

Peace Rally for neighborhood rocked by violence



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(Photo: Chris Bergin / For IndyStar)

On a sunny fall Sunday in Tarkington Park, the laughter of children playing on the playground was overpowered by the sound of a community mourning and praying for an answer.

A rash of gun violence has rocked the Butler-Tarkington neighborhood. Since Aug. 24, the community has seen three homicides — the most recent on last Tuesday night. This Sunday, the community gathered for a peace rally in Tarkington Park.

"This is a perfect example of our community, we are all races and we all have to work together," said Todd Foushee, a Butler-Tarkington resident for 26 years. He waved his hand out at the crowd, who was singing a song led by members of The People's Church.

The Butler-Tarkington Neighborhood Association reached out to Rev. Charles Harrison of the Ten Point Coalition to find a way to organize and address the violence in the community.

"He spoke at our meeting this past Monday and the next night, he and I are at a homicide scene together," said Ted Feeney, the president of the Butler-Tarkington Neighborhood Association. "Everyone was feeling so good and connected, talking about how to solve the problem and the next night there's a homicide."

Neighborhood residents weren't the only ones out in full force. Among the crowd were members of nearby churches.

"I'm very sad and concerned about what's going on in the community," said Nance Howe, a member of North United Methodist Church, ~~Fullscreen~~ a block away from Tarkington Park. "North is in the heart of the neighborhood, the heart of so much sadness and violence. If I'm able to bring attention to it, then that's what I'm going to do."

Photos: Butler-Tarkington Peace Rally

Steve Dunlop is a member of the Board of Trustees at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Indianapolis. Though he was out of town during the ~~heard~~ meeting last Tuesday night, he says the board members heard the gunshots.

"Our concern is about the whole neighborhood. We hope we can continue to have church," Dunlop said.

Also present were officers of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department, who were mingling with the crowd.

"The guys out here can't detach themselves from this," said Capt. Jerry Leary.

Music and prayer were the main themes of the rally, with members of the clergy stepping up to the microphone and imploring the community to do better.

"The work starts with you, family," said Pastor Eli Johnson of The People's Church. "When we see something wrong, we need to report it instead of calling it snitching," he said, to loud applause.

The candidates in Indy's mayoral race came to show solidarity. "Watching the community come together is an inspirational moment that we are trying to create all over the city," said Chuck Brewer the Republican mayoral candidate.

"If you aspire to lead the city, you need to be present when things are good and you need to be present when people are hurting," Democratic candidate Joe Hogsett said.

The rally eventually turned into a march down 40th Street.

"It's nice to see this level of involvement, unfortunately a lot of people seem to think this is what will fix it," said Drew Coppess, a resident of Butler-Tarkington. "It's good to see the turnout but you should have been angry before that."

Coppess added that he is looking forward to the neighborhood association meeting Monday, where they will discuss public safety.

"I came out hoping there would be solutions instead of just a march and a rally," said Lana Lewis-Talib, another participant who grew up near the area. "But I'm hoping something was formulated in this group to end the crimes because we cannot just march. And we're not going to be able to just pray this away."

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