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| August 7, 2019 Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, With you, I am heartbroken and horrified by the mass murders in El Paso and Dayton. Words alone are not sufficient to express the hopeless, helpless, and angry feelings with which we are left, and the despair of living in a society in which it is unsafe to shop at the mall, go out with friends in the evening, or send our children to school. When atrocities of gun violence and societal terror occur in our diocese and state, as they have in Chardon and Dayton respectively, it is more difficult to detach and distance ourselves from their horror. Wherever they are perpetrated, from Sandy Hook, Connecticut to Gilroy, California, these violent acts are close to home if our home is in the heart of God and if we hold the victims, their families and loved ones, and their communities in our prayer. Prayer is an essential element of the response of all people of faith, Christians and non-Christians alike. It links us inextricably both to those *for* whom we pray and to the one *to* whom we are praying, thus to the divine intention of wellbeing and care for all of God's beloved. This is equally true of our prayer for those with whom we are at odds and disagree, with our "enemies," as Jesus called them. They, too, are the ones he told us to love and pray for, in spite of how they treat us or treat others, in spite of how much we may be threatened by or loathe them. Perhaps especially in a politically polarized context like our own, where civil discourse is increasingly replaced by adversarial accusation, prayer is fundamental to combatting the increasing demonization of those who differ from us politically, culturally, ethnically, economically, and in any other way. We must pray for the other, no matter who the other is, if we are going to create an environment where God's love can triumph. We pray for others, whether friends or foes, in hopes that they might find comfort and healing, or might see the light, have a change of heart, perhaps behave differently. But be clear about this: the efficacy of our prayer is measured not by how much that person changes, but by how we change. Our prayers for the victims and perpetrators of mass shootings, for our fellow citizens and our elected officials, must open our eyes to our own values and priorities. They must open our hearts to what we will do, what actions we will take, how we will adjust our own expectations and entitlements, and what we are willing to give up in order to make this world safe for and respectful of everyone. In our prayer we are always and inevitably called to conversion, to living differently and in ways that break down barriers between us, that allow us to hold one another accountable because first we hold ourselves accountable. We must understand that our prayer for others is equally prayer for ourselves. Our prayer assumes and requires a willingness to hear how we can change, how our own, dug-in heels might be released, and how our helplessness might be replaced with the hope and courage to act that find their source in Christ Jesus. In the wake of these killings, O God, let our horror and helplessness lead us both to a deeper humility and to more courageous and sacrificial action on behalf of your truth and love. The Rt. Rev. Mark Hollingsworth, Jr.Bishop of Ohio |

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