has not become a powder keg in the wake of the weekend's George Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin verdict.

Monday afternoon, city officials, including Mayor Jeff Triplett and Police Chief Cecil Smith, praised the restraint of the people of Sanford during a prayer service at New Life Word Center Church conducted by the group Sanford Pastors Connecting, formed last spring after the tragic shooting.

The *Orlando Sentinel* reported Sunday that a little more than a dozen demonstrators peacefully protested Zimmerman's acquittal outside the courthouse in Sanford, many shouting, "Justice for Trayvon." The 17-year-old Martin was shot and killed by Zimmerman early last year.

However, no violence has transpired in Sanford as it did in at least one city in the nation, Oakland, Calif. Other significant protests took place in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and other major cities.

"Are you starting to feel like we're covered?" Smith asked. "It might seem unusual for a city official to pose that question. But I get the overwhelming feeling we've been covered by God.

"For months, everybody has been watching what would happen in Sanford after the verdict was read. The whole world is watching Sanford. Everyone wants to see us act up. We may not like what has happened, but we've put it in God's hands, no matter what. We have been the most peaceful people, lifting up Christ in the things we do."

Triplett spoke briefly Monday, quoting Matthew 5:9: "Blessed

are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God," he said. "You may not like the verdict, and you do have the right to protest peacefully. But I must say how proud I am of the people of Sanford today for how they have reacted with grace."

The verdict—not guilty of second-degree murder—was handed down to Zimmerman Saturday night around 10 p.m. by a six-person jury consisting of all women. It took them 16 hours to deliberate.

reported that Martin's parents were not present in the courtroom at the time the verdict was read.

Pastor John Murphy of Harvest Time International in Sanford says he's been interviewed several times by members of the media who have asked him the same question.

"They want to know if we're ready for things to return to normal around here," Murphy says. "I tell them, 'No, we aren't. We don't want things to get back to normal. We want to go forward and live in peace and harmony.'"

Cornelius Blue, an ordained minister and a deputy sheriff who grew up in Sanford, told the estimated crowd of 200 on Monday at New Life Word Center that because of their obedience, God will continue to keep his hand on the people of Sanford.

"Many thought something would happen here and that things would get out of hand," Blue said. "God has shown himself to the world that the people of Sanford can love together and protest peacefully. I love this city. I'm very passionate about my community.

"We're still not out of the hole. We still have a long way go with this. We need to learn from this experience and move forward with God's power to ensure peace remains in the city of Sanford."