

St Philip Prayer Circle

Prayers for the Victims of Gun Violence

June 9, 2022

Land Acknowledgement: *We recognize the enduring presence of Indigenous peoples connected to and on this land. We are grateful for the opportunity to gather on this territory and work in this community, and we commit ourselves to the work of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.*

Today we are praying for the victims of two mass shootings in the United States. There was more violence this past weekend, and there may be more in the future, but for today, we are upholding the people who were just doing their shopping, or attending school, or teaching their class, not expecting the worst possible, unforgivable violence to take place. We are going to take the “mass” out of these shootings, and honour the individuals with our prayers. To move each from being a victim back to being a person. As one mother said: *“Why I want the world to know? Because I don't want her just to be another kid. I don't want her just to be another face. I don't want any of those kids to be just another face. Each one of them has a story to tell. And this just horrendous act just cut everything short for them.”* And we will pray for their families, and loved ones, and communities, who are heartbroken and discouraged with our world. Let us start with our guide, the gift of grace from God, readings from the Bible.

READER: Today we will recite Psalm 91 – A Psalm for Protection

¹ Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

² I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust.”

³ Surely he will save you
from the fowler’s snare
and from the deadly pestilence.

⁴ He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

⁵ You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,

⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at midday.

⁷ A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

⁸ You will only observe with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.

⁹ If you say, "The LORD is my refuge,"
and you make the Most High your dwelling,
¹⁰ no harm will overtake you,
no disaster will come near your tent.
¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways;
¹² they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.
¹³ You will tread on the lion and the cobra;
you will trample the great lion and the serpent.
¹⁴ "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.
¹⁵ He will call on me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honor him.
¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation."

TOGETHER: **Gracious God, in times of anxiety and stress, teach us to wait in quietness for your protection and defence, made known to us in Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN**

READER: A reading from the Gospel of John, Chapter 16:33 to 17:4

All: Glory to you Lord Jesus Christ

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

This is the Gospel of Christ,

All: Praise be to you Lord Jesus Christ

READER: Let us Pray for the victims of the Topp’s Grocery Store shooting in Buffalo, NY

Ten Black people were killed — six women and four men ranging in age from 32 to 86 years. Four of the shooting victims were store employees, and the others were customers.



Aaron Salter, aged 55, was a retired Buffalo police officer and the grocery store’s security guard. He confronted the assailant when he entered the store and consequently lost his life. Buffalo Police Commissioner Joseph Gramaglia said Salter was a “hero in our eyes.”



Friends and family of Pearly Young, aged 77, said she loved singing, dancing, and being with family. She ran a food pantry in the Central Park neighborhood for 25 years, feeding people every Saturday. She was a mother, grandmother, and missionary.



Deacon Heyward “Tenny” Patterson, aged 67, was said to be always eager to help others, Patterson would often help drive people who needed transportation to the Topp’s store.



Ruth Whitfield, aged 87, was on her way from visiting her husband in a nursing home before stopping at the store to get something to eat.



Katherine Massey, aged 72, is described by her sister, Barbara Massey, as “a beautiful soul.”



Celestine Chaney, aged 65, was a grandmother of six and the great-grandmother of one, and a cancer survivor.



Roberta A. Drury, aged 32, is the youngest victim. Her friends said she was full of life, always happy, and that she cared about everyone.



Andre Mackneil, aged 53.



Margus Morrison, aged 52, died from the injuries.



Geraldine Talley, aged 62

And among the injured were: 20-year-old Zaire Goodman of Buffalo; a 50-year-old from Tonawanda, New York; and a 55-year-old from Lackawanna, New York. According to police, one of the wounded victims was Black, while the two others were White.

TOGETHER: Lord God, the maker and redeemer of all, grant Aaron, Pearly, Tenny, Ruth, Katherine, Celestine, Roberta, Andre, Margus and Geraldine the sure benefits of your Son’s saving passion and glorious resurrection, that in the last day, when you gather up all things in Christ, we may with them enjoy the fullness of your promises; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. AMEN

READER: Let us Pray for the victims of the Robb Elementary School shooting in Uvalde, Texas



Layla Salazar, 11 years old. Her father, Vincent Salazar, would play "Sweet Child O' Mine" by Guns N' Roses as he drove her to school each morning and Layla would sing along. Julien Salazar, Layla's brother, described her as "positive" and "energetic."



Tess Mata, 10 years old. Tess' mother, Veronica Mata said "Every time we would see another mass shooting on the news we would say, "That could never happen here. Not in Uvalde.""



Alithia Ramirez, 10 years old. "She was a very talented little girl," Rosa Maria Ramirez, her grandmother said. "She loved to draw."



Uziyah Garcia, 10 years old. His grandfather, Manny Renfro, described Uziyah as "the sweetest little boy that I've ever known."



Makenna Lee Elrod, 10 years old. Makenna loved to play softball, do gymnastics, loved to dance and sing, play with fidget toys and spend time with her family. She loved animals and "made friends everywhere she went," her aunt said.

Jailah Nicole Silguero, 11 years old, and Jayce Carmelo Luevanos, 10 years old were cousins who attended Robb Elementary School. "They were nothing but loving baby angels, always had a smile on their face just full of life," their cousin said. "I can't believe this happened to our angels."



Rojelio Torres, 10 years old. His mother described Rojelio as a "very smart and loving child." Orta, a mother of four, said she is trying to stay strong for the rest of her children, but added, "I lost a piece of my heart."

Annabell Rodriguez, 10, and Jacklyn Jaylen Cazares, 9, are cousins and were in the same fourth-grade class at Robb Elementary School. Jacklyn's father said "Jackie was the one that would go out of her way to help anyone. It gives me some comfort, that she would be the little cracker that would have done something to help her classmates in that very scary scenario."



Eliahna Torres, 10 years old.

Amerie Jo Garza turned 10 May 10. Her stepfather said "Thank you everyone for the prayers and help trying to find my baby, she's been found. My little love is now flying high with the angels above."



Xavier James Lopez, 10 years old. According to his cousin, Xavier's mom was at his awards ceremony one to two hours prior to the shooting, not knowing it would be the last time she would see him.

Navaeh Bravo, 10 years old.





Ellie Garcia, 9 years old.

Alexandria Aniyah Rubio, 10 years old, is an honor student who was killed on the same day she received a good citizen award from her school, according to her family. Just hours before she was killed, a smiling Alexandria posed with her parents after receiving a certificate for being a straight A student



Maite Rodriguez, 10 years old. Maite's mother said, "She was charismatic. She was goal-driven. She was ambitious. She was determined. She was focused. She was competitive, smart, bright, beautiful, happy."

Maranda Mathis, 11 years old. Maranda's brother Bruce, a second grader, was also at the school but was not injured.



Jose Flores, 10 years old. Christopher Salazar, an uncle of Jose Flores, wrote on Facebook: "I love you and miss you."

Lord God, we are angry and disillusioned to see violence committed against children. How could this happen? What good can come of this? Lord, we don't see a way out of the anguish and rage we feel as we read about the loss of so many young lives. Show us who you are. We know you are good, that all your creation was seen by you as good, and yet, we don't see any good here. We need a miracle, Lord, a miracle to end gun violence. We give you this tragedy to be redeemed, in Jesus' name we pray.

ALL: AMEN

TOGETHER: Lord God, the maker and redeemer of all, grant Layla, Tess, Alithia, Uziyah, Mckenna, Jailah, Jayce, Rojelio, Annabell, Jacklyn, Eliahna, Amerie, Xavier, Ellie, Alexandria, Maite, Maranda, and Jose the sure benefits of your Son's saving passion and glorious resurrection, that in the last day, when you gather up all things in Christ, we may with them enjoy the fullness of your promises; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. AMEN



Irma Garcia was a fourth-grade teacher at Robb. Garcia had been teaching for 23 years at the school. She also was a co-teacher with Eva Mireles in the same classroom for five years. Compounding the family's grief, Garcia's husband, Joe, died on Thursday after suffering a massive heart attack. Irma and Joe Garcia were about to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary, the two had known each other since eighth grade and have four children together.



Eva Mireles, a fourth-grade teacher at the elementary school, had been a teacher in the school district for approximately 17 years. Her aunt, Lydia Martinez Delgado said "I'm furious that these shooting continue. These children are innocent. Rifles should not be easily available to all. This is my hometown, a small community of less than 20,000. I never imagined this would happen, especially to loved ones. All we can do is pray hard for our country, state, schools and especially the families of all."

Lord God, we give you thanks for the lives of Irma and Eva. Like you, they were teachers, and they gave of themselves to their students and to Robb Elementary School. We can only imagine how they tried to protect the children under their care. Comfort their families and be very close to them in their sadness and loss. Bless the students whom they taught that survived this tragedy. Help them to heal from the horrors they saw and felt, to one day have pride in all that they learned from their teachers. Lord, we place Irma and Eva your loving hands and ask you to receive them into your heavenly Kingdom where they will be happy forever and ever.

ALL: AMEN

READER: Let us Pray for those who committed these horrific acts

Lord God, we cannot comprehend what would bring a person to commit such horrific acts. We know they are with you now, and can no longer cause harm to your beloved people. For those who are in a place to cause injury to others, remove fear from their hearts and fill it with your peace, that surpasses all understanding. May they come to know you as the creator of heaven and earth, that they are precious in your eyes, that they may not become hardened by what has brought them to this dark place, and that they may start worshipping you in spirit and truth. In Jesus' name, we pray.

ALL: AMEN

READER: A Prayer for family, friends and communities broken by gun violence

Lord God, we raise our prayers to you in remembrance of the families and friends of the victims of gun violence. Comfort those who mourn. Dry the tears of those who weep. Sustain those who feel diminished. Impart courage to the hearts of those who feel helpless.

We raise our prayers in remembrance of all communities torn apart by gun violence. Each incident of violence affects all your people in our daily lives and work. Renew our resolve to pursue peace in our cities and towns and to respect the dignity of all human beings.

We raise our prayers in remembrance of school teachers and administrators who put their students' needs ahead of their own safety. We pray for first responders, including police, fire and rescue personnel who witness the horror of gun violence while in service to our communities, and we pray for all those with responsibility for law enforcement. We give thanks for their call to protect and serve and to seek justice, which is inspirational to others, and we pray that their emotional wounds will be healed.

We raise our prayers for those lives taken by gun violence through suicide, and also for those lives taken through accidental shootings, especially when those shootings involve children. Console and strengthen those whose despair is so very great.

We raise our prayers in remembrance of all people impacted by gun violence, as gun violence knows no boundaries but can affect all nationalities, races, cultures, faiths, genders, and socioeconomic classes; it can affect us where we live, where we worship, where we work, where we study, and where we play.

We raise our prayers for those who have committed acts of gun violence and for their families. We remember those suffering from mental illness who have gone untreated, and those suffering from loneliness and isolation. We pray for those who injure and kill in your name. We pray for those who would use guns, power and violence rather than respect and dignity to reconcile differences. Grant us the strength to pursue justice with a voice of love.

We raise our prayers for all community leaders and elected officials. Give them insight, wisdom, and courage to address head-on the epidemic of gun violence. Pour forth your Spirit on all our neighborhoods and break the chains of violence that bind your people¹.

ALL: God of Astonishing Mercy, Compassion and Immeasurable Love, restore our broken hearts and enliven our confidence to find new ways to revive our world to become one of peace. AMEN

READER: A Prayer for the end of gun violence²

Lord God, our hearts are broken with pain at the senseless deaths caused by gun violence. Families mourn, children live in fear, and some in our world respond by arming themselves with more guns with greater capacity to end life. Our disconnection and alienation has caused some to turn to guns for protection and safety. We ask that you touch our hearts with your love, heal our brokenness, and turn us away from violence toward peace. Help us to transform our own hearts and to seek peaceful ways of resolving our differences. Let our hands reach out and connect with those who feel alone, those who live in fear, and those suffering from mental illness. Let our voices be raised asking our legislators to enact gun laws to protect all in our society, especially those most vulnerable. Let our pens write messages demanding change while also scripting words of hope and transformation. We ask this in the name of your son and our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who desires that we live together in peace.

ALL: AMEN

¹ Adapted from the Vermont Interfaith Prayer and Remembrance Vigil, December 15, 2015

² Adapted from <https://sistersofmercy.org/resource/prayer-let-the-shooting-end-2/>

READER: Our Final Exhortations from Paul's letter to the Philippians, beginning at Chapter 4

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice.

And the God of peace will be with you.

ALL: AMEN

TOGETHER LET US PRAY THE LORD'S PRAYER:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever,**

AMEN