

Violent Protests Ignite Prayer Movement in Chile

Educational strikes in Chile may have lulled in violence, but they are far from over.

One article reports that 20 students from various high schools in Chile are currently on a hunger strike, prepared to forgo their academic year and their health for the cause.

Thousands of high school and university students have been demanding radical changes to the educational system in Chile for the past several months. Over the last two weeks, peaceful protests turned violent as students attempted to takeover a TV station to broadcast their concerns, lit fire to buildings and led police to bring tear gas into crowds to quell protests. According to the BBC News, damages to public and private property have now reached \$2 million.

Crowds of up to 100,000 have stormed the streets of Santiago—crowds including ordinary Chileans banging pots and pans in favor of the students and against the government—to demand fairer education.

Many perceive the Chilean education system to favor rich students, providing them access to elite, private education, while shunting poorer students into under-funded state schools. The BBC reports that the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), which recently ranked 65 countries on various educational components, placed Chile at 64 out of 65 countries for segregation across social classes in schools and colleges.

Some are going as far as to call the Chilean educational discrepancy an “educational apartheid.” Most agree that the system could use a reform, especially since the system was mainly privatized under 17-year dictator Augusto Pinochet and

has remained the same since his 1990 office exit.

As Christian students survey the scene, however, many are not responding with violence, but with prayer. About 30 students gathered in the Plaza de Armas in Santiago last –and for the last several Fridays–to praise God and pray for peace.

“These students are not protesting the educational system in Chile, like so many of their peers have done in violent street demonstrations across Chile,” explains International Mission Board reporter Wilson Hunter. “Instead, these Christian students are singing praises to God and bowing their heads in prayer.”

They’re praying for wisdom and direction for everyone involved, but they’re also praying for spiritual change.

“They’re praying for their universities and for government leaders. They’re praying for the violent protests to end. But most of all, they’re praying for their peers to come to Christ,” notes Hunger. “‘Prayer is powerful,’ says the organizer of the student prayer meetings. ‘Prayer is the way to find a solution to this problem.’”

Pray with these students for peace, and for the gospel to break in and fill the hearts of all those involved. Pray for Christians students to be bold in their proclamation of Christ.