

This Ministry Is Bridging Ferguson's Race Divide

Residents in the city of Ferguson, Missouri, and the surrounding region have been on edge since the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, Jr. on Aug. 9.

The suburban St. Louis community has been frayed after months of protests and protracted debates about race.

But area churches and pastors are countering the unrest with a message of God's love.

"When you walk into these doors or, as I like to say, when we walk into your life or you walk into ours, what you will encounter is the true God who is without prejudice," said Bishop Raphael Green who pastors the Metropolitan Christian Worship Center in south St. Louis.

For nearly 30 years, Bishop Green has hosted the Urban World Summit, a rally to prayer and action to heal across racial and cultural divides.

It's a timely message against the backdrop of Ferguson.

"We've all been challenged to really forgive," Green said. "And let's move forward out of the heart of God."

This year's keynote speaker was Bishop Harry Jackson, chairman of High Impact Leadership Coalition and pastor of Hope Christian Church in suburban Washington, D.C.

Jackson urged churches to rise up and take the lead by reflecting the unity found in God's love and Christian love or one another.

"Jesus was very clear when he prayed to the Father that we would be one," Jackson told CBN News. "The insight that we

should all get is that when people see our love demonstrated in power, they'll know that Jesus is real. Nothing says that more powerfully in this day than black, white, Asian, Hispanic worshipping together, working together, in an open banner of Christ over their relationships."

The summit also included a legal clinic, with frank and honest conversations about race, religion and the rule of law. Attendees heard from pastors, lawyers, and law enforcement to learn from each other's experiences.

One of the panelists was Capt. Ron Johnson of the Missouri State Highway Patrol. Johnson has spearheaded the police response in Ferguson.

"I think if we're going to change the community – change this nation – it has to be everyone," Capt. Johnson told CBN News.

Johnson believes Ferguson has come a long way since the early days after Michael Brown's death. He credits area churches for taking an active role in the community's healing process.

"It's actually been a big part of the gains and the strive toward peace," Johnson said.

Bishop Green started the urban summit after a spate of murders around the city in 1987. He began planning for this year's event over a year ago.

Green believes the timing of the event ahead of the grand jury's decision was all part of a divine plan.

"A year ago I gave the invitation to ask Bishop Harry Jackson to join us," Green explained. "Of course, Michael Brown, Jr. was alive at that time. We had no idea that we'd be right here at the culmination of this decision. So I believe it's God's design."

Green's prayer is that the lessons learned at the summit will be applied beyond the walls of the church and into the

community.

He believes it's the first step toward overcoming the dividing walls with faith, forgiveness and love.