

Ministry after Lunar New Year massacre family-focused

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MONTEREY PARK, Calif. (BP)—Pastor Victor Chayasirisobhon likens the Asian Lunar New Year to the traditional American Thanksgiving, complete with “extremely important” family gatherings of love and prayer.

A mass shooter’s choice of Lunar New Year’s Eve to kill 11 and injure nine others is a wound particularly painful for East Asian communities—Christians and nonbelievers, Chayasirisobhon told Baptist Press.

Churches seeking to comfort the community would benefit from knowing the communities’ cultural customs, said Chayasirisobhon, Southern Baptist Convention first vice president and senior pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Anaheim, about 30 miles south of the crime.

“I think that it’s always good for churches as a whole in the current climate to reach out and express their condolences and their care whenever anything like this happens,” he said.

“Sometimes, in Asian communities, (we’ve) not always felt like we’re seen. So, when people of many different cultures, particularly of church culture, reach out and express their sympathy and their condolences in times like these, it is well received and appreciated.

“Typically at times when something happens in our community, depending on which culture of Asia you’re dealing with, it’s typically handled within that particular community; but it’s handled as a community.”

‘A very sensitive time’

Chayasirisobhon has reached out to Southern Baptist pastors in Monterey Park but said typically the community will craft a response by first learning the names of the victims and their immediate families.

“I think this is a very sensitive time, and I think that helping in the appropriate moment is more important than just jumping in without knowing what’s really happening,” he said. “Typically, the way we would help is (by asking) does anyone know anyone who’s related to any of those people that were murdered, and we would try to reach out through those networks first.

“We’re a quieter culture. But that’s where food will show up. We’ll send food. We’ll send money. If these people went to church and are part of the church community, all of those services and resources and care will be given through that way.

“Finding a church or a ministry that’s connected to some of the victims of the shooting is typically how we would do that, rather than some sort of big, visible campaign.”

Peter Yanes, associate vice president of Asian American relations for the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, expressed condolences.

“This tragic and senseless killing shouldn’t be happening to anyone. My heart goes with the families of the innocent victims and everyone affected—those grieving losses and healing as a community,” Yanes said.

“As churches lock arms together to pray for the Monterey Park community, the assurance of comfort, peace and hope may be found in Jesus Christ in these troubling times.”

Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna released the names of two of the

people killed in the rampage, 65-year-old My Nhan and 63-year-old Lilan Li. All victims, including those killed and injured survivors, are in their 50s, 60s and 70s, police said. The death count rose to 11 Jan. 23, with six survivors still hospitalized.

The alleged shooter, identified as 72-year-old Huu Can Tran of Vietnamese descent, was found dead on Lunar New Year's Day of an apparently self-inflicted gunshot wound in a white van about 25 miles from the scene of the crime, Luna reported.

Tran also is accused of attempting a shooting the same night at Lai Ballroom & Studio in nearby Alhambra, but patrons there tackled him and took the gun before he fled. No injuries were reported in Alhambra.

Police are searching for a motive, but early reports described it as a domestic dispute.

In secular culture, the Lunar New Year is celebrated as long as several weeks and is seen as an important forecaster of luck for the new year.

While many Asian Christians celebrate certain customs such as family meals and gifting younger generations with red envelopes containing cash, Chayasirisobhon said, he also encourages celebrants with the gospel.

"You actually have a new year every day when you have Jesus," he said. "We pick these days that mean something to our culture, but [in] our Christian culture, we can start every day new in Christ Jesus."