

# White nationalists to meet gospel witness

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CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (BP)—On the one-year anniversary of white nationalist protests that left three people dead in Charlottesville, Va., area believers plan to counter any resurgence of racism with worship and repentance.

In Washington—where white nationalists are planning a first-anniversary repeat of their Aug. 12, 2017, Unite the Right rally—police are on high alert, and Christians are requesting heightened prayer.

## ‘Show love and respect’

Marshal Ausberry, president of the National African American Fellowship of the Southern Baptist Convention, said D.C. and Virginia believers will engage in “a lot of reflection and a lot of praying this weekend” for safety and harmony at rallies and other public gatherings.

Following last year’s racial violence in Charlottesville, churches seem to have become “more overtly sensitive and are encouraging their people to not only speak about respect and love, but to show respect and love,” said Ausberry, pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in Fairfax Station, Va.

Consequently, the first anniversary of last year’s Charlottesville tragedy is “a golden opportunity” for the church, he noted.

“We’re not in a post-racial society,” Ausberry said. “The church, and I think Southern Baptists as a convention, is the best hope for the world to see. The world is going to do what the world is going to do, and the church must

do what God has built us to do. And that's to show love and to love one another."

## **Community worship service scheduled**

Among the weekend events slated in Charlottesville, a multiracial coalition of evangelical pastors has scheduled a community worship service Sunday night, with a theme of "better together" and a focal Scripture of Psalm 133:1. The only requirement for individuals appearing on the worship service's platform is that they affirm salvation is found in Christ alone.

About 20 churches of various denominations and ethnicities are scheduled to participate.

"People are asking, 'How in the world did you get a permit?'" for a worship service at Charlottesville's downtown mall, said Kyle Hoover, a local pastor who helped found the coalition of ministers organizing the service.

"We're really viewing this as a God-ordained opportunity for the church to finally come to the downtown mall ourselves and for us to gather and to proclaim what we believe is right and what we believe is wrong, and to speak about matters of human dignity, but through the lens of what God's word says about that issue and what the gospel speaks about racial injustice."

Amid heightened tension in Charlottesville, the worship service is the only public gathering granted a city permit for the weekend, said Hoover, pastor of Charlottesville Community Church.

## **State of emergency**

Virginia and Charlottesville-area officials have declared states of emergency for the weekend. About 800 state and local police are expected

in Charlottesville, with 300 Virginia National Guardsmen ready to be mobilized if violence erupts, *The Charlottesville Daily Progress* reported.

Rob Pochek, a Charlottesville pastor who helped plan the community worship service, said, “Those who affirm salvation in Christ alone are the only ones who have the answer for our city.”

“Our city has been looking in politics and in legislation and in rules and in government and even in police protection as a way to enforce racial reconciliation,” said Pochek, pastor of First Baptist Church Park Street in Charlottesville. “The reality is that the answer for racial reconciliation is found in the gospel of Christ.”

The worship service will include lament over some evangelicals’ apathy toward racial injustice, repentance and rejoicing that Christ will one day end racial strife.

Pochek and Hoover requested prayer that no violence would break out over the weekend and that the service would be able to proceed as planned.

As a follow-up event, evangelicals will meet Aug. 15 at a local Presbyterian church for a “fellowship tables” meal, where believers of various ethnicities will share a meal and listen to each other’s stories, Pochek said.

## **Charlottesville Clergy Collective**

Also in Charlottesville, Michael Cheuk, a former second vice president of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, said he has been participating in a multi-faith group called the Charlottesville Clergy Collective, which came together under the leadership of Alvin Edwards, pastor of Mt. Zion First African Baptist Church in Charlottesville.

Before the August 2017 racism and violence in Charlottesville, the Clergy Collective “was kind of a sleepy group of faith leaders,” Cheuk said. The

group drew an average attendance of 10 to 12 at monthly meetings. “But we quickly ballooned to about 40 pastors around town coming because they wanted to know, ‘How can we respond to racism?’”

The Clergy Collective has organized prayer meetings and community worship services for Charlottesville residents of all faiths, both Christian and non-Christian, Cheuk said.

## Call to prayer

In Washington, white nationalists planned an Aug. 12 rally in Lafayette Square across from the White House, permitted for up to 400 attendees, *The Washington Post* reported. Counter-protestors could number as many as 1,500, and police will attempt to keep the groups separate.

Vernon Lattimore, a Washington pastor who is president of the African American Fellowship of the Baptist Convention of Maryland-Delaware, called on believers everywhere to pray for the nation’s capital.

“I would love to see believers begin to pray for God’s kingdom to begin to come on earth,” said Lattimore, associate pastor of Christian education at Central Union Baptist Church in Washington. “Pray for racial reconciliation, but also ... we have to move another step. We have to begin to do that ourselves.

“If we fail to live what we’ve been praying for, it doesn’t make sense to pray for what we are not doing.”

Ausberry of the National African American Fellowship added, “If the world can see us loving one another in the Body of Christ, that can be contagious to the rest of the world.”