

Stopping the violence through faith

By Bradley Saacks
Staff Reporter
Durham VOICE
thedurhamvoice@gmail.com

Bishop Arnold Harris has his Barnabas.

Barnabas, an early church leader according to the Bible, became known as the son of encouragement because of his accommodating disposition — traits Harris saw in his own son, Santiago Rochelle.

In a cruel twist of irony, Harris, who has held the Stop The Violence outreach ministry at his church for 16 years, lost his firstborn son to gun violence in November — another victim in a tragic year in Durham, where homicides nearly doubled compared with 2014.

But instead of shutting down like many would in this scenario, Harris was inspired — or encouraged — by his 33-year-old son's life.

"We are all human beings," Harris said while sitting in God First People Second church on East Main Street.

"We must all be our brother's keepers, as the Bible says, and look out for one another. It's about love," said Harris. "I want this community, the people of this church, the people who have affected by gun violence, to feel the love I have for them."

Harris' ministry, which he and his wife founded 16 years ago, works to reach kids and teens and bring them off the street, while also providing counseling and financial help families who are impacted by violence.

"He does everything," said Harris' wife, Anne. "When I met him, I was like 'are you even real?'"

The pastor constantly cites Martin Luther King Jr. as a role model, and Harris has one quote in particular that he keeps with him at all times in a binder that also adorns a picture of his son.

"We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for

"If I can influence and help and do ministry for just one person, then all of this effort is worth it."



Bishop Arnold Harris is the pastor of God First People Second Full Gospel Church, on East Main Street. Harris co-founded Stop The Violence ministry 16 years ago and lost his own son to gun violence in November.

(Photo by Bradley Saacks)

the appalling silence of the good," the worn and often-folded sheet of paper reads.

The last part of King's quote — the appalling silence of the good — is why Harris can't sit still.

"Being active is so important. Just being relentless in your love and in your care — if I can influence and help and do ministry for just one person, then all of this effort is worth it," Harris said.

The city of Durham is certainly appreciative of Harris' efforts. Sgt. Tad Ochman of the Durham Police Department mentioned how important victim services are for individuals whose loved ones have been impacted by violence.

Ochman said that because of a constrained budget, police are not able to always supply the full services some-

one might need. The counseling that Stop The Violence provides to family and friends of people slain is critical, Ochman said, in stopping the cycle of violence that has plagued cities like Durham.

Rochelle's death certainly left its mark on Bishop Harris, his family and his congregation.

"It left a community broken," Anne Harris said.

"Nothing in the world is worth taking someone's life over."

But the pastor refused to let the tragedy stop his ministry's work.

And now, as he runs a gym with free boxing classes and a church that is constantly giving back to the community, Harris is ready to make an impact with even more Durham residents.

"I couldn't shut down after my son died," he said. "My faith wouldn't let me."

It's that same faith that isn't letting Durham down.