

Relationships with NOPD, community factor in Baptist response to Bourbon Street attack

NEW ORLEANS (BP) – A long time before the terrorist attack in 2025's earliest hours that left at least 14 dead and dozens injured, Southern Baptists had established connections with the city and its first responders.

Those relationships will continue to be crucial in the coming days and months, said New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary President Jamie Dew.

"When you live in this city, you come to love its people and hurt when a gut punch like this happens," he told Baptist Press. "But it doesn't shake us in terms of our devotion or commitment to be here. Difficult things happen, and we're not going anywhere.

"We're going to keep shining the light of Christ even though we grieve when something like this happens."

The FBI reported that at approximately 3:15 a.m. Central time on Jan. 1, 42-year-old Shamsud-Din Jabbar, a U.S. citizen from Texas, drove a pickup truck onto Bourbon Street. After plowing through the crowd, he exited the truck and engaged in a shootout with law enforcement, who returned fire and killed Jabbar.

Media reports and online video show a truck maneuvering around police barricades from Canal Street onto Bourbon before accelerating quickly. The Sugar Bowl between Georgia and Notre Dame scheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 1, was postponed to Thursday.

Numerous interviews and reviews of the attacker's calls and social media posts have led investigators to determine that he acted alone.

"We've asked several City Council members and their leadership to call on NOBA pastors for support where and when needed," said Jack Hunter, New Orleans Baptist Association executive director. "Meanwhile, we weep with those who mourn and pray for those who suffer. Today, area pastors are prayer walking the streets where yesterday evil and havoc were loosened."

He finished with sharing John 1:5 – "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

"The purposeful mass casualty attack in New Orleans is pure evil," Louisiana Baptist Executive Director Steve Horn told the Baptist Message. "I am praying now for first responders and medical personnel as they assist the injured. I am praying for families of the deceased as they deal with the horrific news. I am praying for our churches who minister in this city daily."

Inman Houston serves as president and CEO of Baptist Community Ministries (BCM), a philanthropic organization in its 30th year serving the greater New Orleans area. He said the daily presence of BCM chaplains alongside officers make them a much-needed resource in times like these.

BCM has provided the chaplains for about 20 years. They carry a badge and a radio. They attend roll call and are a visible presence.

"Officers see the chaplains as someone they can go to when they need to work through something," said Houston, who added that a chaplain was on-site at Bourbon Street within 90 minutes of the attack. "It's ongoing, day-in day-out work."

BCM employs 10 chaplains. Five work directly with the NOPD. A sixth is devoted to a 911 call center. The rest are in area

hospitals and a substance abuse recovery center.

“When police respond to a situation, they go into response mode, which is what we ask them to do,” said BCM Vice President Larry Johnson, who serves as one of those chaplains. “But during those times and afterwards they may deal with existential questions, those of theology and the problem of evil. Chaplains come alongside them as companions and witnesses of their sufferings and help them to not just cope with an event but provide immediate spiritual care.”

NOBTS partners with BCM’s chaplaincy work as well as offering counseling services through the seminary to NOPD officers. During Dew’s presidency, NOBTS has made a significant investment toward numerous security upgrades.

Those steps, Dew told Baptist Press, include placing guard shacks in better vantage points not only for viewing but response time. Other additions are CCTV security cameras, more campus security personnel and training for those officers such as how to engage an assailant and for active shooters.

As is standard, security will be increased for the upcoming Defend Conference next week on the NOBTS campus and the Abide Conference Jan. 31-Feb. 1. Students will begin the spring semester on Jan. 21.