

Omaha, Neb. -- A community banded together in a ceremony held Sunday night to deliver the message that violence and gangs aren't welcome in North Omaha.

Religious leaders, politicians and citizens said they will work together to clean things up in the northern section of the city. Hundreds turned out, and community leaders said it's a step towards reducing gang and gun violence and improving life in north Omaha.

Morning Star Baptist Church was the setting for people of all faiths and political stripes to meet.

"Tonight starts the process," said Nebraska U.S. Rep. Lee Terry. "Tonight, we say we all have our part in this, how can we put it all together, how can we stop it?"

Speakers said they are hoping to raise awareness and spark action.

"Nobody should have to fear the threat of stray bullets or the desperate individuals who see violence as the solution to problems," said Mayor Mike Fahey.

Speakers highlighted different ways to help calm the violence, from more police officers to after-school programs to improved race relations.

"This is the beginning of a new day in north Omaha and eventually for the city of Omaha," said Councilman Frank Brown.

The group agreed that the best solution is a united community.

"You can't just point to the school system, or point to the government and say, 'Stop it,'" Terry said. "It all rest with us. The responsibility lies with us individually to rise up and say, 'No more.'"

Melissa Harris, whose slain daughter's body was found in Hummel Park last year, said the service helped her believe in her community again.

"It has to be the faith. I lost a lot of faith after my daughter's death, but I've regained a lot of it and it just shows that north Omaha can pull together and be a community, a positive, decent community," Harris said.

Fahey said that while the overall crime rate is down in Omaha, gang, gun and drug violence are increasing. He told the audience that public safety will always be his top priority as mayor.



