

New Orleans ministers respond after terror attack

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)—In an eclectic New Orleans ministerial mix, a second line jazz band belted gospel favorites in the footsteps of pastors prayerwalking Bourbon Street hours after the carnage of a New Year's Day terrorist attack was cleared.

Southern Baptist pastors and chaplaincy leaders were among clergy who joined city elected officials in the 10-block procession at noon Jan. 2, praying for New Orleans after an attacker drove a truck past barricades and into a crowd of predawn New Year's celebrants, killing 14, injuring at least 30, and himself dying from police gunfire.

Vieux Carre' Baptist Church, meeting at 433 Dauphine St., was one block over from the attacker's path and perhaps only yards from where the truck came to rest after it barreled three blocks down Bourbon Street, an area packed with revelers in the city known for its ability to host large parties.

Police identified the attacker, now deceased, as Shamsud-Din Jabbar, a 42-year-old U.S. citizen from Texas who served in the military and praised ISIS in advance of the attack.

Vieux Carre' Baptist Church Pastor Alex Brian, who participated in the prayerwalk, was awaiting the opportunity to check on his church's meeting location when he spoke with Baptist Press Jan. 2.

There's no indication members of Vieux Carre' were injured in the attack, Brian said of the congregation that serves the community that spans the homeless and the wealthy, but that could change.

“Thus far, no one in the ministry of the church has been affected, although our church has historically been deeply involved in work in the homeless community, and word there travels more slowly,” he said.

“And we’re trying to figure out who if anybody connected to the ministry of the church was affected by the attack, and of course praying and mourning for all those who were affected, even if they weren’t connected to the church.”

Supporting the ministry of chaplains



Col. Page Brooks (left), state command chaplain for the Louisiana National Guard and pastor of Canal Street Mosaic Community Church, at the Jan. 2 Bourbon Street prayerwalk with chaplains Ken De Soto, center, and Larry Johnson, pastor of Celebration Church. (Photo from Page Brooks)

Brian is praying for and supporting chaplains in the locked-down area around the scene of the attack. They include those under the command of Col. Page Brooks, state command chaplain for the Louisiana National

Guard and pastor of Canal Street Mosaic Community Church, a Southern Baptist congregation that collaborates with Brian on various ministry outreaches.

The National Guard deployed 100 soldiers and two chaplains in response to the attack, said Brian, who was walking the streets of the French Quarter to provide counseling and check on soldiers and first responders.

“It’s been tragic for them,” Brooks said. “Many of them live here in the New Orleans area, and so I think it’s the shock having an incident happen like this in New Orleans. We’re so focused on Mardi Gras and tourism ... you wouldn’t think anything would happen like a terrorist event down here in the French Quarter. That’s been a lot of my conversation.”

Much of the chaplaincy ministry has been focused on the soldiers and police who have responded to the scene, he said.

“Most everyone kind of in the area is still in shock,” Brooks said. “I think people feel secure because there’s a lot of police presence down here, but I think people are still just in shock at what has happened.

“I try to tell them that God is still in control,” he said. “And, of course, none of this took him by surprise.”



Celebration Church Senior Pastor Dennis Watson (bowing at far left) and Shiloh Christian Fellowship Pastor Michael Raymond (standing at left) place yellow roses on Bourbon Street in advance of a noon prayerwalk Jan. 2 after a terrorist attack killed 14 and injured at least 30 before police killed the suspected attacker. New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell stands at center. (Photo from Page Brooks)

Still, Brooks expressed surprise at the many tourists who still crowd the parts of the Quarter that remained open to traffic in advance of the Sugar Bowl, postponed until 3 p.m. Thursday from an original game time of 7:45 p.m. Jan. 1.

Brooks and Brian will hold a joint service Sunday at 10 a.m. at Canal Street Mosaic Church dedicated to healing in the aftermath of the tragedy.

Former Southern Baptist Convention President Fred Luter was among prayerwalkers, pleading for the peace of God to permeate the city.

“We did not have any members directly impacted by this tragedy,” said Luter, senior pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church. “However, our entire city has been impacted because of this terrorist attack.

“New Orleans is used to hosting major events like the Super Bowl, Sugar Bowl and Mardi Gras, all without incident,” Luter said, lamenting the attack “where a number of people have been killed and injured. Therefore, prayers for our city and the families who lost loved ones are truly needed.

“This incident will only draw our public officials and citizens together to continue to make New Orleans a popular tourist destination for people from around the world.”

Brooks also participated in the prayerwalk, which together with the second line created a vibe he described as unique to New Orleans.

“We had a second line band behind us, that as we were praying they were singing, ‘I’ll Fly Away’ and ‘When the Saints (Go Marching In),’” he said. “In New Orleans, it’s that weird mixture of lament, but also joy in the middle of things like this.

“It’s the lament of the death that’s happened and the people that have passed. But it’s also the strength of coming together as a city that is symbolized in that very act of” prayer accompanied by a second line.

“This is part of the rhythm of New Orleans.”