



GATHERING TOGETHER TO REMEMBER ROMELL: Large crowd attends candlelight vigil in Alton

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - A large crowd of young and old, filled with emotion, turned out Wednesday for a candlelight vigil for **Romell Jones**, organized by the ministry Churches On The Streets next to the Alton Acres Housing Complex community center.

Jones was shot and killed in a drive-by shooting on Monday night by a gunman while waiting for a ride with other children at the Alton Acres Housing Complex community center parking lot.

Sonya Dixon, Jones' mother, and other family were in attendance for the candlelight vigil and felt the warmth and compassion of the community.

Aushukeila Dixon, the aunt of Romell Jones, said on Wednesday night his death hurts bad, but he is in a better place now.

“I am glad they are doing the candlelight vigil,” she said. “This is the second night they have done it. He was a good boy. I loved him to death. I saw him every weekend. I want justice for my nephew, that is what I want.”



Churches On The Streets Co-Founder Angela Valdes said her organization wanted to honor Romell and his life and also show support to the family and Sonya, his mother, and the neighborhood.

“It is heartbreaking what happened,” she said. “We consider this part of our family. We want to send the message we are going to keep coming back here and loving the neighborhood and loving the kids and be a sense of support to the kids. I want to give the mother a hug and let her know we are here for her family.”

Valdes apparently met young Romell in December. She told the media she had to do some digging into her faith and find Bible passages that were meaningful to her in regard to the situation after it happened.

“I really didn’t know what to expect as far as crowd, but I know we have a wonderful, loving community as a whole,” she said. “I had people contact me from both Illinois and Missouri before the vigil.”

Valdes said Churches On The Streets wanted to provide a message of love and unity to the family, the neighborhood and community.

“There are a lot of deep-rooted hurts to deal with,” she said. “That is why the faith community can connect them to local bodies and ministries like ours to help guide them to help find that wholeness,” she said.

Jason Harrison, a pastor at Deliverance Temple Church and associate chaplain of the Alton Police Department, said he never thought a crime of this nature would happen in Alton.

“The community is dealing with it in strong numbers and really lifting up the family,” he said. “I am very excited to see how the community has come together. It takes a village to raise a child and a village to help in such a time of need. Just to see the support of the community is heartwarming.”

Timothy Samuels said it was a blessing to see the community come together as one.

“I am just so thankful people have come out for this little young man who lost his life,” he said. “God is good all the time.”

Marion Endress said she was simply heartbroken for the community and the family.

“I run a Therapy Dog organization and we brought some of our dogs here to help with the sadness,” she said. “It is heartbreaking for an area that usually doesn’t go through this type of thing. My therapy dog organization affiliated with Churches on the Streets does a lot for people to bring comfort in their lives.”

JoAnne Curvey, principal at Gilson Brown, said it was very moving to her and her staff that the community is coming out to as they had for the candlelight vigil in support of Romell and his family.

“It has been a really hard week for everybody, not that our grief is anything in comparison to the mom and family’s grief,” she said. “When you lose a student it is like losing a member of your family. Everybody is holding together and supporting each other. The teachers have been remarkable even though they are grieving to support each other and the students. They have pulled themselves together so they can support the students.”

Curvey said she knew young Romell well and said he was “an amazing boy.”

“He had the best smile,” she said of Romell. “He always helped other students. He mentored other kindergarten students and his own brothers. He is the kind of boy you want your kids to be. There were a lot of things Romell should have been able to do that now he won’t be able to do. I am hoping the inspiration he has given other kids will live on in other kids.”



Ruby Madison of Open Door Fellowship Church, said she wishes people would love one another and stop killing and destroying lives.

“People don’t value life the way they used to,” she said. “I am praying for the family that they will be strong and come closer to God and live their life honoring and glorifying God.”

Zion, a classmate of Romell’s at Gilson-Brown School, said he had moved to the area only a few months ago and he was sad at the loss of his friend.

“He loved to play basketball,” Zion said. “I hope everybody can light a candle and not be sad tonight.”

Only a few steps away from young Zion were a collection of candles, teddy bears and even basketballs. One ball said “RIP Romell, Hoop In Peace.”

When asked if she could say a few words to Romell what would she say, Valdes responded looking up to the heavens with a profound statement that probably summed up how everyone at the candlelight vigil felt: **“We love you, little guy and we will see you again.”**



