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Peace service held amid London riots

Jo Siedlecka Religion News Service | Aug. 10, 2011

LONDON -- The annual peace service at Westminster Cathedral acquired fresh significance on Tuesday evening (Aug. 9) as Londoners gathered to pray for their city and other British communities torn by rioting.

A fourth night of unrest brought total arrests in London to more than 700, according to police, and looting and arson continued to spread to other cities in Britain.

One man has been reported killed and dozens of citizens and police officers have been injured, authorities said.

The rioting began on Saturday after a peaceful demonstration in north London over the police killing of a 29-year-old man.

One attendee among the 200 people at the peace service said she needed a feeling of hope. ?Faith gives hope that current fears and insecurities will pass and we will feel safe on the streets again and trust our young people,? said Ellen Teague.

For the first time, the Roman Catholic cathedral's liturgy mentioned those working for peace in inner cities. People prayed for the police and community workers in areas hit by the riots.

Dedicated to Franz Jagerstatter, who was executed for his conscientious objection to serving in Hitler's army, the event was organized by Pax Christi, the international Catholic organization that advocates for peace. It was attended by Christians of many denominations and Buddhists.

Pat Gaffney, general secretary of Pax Christi, led the service, saying, ?let us pray that we may all become more aware of our responsibilities for what happens in the world around us and be prepared to take what action we can to promote good and prevent evil.?

There was an ecumenical flavor to the cathedral service as prayers of remembrance were offered for those who have given their lives in the cause of peace.

Gaffney read a litany of names of conscientious objectors, including Mennonites, Anabaptists, Quakers and all those who have campaigned against the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East.

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