

# Dozens rally to honor victims of street violence

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Concerned citizens hold signs bearing the names of murder victims during the "Standing Together Against Violence" rally in Niagara Square on Saturday.

They chanted "Stop Now! Here's How!" and held signs bearing the names of victims of deadly street violence.

About 60 people gathered Saturday morning in Niagara Square to stand against violence Ô just hours after more deadly gunfire struck down another Buffalo man late Friday.

The "Standing Together Against Violence" rally, planned weeks ago, came on the heels of an especially violent night in the city.

Buffalo police were investigating the shootings of six people, including a 17-year-old youth man who was killed, another 17-year-old youth man who was critically injured and a 14-year-old girl who was shot in the leg.

"There is a distress call in the City of Buffalo. It's like a plane crashing and saying "Mayday," said Kenny Simmons, who runs a program called SOS, or Save Our Selves.

The Rev. Kenyatta Cobb, a Buffalo police and Erie County Medical Center trauma chaplain and one of several clergy on hand for the rally, told those assembled how he had spent much of Friday night and Saturday morning at ECMC providing counseling for the shooting victims and their families.

"The police can only do so much," Cobb said in an interview afterward. "Instead of placing blame, the community itself must take the responsibility.

"We're at a point where if you don't want it, you have to do something about it," he said.

Neighbors no longer can tolerate crack dealers and gang members in their neighborhoods and must cooperate with police to get them out, said Cobb.

"If you know you've got a gang down the street from you and you don't say anything, and the next thing you know your son gets shot, well, you let that happen because you didn't say anything," he said.

Many of the organizers of the rally have been to dozens of prayer vigils over the years to mourn victims.

"We don't want to have any more funerals," said Ava White, president of the activist faith group VOICE-Buffalo, one of the organizers of the rally. "We cannot make a difference just holding prayer vigils."

A variety of other faith groups also were represented at the event.

"We have to do more than pray and wait for God to come and fix it," said Charles Burgin, whose brother, Bernard, was killed 15 years ago in an attack with an assault rifle.

Burgin started a group called Brotherman's Progress and is trying to gather 50,000 signatures to have President Obama or a representative from the White House come to inner-city Buffalo to explore the problem of street violence more closely.

"They need to come here, they need to see what's happening," said Burgin.

The Rev. Hope Harle-Mould, pastor of St. Peter's United Church of Christ in West Seneca, urged people not to think of violent crime as just a Buffalo problem.

"Violence does not recognize municipal borders and boundaries," he said. "Western New York is one community. In the Southtowns, there are many types of violence, as well."

Harle-Mould admitted he had not done enough as a pastor to address the problem of violence, and he pledged to tear up his weekly to-do list and place the issue at the top of the list.

Simmons challenged others to get out on street corners and establish positive relationships with young people, who need more help from adults to stay out of trouble.

"The children are not our future, stop saying that. We are their future," said Simmons.

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