

# Interfaith Union to take stand today against violence

March, peace vigil to begin at 3:45 p.m. at St. Paul United Methodist Church.

By VALERIE WELLS  
H&R Staff Writer

DECATUR — The goal is positive change. Standing for something, rather than against something.

And the first order of business for the Decatur Interfaith Union is a prayer vigil for peace and encouragement in a neighborhood that has seen its share of troubles: the 1200, 1300 and 1400 blocks of East William Street.

Marchers will meet at St. Paul United Methodist Church, 1305 E. Prairie Ave., at 3:45 p.m. today, then walk together to Jasper Park, where the vigil will begin.

From 4 to 6:30 p.m., participants will walk through the area and hand out in-

formation on the organization to residents. A prayer service — led by Shuaib Neel, a member of Masjid Wali-hasan, and the Rev. Grank Ogden, pastor of St. Paul United Methodist Church — will follow.

"We need to put God back into the hearts and minds of people," Neel said Monday at the group's meeting in Trinity CME Church. "We're missing the religious community. The churches are not standing up."

The group discussed several approaches to the vigil. The Rev. Jim Montgomery of Decatur's First Presbyterian Church



Green  
Trinity CME

mentioned a suggestion to hand out light bulbs to residents as a symbol of the Interfaith Union's slogan, "Light Up and Live."

The meaning is two-fold: Illuminating dark yards and alleys to cut down on crime and bringing the light of hope and support from the faith community into beleaguered neighborhoods.

Montgomery was also concerned that calling the event a "prayer vigil" would turn off potential participants who might think it's an evangelizing mission.

"It projects a 'holier-than-thou' attitude," Montgomery said. "Like 'We have the way, and you don't' — beating others over the head."

But Neel said that as a faith-based group, prayer must be a part of their identity.

"When (people of faith) go out and say we want this (violence) to stop in the name of God," Neel said, "we

shouldn't deny God and our faith in God. We're not there to necessarily convert anyone."

The Rev. Eugene Green, pastor of Trinity CME and moderator of the meeting, said another purpose of the group is to unite different faiths to work together solving Decatur's problems.

"We want to get back to our mission and what we're about," Green said. "The gangs are very vocal, and Christians are very quiet. We need to be vocal. You have to step out in faith sometimes."

And Decatur Mayor Terry Howley, who also attended the meeting, offered the city's support for the group's goals.

"You need to do more than just meet an hour or two on Sunday," Howley told the group. "You need to get out there and work the other 6 1/2 and do what you're supposed to be doing — ministering to the people."