

Parisians gather in churches and plazas after attacks

by [Sara Miller Llan](#)

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*(The Christian Science Monitor)* The Eiffel Tower stood dark Saturday night, an expression of the stunned response across Paris after one of the worst terrorist attacks in European history, which left at least 129 dead and 352 wounded. But as sunshine embraced the city Sunday, Parisians arose to channel their anger, fear, grief, and determination.

Streets that were empty yesterday were filled as residents searched for a sense of community, packing into churches that are normally empty, lighting candles at the sites of the attacks, and amassing in public plazas even though a state of emergency forbid it.

It has been less than a year since extremists attacked the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and a Jewish supermarket in Paris. Yet on the first Sunday after that attack, Parisians knew where to go. They joined more than a million people at Place de la Republique who marched, along with 40 heads of state, down the main boulevards of central Paris.

It showed solidarity in a deeply secular country that was reclaiming their freedom of expression, religion, and thought.

There was no single rallying call after Friday's attacks—France's most violent night since World War II—with simultaneous suicide bombings and shootings across six sites, including a concert hall, a soccer stadium, a restaurant, and a street full of bars and cafes. Instead, the mood was reflective, with the sense that anyone living here could have been hit. And it appeared that individuals processed this realization in clusters, wherever they found relief.

At Sainte Elisabeth de Hongrie, a Roman Catholic Church not far from where the attacks began, regular parishioner Nana Sumah said the pews are normally empty. Yesterday the church was filled to capacity, with visitors forced to stand in the back.

In one section, only one man of some 50 knew the words to a hymn, which he sang loudly, without self-consciousness.

"I am a believer, so my religion gives me hope," Sumah said. "But many non-believers are here today to also find light."

At the American Church in Paris, on the city's Left Bank, the pews were crowded with multitudes of Americans, as well as tourists who simply wanted to grieve with the city.

Cardinal André Vingt-Trois, the Archbishop of Paris, gave a closed mass at Notre Dame Cathedral to honor the victims. Parisians and tourists alike who had hoped it would be open settled for standing outside in prayer.

Along Rue de Charonne, where gunmen took almost 20 lives at the shuttered La Belle Equipe bar, dozens of people, many of them weeping, left candles and heartfelt notes. One note was signed by two women to another who was killed. "We'll remember you forever," they wrote.

And at Place de la République, Jacqueline, a young mother with two children in tow, headed to the statue of Marianne, the symbol of the French Republic. It was her second visit this year—but this time she went with a heavier heart. "It's not just one [type of] people or journalists," she said. "It's everyone."

Another visitor to the site, Didier, a Frenchman who wanted to give only his first name, commuted from the suburbs in camaraderie with his fellow citizens. "I [want to] improve the feeling by being present here, to do a little thing at my individual level," he said. "I heard about spontaneous meetings going on here, and I came to feel the difficult mood together with other Parisians."

While Parisians showed defiance in gathering at the large plaza during a state of emergency, a panic broke out in the evening when many thought they heard gunshots, causing a frightening stampede of hundreds. An American expatriate living nearby opened her house to ten people who were physically shaking, worried that another terrorist attack was beginning.

Museums remained closed, as did public pools and gyms. There are barricades across the city, as well as "canceled" signs. Many cafes and restaurants have not yet reopened. But Alain, the owner of L'Absinthe Café on the corner of Rue Volta, less

than half a mile from République, said he opened to help bring back life.

And indeed, on an unseasonably warm and bright Sunday, Parisians slowly began to clamor for seats at such popular outdoor cafes, to find perches along the Seine, and to take their children to playgrounds across the city.

“I have a strange feeling [but] life goes on, so I am open,” Alain said. “We’re not going to let anyone stop us.”

*Jason Walsh contributed to this report.*