

Fresno leaders attend vigil for slain 9-year-old Janessa Ramirez

By Rory
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Lynda Labendeira, Janessa Ramirez's fourth-grade teacher at Steinbeck Elementary School, addresses the crowd at Thursday's vigil. RORY APPLETON — The Fresno Bee

- Services for Janessa Ramirez

Where: Cornerstone Church, 1545 Fulton St.

Viewing: Friday 5 to 8 p.m.

Services: Saturday 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

To help: The family has set up an online account through Go Fund Me (<http://www.gofundme.com/kiemdk>) seeking help with funeral expenses. Anyone wishing to donate to the Crime Stoppers Reward Fund can contact Fresno police Lt. Joe Gomez at (559) 621-2751.

Around 300 people joined Fresno City Council members, police Chief Jerry Dyer and Janessa Ramirez's family and teachers at a large vigil Thursday night at Marks and Clinton avenues west of Highway 99, the location where Janessa was struck and killed by an errant bullet Sunday.

Many of those in attendance were moved to tears when Janessa's fourth-grade teacher at Steinbeck Elementary, Lynda Labendeira, spoke about the young girl.

Council Member Esmerelda Soria and Dyer spoke to the crowd, which huddled closely together in a half-circle near a makeshift stage in front of Janessa's memorial. Council Member Clint Olivier was also present but did not speak.

“I’ve never seen a vigil this large in our community — it’s incredible,” Dyer said. He compared the level of support to how the community rallied around the family of Marcus Wesson, who killed nine of his children at his Fresno home in 2004.

“But in that case, we had the killer in custody,” Dyer added. “Here, we are still trying to get information to catch those responsible.”

Dyer spoke several times at the event, echoing previous statements about the department’s full commitment to solving the crime. He told the crowd that police have received more than 30 tips — many of them good — in the case and praised those who have donated money to either help the family or build a reward fund for information in the case.

Soria said the reward fund totals \$22,500. She also noted the community’s aid to Janessa’s family, whose crowd-funding campaign for funeral expenses has received more than 300 donations over the last few days.

Soria said it was important for Fresno’s government to show public support. “We’re here to show unity and take back our neighborhoods,” Soria said. “I’ve never been a part of something like this. The entire community is shaken up.” Janessa’s mother, uncle, grandmother and grandfather each briefly addressed the crowd. The family urged those responsible to come forward and asked the community to trust God in these difficult times.

Labendeira remembered good times with Janessa. “She would greet me every morning and ask if she could help me carry anything. She knew what was going on in your life — she was an angel.”

Labendeira said Janessa was scheduled to receive the “most improved reading” award in a small class ceremony on Friday.

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