

Trayvon Martin: Moving From Tragedy to Reconciliation



Steve Strang addresses media outside Holy Cross Episcopal Church at Friday's press conference

Trayvon Martin was killed less than 3 miles from our offices in Lake Mary, Fla., which abuts Sanford. I've been in meetings the last two days with local pastors and held a major press conference on Friday covered by all the major media.

Thankfully, pastors in this city are beginning to work together.

And I believe the news conference gave opportunity for some of the

pastors in Sanford to talk about love and forgiveness and reconciliation. I even met yesterday with the special prosecutor

Angela Corey, who said they are wanting justice for Trayvon and due

process for the man who admitted shooting him, George Zimmerman.

On Thursday I hosted a meeting of 75 pastors, most of them local.

My friends Bishop Harry Jackson and Dr. Raleigh Washington were in

town for other things and we brought them into the meeting. They both

spoke of healing and restoration. They both wanted to see where the

tragedy happened, so I drove them over to The Retreat at Twin Lakes,

where the shooting occurred. It's less than half a mile from where my 24-year-old son lives in a similar gated townhouse community in a newer part of Sanford.

I have been working to bring racial reconciliation in Sanford for years. I know it is a divided city, but I never dreamed Sanford would have an incident that is now of major national and international importance raising questions about racism. Because I can't stay glued to the news networks, it only slowly dawned on me that a local killing had become a major issue. When the huge rallies happened, I didn't know about them until after the fact. And like many local leaders, we didn't know what to do or how to respond.

A week ago I attended a local ministerial association meeting. The topic of Trayvon's killing came up, but both black and white pastors spoke of wanting reconciliation and healing—not marches and protests. They talked about how Sanford has been prayed over and even prophecies have been given about how revival would come out of Sanford. It was a very different sentiment than what I was hearing in the news media, which was quoting the New Black Panther Party for Self-Defense as calling for racial violence if they didn't feel justice was done.

Then on April 6 I joined about 60 local pastors who met for a specially called Good Friday prayer service at Holy Cross Episcopal Church, the oldest church in Sanford. Both black and white pastors gave wonderful talks and prayed prayers asking for God's mercy and forgiveness and healing. I invited several of the speakers to write blogs, some of which we've already published and quite a few more that we will post in the next week.

That meeting led to my hosting the gathering Thursday and working with Washington and Jackson, who both wanted to help. There was great discussion, which we videotaped and will make available later. But late yesterday afternoon the group felt it was time to speak up by holding a press conference. The question, of course, was: Would anyone show up? Overnight we sent out an invitation to attend, and I was surprised at the number of media that came.

But I was more amazed at how the Holy Spirit seemed to guide each speaker. We are posting the entire news conference on our websites and we are sharing it with other Christian media. I encourage you to watch it. I think you'll be touched. Leave me your comments after watching the news conference and reading the blogs we previously

posted on our site.

In the next weeks I'll write more about this situation and about my own involvement. I'll write about how we plan to deal with these issues in our June edition of *Charisma* with "The Church's Response to Racism."