

New Albany churches partner for social justice prayer service

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- Sep 14, 2020



Second Baptist Church, or Town Clock Church, will serve as the host site for Saturday's unity prayer service. [News and Tribune file photo](#)

NEW ALBANY — Twelve New Albany churches had pledged their support as of Monday for a unity prayer service that will focus on social justice.

A joint statement released by those churches clearly explains the message behind the gathering, which is slated for 6:30 p.m. Saturday in the courtyard of Second Baptist Church, also known as Town Clock Church.

“We denounce racism in all its forms and choose to strive to be a witness to our community — especially our young people — that diversity is a cause for

celebration, not conflict; a display of beauty, not ugliness; a show of strength, not weakness,” the statement reads.

The New Albany churches are seeking city approval to close down the street at Third and Main streets for the event, which will be moved inside the historic church building in case of rain.

As civil unrest began spreading in the wake of George Floyd’s death, area faith leaders began talking about ways to help. The discussion came to a head during a meeting at the Cardinal Ritter House.

David Hock, chair of the Cardinal Ritter Birthplace Foundation board, said faith leaders wanted to do something, but the question was what?

Pastor Allen Colwell of St. John United Presbyterian Church said the faith community felt it wasn’t being represented through the protests and reactions to social injustice issues and believed an act of unity would be a good way of expressing support for those who are fighting oppression.

In terms of whether the matter is a faith issue, Colwell said there’s no question. Jesus Christ’s first sermon focused on aiding the poor and freeing the oppressed, he said.

“Speaking out on justice issues was one of Jesus’ big things,” Colwell said.

The setting for the unity prayer service is the site of a link in the Underground Railroad. Town Clock Church has undergone major renovations in recent years to preserve its history and legacy for being a beacon of hope for escaped slaves.

“We recognize the history of our city, where on the banks of this side of the river individuals and families took their first steps of freedom from captivity,” said Rev. Leroy Marshall, pastor of Second Baptist Church.

“We remember our ancestors, both slave and free, white and black, who courageously risked their reputations and/or lives for the causes of justice and freedom.”

Town Clock Church was once home to Second Presbyterian Church, which is now St. John. Faith leaders referenced the significance of the church building as well as New Albany individuals — including U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sherman Minton and Cardinal Joseph Ritter — in the fight against oppression and racism.

“Continuing our legacy for social justice reform, this event intends to bring people together to pray for positive action and healing in light of recent racially divisive events and civil unrest,” the statement from the churches reads.

“While ongoing local, national and international protests are recognized as important and essential in raising racial awareness and the need for systemic change, our prayers are focused on moving action forward to foster hope and faith, unite diverse communities, and create a better culture for the future.”

Event organizers said they are working with the Floyd County Health Department to ensure the site is safe for the event. Masks will be required and provided for anyone in need, and social distancing guidelines will be followed.

Not only is the event open to the community, but organizers said they hope to attract more churches to take part in the service.