

Evangelicals gather for Washington prayer rally

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Evangelical Christians converged on the nation’s capital for a prayer rally on one of the hottest days of the summer.

With the nation reeling from recent shootings and shocked by news of a terrorist attack in France and an attempted coup in Turkey, speakers at Together 2016 cited the global events from the stage and spoke of the challenges facing Americans.

“Jesus can heal our nation,” former Southern Baptist Convention President Ronnie Floyd said to applause and cries of “Amen.” “Jesus can heal relationships. America is like a broken bone that needs to be put back into its correct place in order to experience healing.”

Emphasis on prayer

With their calls for prayer and unity, speakers generally focused on spiritual rather than political solutions to the nation’s problems. The event had been promoted by Pope Francis and noted by President Barack Obama.



A crowd gathered for Together 2016, an evangelical Christian prayer rally in Washington, D.C. (RNS photo)

by Adelle M. Banks) Nick Hall, 34, the leader of the Pulse ministry that organized the event focused on Millennials, also addressed the crowd in the shadow of the Washington Monument.

“God, we don’t need to hear from some man or some woman,” he said in an opening prayer. “God, we don’t need to hear from some band. We need to hear from heaven today. That’s why we’ve come.”

Others taking the stage included preachers such as Josh McDowell and Samuel Rodriguez, Christian musical artist Lecrae and the group Hillsong United.

Millennial and multi-ethnic

Hall, speaking especially to the Millennials, said “we want to get the hashtag #JesusChangesEverything trending around the world today.” It remained one of the top trending tweets on Twitter hours after the event.

Many in the multi-ethnic crowd joined in as contemporary Christian singer Michael W. Smith sang about compassion. As people sweated and fanned themselves, wearing beach hats and hovering under umbrellas, they offered bottles of water and welcomed others to the scant shady spots in earshot of the stage’s speakers and songs.

Repent and reset

Although cut short due to the heat, the event moved methodically through discussions of how to “reset,” with sermons and prayers calling for repentance, prayer and service. The generation of Facebook and Twitter was urged to put down cellphones and meet people for coffee instead and to think about people less fortunate than themselves.

“We, the people of the cross, repent of 1.2 million children who will be trafficked around the globe this year while we care more about traffic

reports,” Christian author Ann Voskamp prayed, “repent of the 3.1 (million) children under 5 who will die this year because of starvation while we spend \$60 billion dollars this year trying to lose weight.”

Some members of the audience prayed for others who they thought needed a divine touch.

Jennifer Yeisley, 31, a nondenominational Christian from Rockville, Md., got on her knees and prayed for Jackie Herbertson, 73, from Brooksville, Fla., who sat in a wheelchair, her toes curled by arthritis.

Families and senior adults

Although many Millennials gathered near the stage, the crowd also included families and senior citizens.

“My husband has been praying for a revival in this nation,” Herbertson said of her spouse, Bill, adding he had written to congressmen and evangelist Billy Graham. “He wanted to see us all get together and pray. So, when we heard about this one ... we wanted to come.”

Some of the prayers from the stage were tied to pleas for improved family and race relations.

“Let me die for my home. Let me die for my community. Let me die for a white man; let me die for a black man; let me die for a Hispanic man; let me die for an Asian man,” gospel artist Kirk Franklin prayed. “Let me get out of the way, so you can be God in my life.”

Women in attendance, on the program

The event follows many other religion-related gatherings—both of believers and nonbelievers—on what is known as the nation’s front lawn. Together 2016 was planned in ways similar to Promise Keepers’ 1997 “sacred assembly” for evangelical Christian men—but this time, it included women,

too.

The program, with an unusually high number of women speakers for an evangelical gathering, featured Voskamp and poet Amena Brown in a spoken-word segment that featured calls for forgiveness and reconciliation related to racism and privilege.

“We will not be the people who turn a blind eye to injustice,” Voskamp said.

“We will use our voices, our time, our resources to effect change,” Brown responded.

As the event drew to a close, many pledged to pray more and study the Bible. Charlene Atkins, 49, who attends a mostly black African-American church in Dallas, said she hopes to encourage greater work across racial lines in her church community.

“One of the things that we talked about while out there was helping people who are Christians understand what it means to be as one body in Christ,” she said. “How do we look more like Christ and less like ourselves? I think that would help a lot in the issues that our nation is facing if the church would start to look more like the church.”