

Reconciliation Rallies Planned Across US After Zimmerman Verdict

The George Zimmerman acquittal a week ago has brought to the surface racial divides in our country, and it's time for believers in Jesus to get involved because the only answers are spiritual. There must be forgiveness, and mercy always triumphs over justice.

This case has always been personal to me because Trayvon Martin was killed 2.3 miles from my office. My younger son lives less than half a mile away in a similar gated townhouse community.

I've known for years that Sanford is a very divided community, and I've done what I could to help lessen those divides.

I've seen up close what's happened here—strong emotions, hate-filled rhetoric, accusations and fear of racial unrest. I've also seen what happened when Christian leaders got involved.

The result? While there's been unrest and even some rioting in cities all over America, Sanford, Fla.—where the shooting happened and the trial took place—has remained calm.

Many people were involved in the process to keep the peace, and no one group can take credit. But I believe something broke in the spiritual realm when pastors and leaders came together in April 2012 to dialogue, to pray and then to speak out as unified spiritual leaders of the city. Remember the Bible says: We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers.

You can see what happened in a documentary we produced called *Sanford: The Untold Story*. It's untold because the mainstream

media plays up the tension and division and the agendas of those some call “race-baiters.” The media also is not aware or looks the other way when it comes to the spiritual aspect of problems in our country.

But you can see what happened when Bishop Harry Jackson of High Impact Ministries and Dr. Raleigh Washington of Promise Keepers came to town to see what they could do to help. In one eventful and perhaps historic afternoon, pastors came together at a meeting I hosted in our offices in Lake Mary, Fla., to seek God on solutions for our divided community. Dr. Washington, who has been involved in racial reconciliation in countries all over the world, says he’s never seen anything like it.

Now it’s time to do this all over the country.

I’m starting an initiative to do what we did in Sanford—hold racial reconciliation meetings hosted by respected pastors from both the black and white communities. The meetings would be designed for people to listen to each other and to understand the pain that is obviously there. But also, they should provide spiritual leadership for each community, showing that only Jesus is the answer.

In my own way, I’ve been doing this since high school when I was calling for understanding in editorials in my high school paper during the days of desegregation, around the time of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. And if you’ve read *Charisma*, you’ve seen how we’ve covered the black community and dealt with the issues of racism in our culture and in the church—the most recent was a special issue in June 2012, partly as a result of the reaction to the shooting of Trayvon Martin, which you can read [here](#).

Our nonprofit partner Christian Life Missions is taking the lead to set up these meetings in major cities. Ideally, we’d like to have one in every city where Rev. Al Sharpton called

on protest rallies this weekend.

Already Dr. Washington, Bishop Jackson and Dr. Alveda King, the niece of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., have agreed to participate. And in the next 48 hours, we hope to set up the first 10 meetings within the next two weeks.

We've enlisted Pastor Derrick Gay, a young African-American pastor in Sanford who has been involved since the beginning with the Martin family as well as working with governmental leaders. He was also involved in the prayer meeting shown on the documentary, and he was one of the most vocal to speak out at the press conference we held the next day—which was carried live by CNN and covered by many other news outlets. (But when they discovered the tone was reconciliatory and focused on the changes that can happen through Jesus Christ, they quickly moved on to the next story.)

I have personal feelings about this story, partly because it's so up close and personal.

Remember the young mother who testified that her townhouse was robbed by two men in hoodies while she hid with her baby in the closet with a pair of scissors? I've known her since she was a little girl. Her husband is related to a member of my staff.

But after writing several drafts of a commentary last week in which I shared my personal feelings, I felt led to call for these meetings as soon as possible. There's enough said and written about this case, and emotions are already high. Instead, we need action, and we need leaders who love Jesus and who have hearts of reconciliation and healing to step forward and help us hold these meetings. So, I'll wait to share my own insights until later.

Please watch the documentary. I believe you'll be touched. We intend to update the documentary this week with what's happening after the verdict. But as it is, the film deals with

the problems of racism in this country—not the guilt or innocence of George Zimmerman.

In the documentary, I also say that long after this story is not in the news, we who live here must still deal with the divides that go back generations. And that's true of cities all over the country. I believe that had George Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin never been born, these rifts would still exist in this country and need to be dealt with. This merely opened a wound that is festering.

Please leave your comments below this commentary. But if you have a heart to participate, please email us with your contact info and what you're willing to do and how soon so that we can follow up. As things progress, I'll report on what is happening. Please email @ or @ so they can share it with me and follow up by email and phone.

Yesterday, I talked to the broadcast journalist who broke this story locally. He told me he was the one who showed Tracy Martin where his son died, and this journalist was also the first and only one to interview John Good, who was the only eyewitness. He confirmed that even though there have been some protests, everything is peaceful here in spite of fears of violence. I told him about this initiative of getting Christian leaders to dialogue and search for solutions and then to speak up. He agreed with me that the problems in this country are much deeper than just the outcome of this case.

Many of you can't participate, but you can pray. Let's pray for forgiveness, reconciliation and that somehow good can come out of this horrible tragedy.

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