

**“I am deeply bewildered by the violence in our community.
We come here to bear witness that each life matters.”**

Frederick R. Stubbs, Berks Advocates Against Violence

Group calls for end to violence in city

The scene of a murder earlier in the week forms a backdrop for a prayer vigil for about 50 people.

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By **Jason A. Kahl**

Reading Eagle

About 50 people braved blustery conditions Friday night to sing and pray for peace in Reading in the park at Fifth Street and Centre Avenue near the site of a murder earlier in the week.

The strong winds canceled plans for a candlelight vigil, and lightening and foreboding skies moved several speakers to comment on the need for divine intervention to stop the violence in the city.

“We ask that as this wind blows here tonight a new wind will bring peace into this community,” said the Rev. Dorrian H. Schenck of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The vigil was sponsored by the Violence Prevention Roundtable of Berks, an informal coalition of business people, clergy and neighborhood organizations.

A half-dozen speakers from different churches took turns offering prayers for the city and asking residents to be better neighbors.

The Rev. Sandra R. Fee said her church, First Unitarian Universal-

ist Church of Berks County, is celebrating 175 years in Reading and has no plans of leaving despite Reading’s designation as one of the most dangerous cities in the U.S.

“We believe faith communities must help to end the violence and bring peace,” Fee said. “My husband and I live in the city and believe it is necessary for people of faith and good will to make that same commitment.”

Frederick R. Stubbs, the head of Berks Advocates Against Violence, summed up the sentiment of the crowd best when he said: “I am deeply bewildered by the violence in our community. We come here to bear witness that each life matters.

“We came to confirm our love for our neighbors even while fearing the violence ... We still believe it’s possible to create a land of peace and love. We are horrified by the violence that is happening here in this great city of Reading. I’ve lived here all my life and want to ensure it’s a great city for future generations. The safety of this community is in our hands.”

It wasn’t only church leaders who spoke.

Mayor Tom McMahon and Coun-



Reading Eagle: Ben Hasty

The Rev. Jeffrey D. Bell Sr. leads a group of about 50 in song Friday night in the park at Centre Avenue and Fifth Street. In the background is the Burger King where Samuel Andrew Santiago was shot and killed Monday.

cilwoman Marcia Goodman-Hinershitz urged people to band together to make the city safer.

Robert C. Davis, a music producer and head of La Resistance Records in Reading, said change starts in the home.

“When are we going to start being parents again?” Davis asked. “We need to talk to our kids about right and wrong. The responsibility falls back on the parents. Children need to differentiate between reality and fantasy.”

The crowd locked arms in a big circle and sang the hymn “We Shall Overcome” before a heavy rain

started to fall.

A few speakers offered condolences to friends and relatives of Samuel Andrew Santiago, 25, of 1205 Cotton St., who was fatally shot Monday night in the Burger King parking lot across the street.

No one spoke on his behalf.

A police officer parked nearby pointed to the spot near the entrance to the restaurant where Santiago was murdered. No candles or memorial marked the spot.

The slaying remains under investigation.

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