

From Riots to Hopeful Prayer

Chaplains from the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team fanned out and ministered throughout the city of Ferguson, MO, for six weeks following riots that erupted after the November 2014 grand jury decision not to indict a local police officer in the Michael Brown shooting case, according to Erik Ogren of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA).



“We’ve heard from several pastors, and they view this as raw spiritual warfare. That’s what it is, and it’s very obvious,” says Jeff Naber, one of the Rapid Response Team. “But with that said, the potential for revival here is extreme.”

“This is different than a tornado or flood,” said Chaplain Strib Boynton as he maneuvered his truck through the streets of Ferguson. “This is changing the hearts of people, of a whole community.”

Ogren writes that this response was unlike anything the crisis-trained chaplains from the BGEA have ever encountered in the decade-plus history of the ministry. A natural disaster often leaves a wide swath of destruction but dissipates in a way that allows for healing and reconstruction. However, the unrest in Ferguson following the death of Michael Brown was a tragedy of distrust and anger. These issues cannot be solved simply by carrying out moldy carpet or patching a roof.

Vivian Dudley, founder and evangelist for One Church Outreach Ministry, sat and spoke with chaplains just yards away from a dumpster bearing the spray-painted words “If we burn, you burn with us!” “[The people] feel hopeless,” she told the chaplains, “and they need to be reminded that all hope isn’t

lost.”

The Rapid Response Team’s mobile command truck—parked on space provided by Bishop Giovanni Johnson of the Center for Hope and Peace—became a meeting point for many. Throughout the day, a wide array of people—gang members, pastors, police officers, fire fighters, community leaders, family members of Michael Brown, and others—passed through to have a cup of coffee, sometimes to get out of the rain, and to share their stories with the chaplains.

“This has been an incredible experience for us in Ferguson,” said Naber, manager of chaplain development and ministry relations. “We’ve had people from the community . . . on opposite sides of this division . . . who have cried together, embraced each other, and prayed together. There is still a storm raging, but they’re looking for healing.”

One thing many who talked with the chaplains agreed on is that if hope and reconciliation are to come to Ferguson, it needs to be through spiritual healing.

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