

The rally this Sunday that will bring people in the Stamford area together in opposition to the heinous gun violence that terrorized so many in El Paso and Dayton, as well as throughout the country, was initially an event that the Episcopal Churches in Stamford--St. John's, St. Andrew's, St. Francis, Epiphany, and Betania--had planned. Initially, the rally was intended to raise school supplies for DOMUS and to focus on children heading back to school. Tragically, the gathering has morphed into an inter-religious rally focusing on the unconscionable events of last week. Perhaps in a wholly clairvoyant moment, the committee had originally invited the Executive Director of Connecticut Against Gun Violence to speak. How tragically prescient this choice was. Regardless, the gathering is important for people to come together, to offer comfort and solace, as well as support and renewed commitment to prevent such atrocities in our own community as well as throughout our country.

While the rally has changed, the group planning it has not. And the name of this collaboration between the Episcopal churches in Stamford is inspired: *Working Beyond the Walls*. Indeed, the reason for the initial gathering and the emerging vigil both engage us as Episcopalian Christians in this vital sense. We are not called to remain hidden behind the walls. Rather, the worship and prayer that is a part of our weekly liturgy calls us beyond the walls to work that is of God wherever we find ourselves. A wonderful expression of this that frames things in a similar light comes from Paul Claudel. He writes, "Speak about Christ only when you are asked. But live so that people ask about Christ."

The 21st century and our current milieu certainly offer plenty of challenges to us as individuals, families, secular communities, schools, cultural and social institutions, as well as churches, synagogues, and other religious communities. The ability to reframe our situation or to look at our condition from a different perspective is critical in such situations. I highly doubt that there is an elixir that can solve our problems. Rather, for us as Christians in the world, we are invited to move beyond the walls and to live so that people ask about Christ. There will be many for whom such activity seems meaningless or pie-in-the-sky. However, the values of our tradition--unconditional love, self-sacrifice, community, and seeing the image of the divine present in those we meet--can stand up to most any ethical or moral system.

Of course, this is not a popularity contest, nor do we ever want to return to the days of groups claiming superiority in their thought or belief. Let our actions speak for what we hold to be central and non-negotiable. In doing so, we can offer the world an alternative vision of our life and life together. The piece that I passed on earlier this week from my colleague Pastor Duane Pederson contains a very helpful frame for engaging the world and the many issues that we face. It is worth repeating here. Duane writes:

As people of faith and as citizens of a democracy, we are impelled to seek the

safety and welfare of all. Faith active in love includes supporting those policies and candidates that promote safety and neighborhood health. The engagement strategy of our denomination is awareness, accompaniment and advocacy – to become more deeply **aware** of an issue, to **accompany** those most directly affected, and to **advocate** for policies and practices that make a positive difference for those most affected. This is what we do as the church of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, this is what we do. Whether you think of it as Working Beyond the Walls, or living so that people ask about Christ, or becoming aware, accompanying others, and advocating, it is all part of the larger in-breaking of God's presence in the world around us. The problems can seem so daunting that we may lose heart. However, I am convinced by the overwhelming acts of grace and love that I witness on a daily basis that we shall overcome someday.