

First Baptist Roanoke Hosts a SPECIAL COMMUNITY UNITY Prayer Service

by Timothy Cokes

First Baptist Church of Roanoke hosted a night of prayer and worship for the local community Sunday, June 7, in response to the recent events in the nation.

The theme of the night was “Together,” and the keynote speaker was Allen McFarland, pastor of **Calvary Evangelical Baptist Church** in Portsmouth and current president of the SBC of Virginia. McFarland is the first African American to hold that position.

The service featured a diverse group of participants, including Roanoke-area pastors, law enforcement representatives, and government officials. Notable speakers included Roanoke City Chief of Police Samuel Roman Jr. and Roanoke Mayor Sherman Leah Jr.

Bryan Smith, the pastor of First Baptist of Roanoke, said he is proud of the response of the local community amid recent hard times.

“We’re so thankful for our leaders as well as our neighbors in the way that we have handled these difficult, challenging days,” Smith said. “It’s rare to see a city our size that can come together as closely, personally, and compassionately as the city of Roanoke.”

The service was held in First Roanoke’s Faith Chapel because of the sanctuary’s history. Built in 1929, Smith said for many years the building had the largest seating capacity in the city of Roanoke. This allowed First Baptist, in conjunction with a local African American church, to host a community prayer service after

the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 52 years ago.

Smith said some church members still remember the impact of that long-ago prayer meeting.

The first portion of the service Sunday night included a time of praise and worship as well as specific prayer times led by area pastors. Each guest at the service was given a card with a topic, including prayer for the family and friends of George Floyd, for wisdom for leaders and law enforcement, and for the end of systematic racism and oppression in the country.

McFarland brought a message encouraging those gathered to look to the Bible to see how to overcome in a spiritual battle.

“We need to help people realize the spiritual battle that they are in,” McFarland said. “This world’s system is not a friend of grace, but the Bible tells us how we can be difference-makers in this world’s system.”

McFarland spoke from Revelation 12 about how Christians can overcome and make a difference for Christ through the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and loving the Lord and their neighbor more than their own lives.

“People need to know they are sinners and need a Savior,” McFarland said. “You want to march, go ahead and tell people about Jesus. Get involved if you want to, but be a witness for the Lord, and you cannot be a witness for the Lord if you don’t know His Word. We have to show our overcoming spiritual victory to others. We do this by showing love through devotion, determination, and demonstration.”

The service ended with everyone singing “Amazing Grace.” Smith said just as with the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. many years ago, these challenging days can be a source for spiritual renewal for the nation.

“Wouldn’t it be great if out of riots across this nation there would be revival?” he asked. “It could happen. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if it happened starting here tonight?”

Timothy Cokes is a freelance writer and graduate divinity student at Liberty University

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