

Cincinnati shooting spurs Baptists to bring hope

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CINCINNATI (BP)—A Sept. 6 shooting rampage in Cincinnati that left four dead and two others injured led a city councilman to request aid from the community. Within minutes, Cincinnati Baptists began responding.

An unidentified gunman entered Cincinnati's 30-story Fifth Third Center through a loading dock at 9:10 a.m. local time and opened fire in the lobby, according to media reports. He killed three people and injured others before police shot and killed him.

In the aftermath, a Baptist who works at a local news station heard city councilman Jeff Pastor say donations of water and snacks would be appreciated for the crowds standing outside after streets were closed. The news employee called his pastor, Josh Carter of Clough Pike Baptist Church in Cincinnati, who also serves as evangelism catalyst for the Cincinnati Area Baptist Association.

He contacted Mark Snowden, the association's director of missional leadership, and church planter Josh McKinney was dispatched to buy snacks and water and head to the scene. The association's prayer team was alerted to pray, as well.

"Cincinnati is a mission field with one million people not claimed by any religious organization," Snowden wrote in an email. "When we hear of tragedies like the shooting today, I believe beyond the shared grief and need for ministry to affected families, the Lord uses horrific events like this to spur us onward as intentional disciple-makers.

"Who do we know? What do they need? And how can they embrace the

gospel for spiritual transformation? We draw close to Jesus at times like this. And his heartbeat continues to pound out anguish for a fallen world. How can we not be our brother's keeper when his blood is splattered all over the ground?"

Witnesses told the *Cincinnati Enquirer* "there was definitely a lot of blood," and up to 15 shots were fired.

Prayer, water, snacks and the gospel

McKinney, who lives two blocks from the site of the shooting, assembled a team of four people to offer prayer, water and snacks, and a gospel witness for first responders and others at the scene. McKinney is a North American Mission Board church planter working in cooperation with the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio and the local Baptist association.

"Brokenness is pervasive," McKinney said in an interview, fighting back tears. "We shouldn't lose sight of our time we have here to engage a culture that is hurting and bring a hope for something better. We can talk voting, we can talk justice, we can talk social justice. But unless we engage the hurt behind it all, these kinds of things aren't going to change."

Carter, the pastor who helped launch the ministry reaction, wrote on Facebook to the church he leads "Please be in prayer for the families affected by the active shooter situation which happened at the 5th/3rd building by Fountain Square this morning. I want you to know that I have been in contact with those that I know of that work on or near the site of the shooting, and that, as far as I know, no members of Clough were injured. However, ... undoubtedly, our church family has friends and co-workers that were involved in this tragedy."

Snowden offered suggestions for other churches and associations that find themselves positioned to respond to mass shootings and other local

tragedies.

“My counsel to pastors wanting to help in situations like this is to check with church members immediately to see who might be affected. Send an email blast to church members saying how grieved you are, a few facts based on current news reports (or links), and express that you’re monitoring the situation. Your associational office can help by coordinating ministry opportunities,” Snowden said.