



Pastoral Letter

The Rt. Rev. Carlye J. Hughes, XI Bishop of Newark

To be read in all congregations of the diocese, or otherwise made available to all members by email or other distribution.

May 25, 2022

Dear Companions on the Journey,

Especially in times of trouble our practice is to start with prayer. Let us pray:

God our deliverer, gather our horror, anger, and sadness at the death of children and teachers at Robb Elementary School into the compass of your wisdom and strength, that through the night we may seek and do what is right, and when morning comes trust ourselves to your cleansing justice and new life. Amen.

(Adapted from Enriching our Worship 2, p. 143)

The news of another school shooting, this time in Uvalde, TX, has shocked, disheartened, and angered us all. We will pray daily for the dead and the devastating grief now engulfing their loved ones. And we must turn ourselves to action.

Nineteen small bodies and those of two teachers demand our commitment and attention to life. What shall we do as individuals and as church to bring the frequent mass shootings to an end? The dead have no time for our discouragement, they have no tolerance for our feeling overwhelmed, and they have no need for our opinions. Instead, the echo of their lives and the horror of their deaths urges us to a relentless commitment to end gun violence and mass shooting.

These students and teachers, along with their classmates, parents, families, and friends, had every expectation to go home to dinner, playtime, homework, and bedtime stories. All disrupted by yet another person with unchecked access to guns and a relentless desire to inflict death.

They had a right to life. So did grocery shoppers in Buffalo, NY, church goers in Laguna Woods, CA, and school children in Columbine, CO, Newtown, CT, and Parkland, FL. The Robb Elementary School shooting comes ten years after 20 children and six adults were murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown. It comes 10 days after 10 people were murdered while grocery shopping in Buffalo. Their deaths spur us on towards prayer and action.

If we do not want to see this happen again, then all of us must take up our part to enact a change. A few ways to get started:

Call and write your congressional representative. Do not assume that because we are from New Jersey, their voice and presence on this matter do not count. They need to know that we expect them to press for significant and impactful change to protect the lives of all people.

Call and write your state legislature representative. Ending gun violence and mass shootings will take a coordinated effort by state and federal governments. Our state representatives need to know this is an issue of deep concern to us.

Start a chapter of Episcopal Peace Fellowship in your parish or region. Learn and share ways your parish and region can align themselves with efforts across the Episcopal Church.

Adapt prayers for individual use and for the Prayers of the People. Bishops United Against Gun Violence (bishopsagainstgunviolence.org) and *Enriching Our Worship 2* are good liturgical and prayer resources.

Add the names of the dead to your personal and parish prayers lists. Pray for them by name in your daily prayers and in Sunday services.

Wear Orange on June 3, National Gun Violence Prevention Day (wearorange.org). June 3 begins a weekend of activity across the nation. How is your municipality observing the weekend? How is your parish? How will you? It may be as simple as wearing orange to church this Sunday and on June 3. And it is an opportunity for all of us and our parishes to take an active and visible stance.

Write articles and letters to your local publications and local leaders. In order to make change, our voices must be present, energetic, and relentless. Tell the story of our faithful response to gun violence at every opportunity.

This is our ongoing work as God's people. It will take time and require perseverance. We can grieve, pray, and roll up our sleeves at the same time. The cost of doing nothing is too high and leads to more death. God will guide us, work within us, and bring us into a new way of life.

Almighty God, receive, we pray, into the arms of your mercy all innocent victims; and by your great might frustrate the designs of those who would inflict evil in this world and establish your rule of justice, love and peace; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.
(Adapted from the Collect for the Holy Innocents, Book of Common Prayer, p. 238)

Grace and Peace,

The Rt. Rev. Carlye J. Hughes
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