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Anti-crime group urges peace

At LR church, speakers promote steps to reduce violence

by [Jordan Gass-Pooré](#) | August 10, 2015 at 4:14 a.m.

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LaTaveya Franklin (front) sings with the Grace Temple Young Adult Choir on Sunday at Grace Temple Church in Little Rock during a Stop the Violence gathering. - Photo by Melissa Gerrits

Love is the answer, not violence, Bishop Steven Arnold of Grace Temple in Little Rock told about 100 people who had gathered at the church Sunday afternoon to raise awareness of violent crime and to promote peace.

Grace Temple partnered with the anti-crime group Arkansas Stop The Violence to "heighten the value and importance of every life," Arnold said.

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Gospel music and dance accompanied the message.

The church's young adult choir, whose members are between the ages of 20 and 32, represent the demographic most likely to become criminals, Arnold said, because they have limited educational and professional opportunities.

Former Democratic state Sen. Tracy Steele of North Little Rock said communities have to keep children busy to prevent violence.

"An idle mind is the devil's workshop," Steele said.

During his 14 years with the Arkansas Legislature, Steele said, the funds for some programs created to help children's personal and professional development were pulled and transferred elsewhere.

So often have bandage approaches been thrown at the issue, Steele said.

"Sometimes we get too comfortable saying, 'Violence is always gonna be with us. Oh, there's nothin' that we can do,'" he said.

To eliminate violence, people "need to start pulling coattails," Steele said.

The Rev. Benny Johnson, founder and former director of Arkansas Stop The Violence, created the grass-roots group to help prevent inner-city and "black-on-black" crime.

Johnson said he witnessed a fatal shooting of a person at the hands of a 14-year-old when Johnson was a Central High School security guard.

When this happens, communities lose two people: one to the graveyard, the other to the penitentiary, he said.

"When a white officer shoots us, we're gonna march and burn down our neighborhoods, but we're killing each other every day, all over this nation, and we're not saying a word," Johnson said.

For Little Rock resident Marcus Simmons, like others who grew up along Asher Avenue, the odds were stacked against him.

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Simmons, a member of Grace Temple, said God gave him five opportunities to shape up after getting accustomed to street life.

So in 2005, he got a job as co-owner of GoodFellas Barbershop, which now has two locations and a barber college.

Arnold praised Simmons for giving back to the community.

"He done dealt with the drugs. He done did some shootin' and been shot at, but God has delivered him from that," Arnold said.

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