

Buffalo church, community grieve supermarket massacre

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BUFFALO, N.Y. (BP)—Four miles from the Tops Friendly Markets mass shooting May 14, North Buffalo Community Church Pastor William Smith is comforting a crying community.

Church member Cashell Durham lost her baby brother Aaron Salter in the massacre—a 55-year-old retired Buffalo police officer and Tops security guard, who was among four employees killed. Smith’s daughter Lauren Smith is employed in Tops administration, but wasn’t at the 1275 Jefferson St. location.

“She said, ‘Daddy I cried all day yesterday,’” Smith said. “The impact rippled through all the city. ... The church itself, we spent good time yesterday talking about violence and talking about pain.”

Durham is the widow of North Buffalo Baptist Associate Pastor Arriet J. Durham, who died in 2018.

“Cashell has been grieving now for quite a while. She’s had some help, but she’s still grieving from the loss of her husband,” Smith said. “And right now, she’s been bombarded with requests from different press agencies. ... But she’s not really in any position to be able to speak with people. She’s just hurting so bad.”

Believed to be racially motivated hate

crime

The alleged shooter arrested at the scene of the crime, 18-year-old Payton S. Gendron, is accused of having driven 200 miles strategically to find a public location full of African Americans in what police are calling a racially motivated hate crime. Eleven victims were Black; two were white.

Through a 180-page manifesto the shooting suspect posted online, police have connected Gendron to a fringe “replacement theory” conspiracy that says whites are being slowly and intentionally replaced by minorities and immigrants, multiple news outlets reported.

“We’re just trying to deal with the pain. So many of us Saturday were just crying. The pain was so hard,” Smith said. “And the Lord is the one who’s going to be near the brokenhearted. And when he’s near the brokenhearted, I really believe that that’s going to be what we need.

“We need the Lord’s guidance, and we need prayer. Which was very encouraging, we got prayer from all over the country from people.” Many offered to help in any way needed.

Beverly Flannery, wife of Frontier Baptist Association Associational Missionary Mike Flannery, emailed 900 contacts predominantly in northeast New York asking for prayer for Buffalo. Hundreds responded. The Frontier association is mobilizing ministry to those impacted by the shooting.

“I am currently trying to organize churches to deliver food in this geographical area that is a food desert,” Mike Flannery said May 16. “The Tops store will be shut down probably several weeks because of federal investigations. I’m working with another organization, Saving Grace Ministries, that wants us to work with them to deliver food.”

Appreciation for support

Smith appreciates Southern Baptists' compassionate response. He wants Southern Baptists to understand the pain.

"This shooting has added to the negative mental health of African Americans wondering who's going to shoot next," he said. "We have our own crime in the city. We have our own shooters in the city. And then to add this to that, it's a painful thing for us, for little kids, because you never know when this is going to happen again. That's why we need the Body of Christ."

He mentioned widespread support from Southern Baptists across New York, including the Frontier association and the Baptist Convention of New York.

"It was an outpouring of support," Smith said. "Those people in our circle have reached out to provide any kind of resources that we might need. I would ... say thank you (to Southern Baptists), from North Buffalo, for our partnership, because it's made a major difference, in a few days, just a short period of time, to know that we've got people behind us, supporting us. I'm glad to be a Southern Baptist."

In addition to Salter, Buffalo police identified the murder victims as 86-year-old Ruth Whitfield, 77-year-old Pearly Young, 72-year-old Katherine Massey, 67-year-old Heyward Patterson, 65-year-old Celestine Chaney, 32-year-old Roberta Drury, 52-year-old Margus Morrison, 53-year-old Andre Mackneil and 62-year-old Geraldine Talley.

Three others were injured, Buffalo Police said, namely 20-year-old Zaire Goodman of Buffalo, 50-year-old Jennifer Warrington from Tonawanda, N.Y., and 55-year-old Christopher Braden from Lackawanna, N.Y. Goodman and Warrington were treated and released from a local hospital. Braden

remained hospitalized May 15, a local NBC news affiliate reported.

“We don’t have any answers for these kinds of things. Biblically, I don’t see how this is going to get any better,” Smith said. “When I read the Bible, I see that as the last days—which I believe we’re in—the kind of violence, this is just going to get worse. I’m not plotting out these things on a graph, but I see, all across our world, things are just getting worse and worse.”

Public prayer meetings are scheduled to help the community grieve and heal.