

Prayer walk fights 'spirit of fear'

By Stephen Huba, Post staff reporter

A loose coalition of churches is organizing a prayer walk Saturday to address the spiritual problems that it says are behind the recent troubles in Cincinnati.

Prayer walkers say they will "bind the spirit of fear" and "destroy demonic activity" that has a grip on the city.

"We all believe that the power of God is what is needed to heal our community," said Tracie Hunter, general manager of radio station WCVG (1320 AM), chief sponsor of the event. "We're trying to contribute to the healing of the community through prayer and fasting."

Another demonstration growing out of April's riots - a noon march against black-on-black crime that will proceed from Swifton Commons to Roselawn Park - also is scheduled for Saturday. Up to 1,000 Cincinnati elected officials, police officers, ministers and community activists are expected to participate in that event.

Saturday's prayer walk is the latest in a string of similar events held in Cincinnati over the past two months. In the wake of April's racial unrest, marches, vigils and prayer walks have become the tools of choice for groups agitating for change.

"Prayer walks are big for two reasons," said Chris Beard, senior pastor of First Christian Assembly of God in Corryville. "They bring churches together and they expose churches to the realities in the communities."

Rev. Beard joined in a prayer walk with other clergy on the second day of the riots.

Saturday's prayer walk will begin at 4:30 p.m. at St. Francis Seraph Church, 1615 Vine St., Over-the-Rhine.

Ms. Hunter said participants, led by clergy, will walk to various trouble spots in Over-the-Rhine and pray "strategically" for an end to crime, drug dealing, violence and other "unrighteous activity."

The scheduled walk is meant as a follow up to one held on the day of Timothy Thomas' funeral, she said. Thomas was the 19-year-old black man fatally wounded by a Cincinnati police officer April 7.

The Rev. Damon Lynch III, pastor of New Prospect Baptist Church, led a "Jericho march" around District 1 police headquarters May 7, the day that indictments were announced against police Officer Stephen Roach, whose shot killed Thomas.

Rev. Lynch said both kinds of marches - prayerful or political - can be effective.

"I would think they all complement each other," he said. "Spiritual battles are waged through the efforts of prayer but also through the human effort of making change. You can pray; but at some point you gotta add some plagues."

Ms. Hunter said the April 14 prayer walk diffused a potentially explosive situation after officers, apparently unprovoked, fired bean bag ammunition at protesters standing at Elm and Liberty streets.

"My understanding was, that really was responsible in keeping the peace after the bean bag shooting," she said.

"Another group (of protesters) became intermingled in our group, and that caused the tension there to cease."

Several walks have been held with clergy going out in groups of two to talk and pray with people in Over-the-Rhine and other trouble spots.

The Rev. Gregory Chandler Sr., pastor of Peace Baptist Church in Avondale, has participated in neighborhood prayer walks organized by the Avondale Community Outreach.

A coalition of 15 churches, the group has been hosting regular outdoor worship services and prayer walks for the past year. "When the disturbance hit the city, there was relative calm in Avondale," Rev. Chandler said.

Churches also participated in the March for Justice held June 2 at Fountain Square. Marchers demonstrated peacefully for social and economic justice, for an end to "police brutality" and for healing in the community.

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