

RAPID RESPONSE TEAM

# BRINGING GOD'S PEACE TO FERGUSON



**OFTEN DURING** their Ferguson deployment, RRT chaplains took to the streets to talk with local residents.

Billy Graham Rapid Response Team chaplains witness God changing lives in Ferguson, Mo.

ARTICLE BY **RICHARD GREENE**  
PHOTOS BY **SEAN LOFTIN**

**D**ue in April, Lisa feared for the baby she was carrying, terrified what kind of world the child would grow up in. The 30-year-old lives in Ferguson, Mo., not far from where the rioting and looting erupted in late November, sending this town of 21,000 near St. Louis spiraling out of control. Lisa's older sister, a believer in Jesus Christ, knew of Lisa's deep-rooted anxiety. And she also knew who Lisa needed to talk with about her fears. On a dreary mid-December afternoon, she brought Lisa to the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team chaplains.

► **THESE CRISIS-TRAINED** chaplains began arriving in Ferguson on Nov. 26, two days after tensions flared when a grand jury decided not to indict a white police officer in the fatal Aug. 9 shooting of an unarmed black teenager. They immediately circulated among the local community, providing emotional and spiritual care—touching lives, from people on the streets to police officers, firefighters, military personnel and government officials.

On this particular Friday, several RRT chaplains were manning a table in a corner of the Ferguson Community Center. They were among the 57 agencies invited to a resource fair sponsored by the city and neighboring Dellwood.

Lisa's sister introduced her to Suzanne Galvin, a chaplain who lives in St. Louis. "I want my child to grow up right," Lisa told Suzanne. Their conversation quickly turned to spiritual matters. Suzanne understood Lisa's fear perfectly. Just the day before, she had talked with two teenagers at the RRT Mobile Command Center, and they asked for prayer that they would live long enough to become grown-ups.

Suzanne shared with Lisa how much God loved her and how He came to earth in the Person of His Son to die for her sins, and He would forgive her—and always be with her—if she would only confess her sins and receive Christ as her Savior by faith.

Lisa bowed her head and prayed to commit her life to Jesus. Suzanne

then placed her hand on Lisa's stomach and prayed for her unborn baby and their future.

Throughout their nearly six-week deployment, chaplains served long hours, occasionally in the rain and the cold. They engaged residents at the RRT command center, which was set up first in a parking lot and then at a busy intersection. They also ventured out, their feet sometimes aching as they traversed up and down West Florissant Avenue, visiting workers and managers at restaurants, shops, gas stations, department stores and other businesses, sharing the hope of Jesus. They shed tears with people in their homes upon hearing stories of pain and loss. And their hearts broke as burned-out or boarded-up buildings reminded them daily of the pervasive evil in the world.

Through it all, God's goodness prevailed, as 81 RRT chaplains prayed with more than 1,500 people and communicated the Good News with a good majority of them. Dozens made decisions to follow Christ.

Follow-up and discipleship, in concert with local churches and ministries, are now taking place.

The Reverend Jose Aguayo, a St. Louis-area pastor deployed as an RRT chaplain, said God is restoring lives. "I've seen a lot of people come to Christ," he said. "People are

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**AFTER COMMITTING** her life to Jesus Christ, Lisa prays with RRT Chaplain Suzanne Galvin about the impending birth of her child in April.



**THIS BURNED-OUT,** collapsed structure was the backdrop where the RRT truck was parked in Ferguson.

» smiling again. There's hope back in people's eyes."

The Billy Graham chaplains came at the right time, noted Pastor Carlton Lee, whose congregation includes Michael Brown Sr. and his wife Calvina ("Cal")—father and stepmom to the late Michael Jr., the 18-year-old who was shot. "They offered healing and the gift that keeps on giving—Jesus Christ Himself. From Day One, they wanted to see Jesus glorified."

Vivian Dudley, founder of One Church Outreach Ministry, said she found the RRT chaplains' focus on service refreshing. "That just blew people away," she said.

Dudley, who through Christ overcame a longtime drug addiction, said she saw chaplains do everything from helping people rededicate their lives to the Lord to partaking in a wedding. "They've touched places that people here in St. Louis for years have not touched," she said.

Regarding their impact, RRT international director Jack Munday said during an interview with Moody Radio: "God is changing hearts, and people are finding hope in Christ. I think we're going from unrest to unity in the community like we've never seen before."

Reconciliation certainly was on display throughout this deployment.

**RECONCILIATION BETWEEN GOD AND MAN**

After talking with the chaplains, Chris surrendered his life to the Lord. He became so excited that he told his girlfriend. She saw a change in Chris, so she came to the RRT truck and gave her heart to Jesus. Then Chris took a bold step. After a Sunday church service, where Christians expressed their love with loads of hugs, Chris went into the "hood" and brought back three of his gang friends. They came to the church because they knew they could get something to eat. The RRT chaplains were there and hugged these "dudes," as Chris called them, and prayed with



**COMMITMENTS TO JESUS**  
were often made in front of the RRT command center.

them. They then disappeared, only to return to hand over their weapons to Chris. "They said they didn't need them anymore because they found something new," Chris said. "Those are three more guns off the street, three more people coming to church and three more people we might guide in a better direction to spread the Word."

Weeks later, a 17-year-old girl and her mother were waiting at a bus stop located near the RRT truck. Chaplain Pam Rhodes approached them and listened to how recent events had affected them. The daughter particularly seemed without hope. Pam told her that true and lasting hope can only be found in Jesus, then she began sharing the Gospel. The mom already had a personal relationship with Christ, but the teenager said she wanted to ask Jesus into her heart. As she did, tears coursed her mother's cheeks. A few moments later, the bus pulled up. Pam waved goodbye as they rode away with a new life—and the hope of Jesus.

**RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE RACES**

An EMT crew member, who was one of the first responders on the scene when Michael Brown Jr. was shot, came to the RRT truck one day. While there, he met a relative of the Brown family. When they identified each other, they talked a long time, cried together and prayed together.

**RECONCILIATION BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE**

One person in whom the chaplains invested was a man named Kenny. He had committed his life to Christ while in prison. Almost from the outset, Kenny hung around the RRT truck, helping in any way he could, including cooking his savory sweet potato pies. He listened when the chaplains opened up God's Word and taught how to have a Christ-centered marriage. Kenny's marriage was fractured. On the Saturday before Christmas, Kenny brought his wife, Myra, to the truck, and together they talked and prayed with two RRT chaplains. The couple took concrete steps toward reconciliation. Later in the week, Kenny showed up when a distraught mother and her three children came asking for food. He took them to his house and fed them a home-cooked meal.

Revival is definitely on the heart of Michael and Cal Brown, who voiced their thanks to the RRT chaplains for ministering personally to them. The Browns have a dream of hosting an All Lives Matter Peace Fest this summer in downtown St. Louis.

"We want to bring people together to the city," Michael said. "Everyone will be welcome."

Cal added, "We teach our kids that love has no color. We want to help people get closer to God and have a better relationship with Him. We must rely upon Him for peace and reconciliation." ©2015 BGEA

**Churches and Racial Harmony**

HOW MULTIETHNIC CHURCHES COULD BRIDGE DIVISIONS

BY BOB PAULSON

**WHAT IF MICHAEL BROWN** and Officer Darren Wilson had attended church together?

Bryan Loritts, pastor of Fellowship Memphis, posed that question to a panel of white and black evangelical leaders in Memphis, Tenn., Dec. 16.

Attending church together—it's such a simple thought. And if it had been the case for those two men from Ferguson, Mo., it might have changed everything.

The fact that it *wasn't* the case doesn't seem to surprise anyone. Even now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, whites and blacks, Latinos and Asians still overwhelmingly worship with others of the same racial background. According to the

Kainos movement, a church diversity initiative, sociologists consider a church to be multiethnic if it has at least an 80:20 ratio of diversity. And only 2.5 percent of U.S. churches fit that description.

That rankles Derwin Gray, one of the participants in the Memphis panel discussion and lead pastor of Transformation Church, in Indian Land, S.C.

"The New Testament knows nothing of homogeneous churches," Gray says. "That's a foreign concept to Paul and Peter." Gray points out that when the Apostle Paul established churches in various cities, the churches were not separated by ethnic group or class; they included Jews and Greeks, slaves and

free—any Christians who lived in the area.

So by prayer, fasting and intentional structuring of its leadership, Transformation Church has become a church that is multiethnic, multi-generational, and one of the fastest-growing churches in the nation.

In fact, Transformation is a rarity even among multiethnic churches, as Gray, a black pastor, leads a congregation that is 55-60 percent white.

"When churches say they want diversity, what most of them really want is minority *color* but not minority *influence*," Gray said. "Minority color means I can point out in the crowd and in small groups and say, 'Look, our church is diverse.' But yet, the culture will still reflect the majority culture."

Gray's vision for truly multiethnic churches is rooted in Scripture: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"

(Galatians 3:28).

In light of this, churches need to look around, Gray says. "Where is our church located?" he asks. "What are the demographics? Well, that's who is here, so that's who we are going to try to reach."

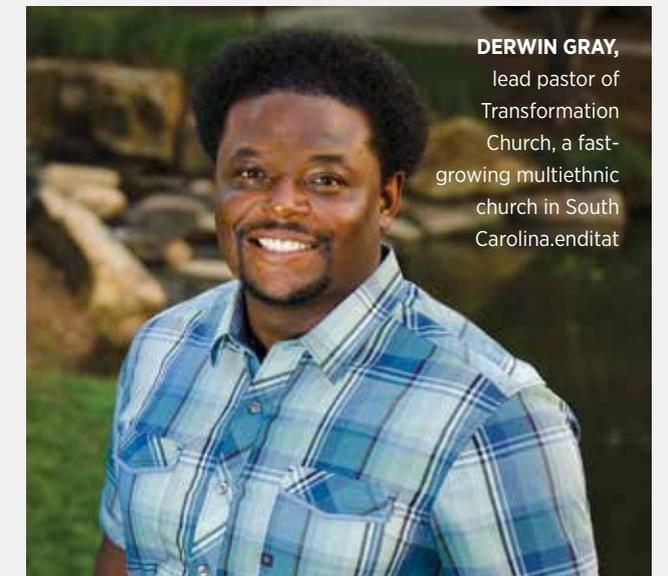
He also points to the need for exegetical preaching that explains the entire Gospel—that God's goal is not only to get people to Heaven when they die, but also to build His kingdom here on earth—a kingdom in which people from every tribe, nation, people and language worship God.

"What we've tried to do is to say, 'Don't leave your culture at the door; bring your culture and add to us,'" Gray says. "Because the more cultures we have—unified in Christ—it's like a multifaceted diamond: Each way you turn it, you see a different glimpse of God's grace." ©2015 BGEA

THE SCRIPTURE QUOTATION IS TAKEN FROM THE HOLY BIBLE, ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION.



**BRYAN LORITTS**, lead pastor of Fellowship Memphis, a multicultural, multiethnic church founded in 2003.



**DERWIN GRAY**, lead pastor of Transformation Church, a fast-growing multiethnic church in South Carolina.enditat