

Lifting Our Light in the Darkness

A **Nuns Against Gun Violence** Prayer Service

Gathering Reflection and Candle Lighting

[If you are gathering in a group setting for your vigil, read the following opening reflection aloud. In a group prayer, one person might light each candle.]

Holding an unlit candle in your hand, take this moment to breathe deeply and enter into a spirit of prayer.

Observe the cold wick of the candle you hold. Call to mind the grave epidemic of gun violence across our country and the thousands of people who have been harmed by it. Think of those people that you know in your own life who may have been affected by gun violence. Enter into the collective pain and grief of our nation. Visualize that suffering as a gathering darkness. In silence, reflect: What will it take to push back this darkness with the light of our collective love, strength and courage?

When you are ready, light your candle. Notice how the light spills into the darkness, transforming and brightening the space around you.

Still in silence, lift your candle into the air. Imagine this flame joining with those of others all across this nation who are praying together today. Visualize your candle as one of a wave of lights being lifted into the darkness, one after another.

Together, our light is stronger than the darkness of fear.
Together, we lift our lights, and we pray for courage.

Opening Song

Begin your vigil in song with the following hymn.
If a recording is preferred, follow the link to listen to "World Peace Prayer" by Marty Haugen.

God of Mercy, You Have Shown Us
(A Hymn Lamenting Gun Violence)

Suggested melody: BEACH SPRING 8.7.8.7. D
("God of Day and God of Darkness")

God of mercy, you have shown us ways of living that are good:
"Work for justice, treasure kindness, humbly journey with your God."
Yet your people here are grieving, hurt by weapons that destroy.
Help us turn to you, believing in your way that brings us joy.

On a street where neighbors gather, shots are heard; a young girl dies.
On a campus, students scatter as the violence claims more lives.
In a family filled with anger, tempers flare and shots resound.
God of love, we weep and wonder at the violence all around.

God, we pray for those who suffer when this world seems so unfair;
May your church be quick to offer loving comfort, gentle care.
And we pray: Amid the violence, may we speak your truth, O God!
Give us strength to break the silence, saying, "This can be no more!"

God, renew our faith and vision; make us those who boldly lead!
May we work for just decisions that bring true security.
Help us change this violent culture based on idols, built on fear.
Help us build a peaceful future with your world of people here.

Tune: The Sacred Harp, 1844. Harm. James H. Wood, 1958.
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Readings

[Select either or both readings, as appropriate for your group]

Reading 1:
The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

A Reading from the Gospel of Luke.

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.

"Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"

He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'

Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

He said, "The one who showed him mercy."

Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Reading 2:
"Sad, Tired, and Angry: A Prayer in the Face of Gun Violence"

by Fr. James Martin, SJ

Almighty God,

I come before you,
once again,
after another shooting.

I am sad, God.

So I ask you
to receive into your loving care the souls of those who were killed,
to care for those who were wounded or hurt in any way,
to console the family members and friends of those who died or were wounded,
to strengthen the hands of the rescue workers, medical professionals and caregivers

I pray too for the shooter, as I must as a Christian.

All this makes me inexpressibly sad, God.
But I know that the sadness I feel is your sadness.
It is the same sadness your son expressed
when he wept over the death of
his friend Lazarus.

I am tired, God.
I'm tired of the unwillingness to see this as an important issue.
I'm tired of those in power who work to prevent any real change.
I'm tired of those who say that gun violence can't be reduced.

All this makes me tired.
But I know that the tiredness I feel is your tiredness.
It's the same tiredness that Jesus felt after his own struggles against injustice
that led him to fall asleep on the boat with his disciples.

I am angry, God.
I'm angry at the seeming powerlessness of our community to prevent this.
I'm angry at the selfish financial interests who block change.
I'm angry that these shootings happen at all.

But I know that this anger is your anger
It's the same anger Jesus felt when he overturned the tables in the Temple,
angry that anyone would be taken advantage of in any way.

Help me see in these emotions your own desire for change.
Help me see in these feelings your moving me to act.
Help me see in these reactions your pushing me to do something.

Because I know this is the way you move people to action.
And I know that you desire action.
For Jesus did not stand by while people were being hurt.
He plunged into their lives.

So help me to answer these questions:
How can I help?
How can I fight against gun violence?
How can I urge my political leaders to enact change?
How can I help people understand that this is an issue about life?

I am sad over the loss of life,
tired of excuses for the loss of life,
and angry that we are paralyzed by the loss of life.

So

Turn my sadness into compassion.
Turn my tiredness into advocacy.
Turn my paralysis into the freedom to act.

Help me
to be compassionate,
to advocate
and to act,
as your son did,
Almighty God.

Reflection/Faith Sharing

A group may choose to reflect together on the following questions. If you are praying individually, you might journal about some of these questions:

- When you contemplate the pandemic of gun violence in the United States, what is a word or short phrase that rises in your heart? A group might also choose to distribute paper and markers and invite participants to draw an image of what rises in your heart.
- Have you ever had a conversation with someone who has differing views from yours on this issue in which you felt you were able really to hear one another? What was that like for you? What qualities do we need to develop to stay at the table in these difficult conversations?
- Rebecca Solnit writes, "Together we are very powerful, and we have a seldom-told, seldom-remembered history of victories and transformations that can give us confidence that, yes, we can change the world because we have many times before." What can we learn from movements of social change that can inspire our efforts to eliminate gun violence?

Intercessory prayers

Our response will be: ***God of light, we lift our prayers to you.***

For all victims of gun violence, that they may be held always in your loving embrace, we pray…

For all survivors of gun violence, that they be comforted by your healing presence and by our solidarity, we pray…

For all families and loved ones of those who have suffered from gun violence, that they may be surrounded and strengthened by all who love them, we pray…

For all those traumatized by gun violence, that they may have access to the services and support they need to heal and thrive, we pray …

For our neighborhoods, that we may be a loving presence to all those who suffer as a result of gun violence, and that we might seek alternatives to violence in our ways of sharing life together in community, we pray…

For the children and teens across this nation who worry every day that their school will be the next target, that they be kept safe from violence and protected from mental anguish and fear, we pray…

For all those whose fear leads them to build arsenals, that they may experience the love, trust and security that they need in order to disarm their hearts and their homes, we pray…

For those who see violence as the only solution to a problem, that the nonviolent love of Jesus may lead them to respond creatively in ways that give life, rather than threaten it, we pray…

For those who perpetrate acts of violence with guns, that they may experience conversion of heart, repentance, and restoration of trust and relationships broken by their actions, we pray…

For those who feel despair in the face of the epidemic of gun violence, that they may find new hope in a disarmed future, as we lift our lights alongside theirs tonight, we pray…

For legislators and policymakers, that they may work tirelessly to address the systemic causes of gun violence in this nation, and have the courage to resist the powerful forces trying to maintain the status quo, we pray…

For all of us gathered in tonight's vigil, for the courage and commitment to take bold and prophetic action against gun violence, and that our efforts may bear fruit, we pray…

God of light, we lift our prayers to you on this day, confident of your love, knowing that you hold all of our suffering people in your comforting embrace, now and always,

Amen.

Invitation to Silent Prayer

The United States has seen over 17,000 deaths by gun violence so far in 2023, more than half of them deaths by suicide.[1] Let us enter into a time of silence to hold in our hearts the thousands of people affected by gun violence – those who have died and those who mourn them, those who experience trauma because of pervasive gun violence, activists who can feel discouraged. We pray for conversion of heart for all of us, that we will disarm our hearts and learn the ways of peace.

Closing Prayer: Novena Against Gun Violence

by Michele Bisaillon, DHS

Loving God, You created for us a world of beauty, order and endless possibilities. But today ours is a world often in chaos: war, famine, drought, so many "isms", lack of respect for life and for one another. In this country we face these issues day after day. One of these is uppermost in our minds these days—the horror of gun violence which continues to ravage our nation, our society, our people, even the youngest of our children.

Spirit God, we give you all names: Holy, Sanctifier, Paraclete, Advocate. Yet you are so much more: Challenger, Nudger, whirling Wind and engulfing Fire, Mover, Enabler, Lover, Breath of Life.

Be that for us, we pray. Instill in us your gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, reverence and awe. Pentecost us. Enable us to be as daring as the newly inspired apostles—to be bold in our defense of the right of all persons to feel safe wherever we are, unafraid of being forever silenced by those who are armed with weapons and anger and sometimes even hatred.

Give us the courage to speak the Word. Give us the audacity to take the actions needed to end this needless violence.

In the name of our Creator God, in the name of the Word of Life and in the name of the Fire of Love. Amen.



[1]The rate of gun violence in this nation is so high that these numbers may already be out of date by the day of this vigil. Detailed data and daily updated numbers on gun violence may be found at gunviolencearchive.org.

Closing Song

Close your vigil in song with the following hymn (in English and Spanish versions below).

If a recording is preferred, you can listen to the English recording or the bilingual English/Spanish recording, or select one of the following options instead:

- *African Children's Choir, "Walking in the Light"*
- *Thrive East Bay Choir, "We Shall be Known by the Company We Keep"*

Christ, Be Our Light

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

Refrain: Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice. (Refrain)

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed. (Refrain)

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone. (Refrain)

Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come. (Refrain)

Sé Nuestra Luz

Luz anhelamos en las tinieblas.
Sólo tú puedes dar la verdad.
Haz de nosotros tu pueblo santo,
Tu luz para iluminar.

Estribillo: ¡Sé nuestra luz, Cristo Señor, en las tinieblas!
¡Sé nuestra luz! Brilla en tu iglesia reunida hoy.

Paz anhelamos para un mundo herido,
Esperanzado y sufriendo en dolor.
Eres el Verbo que nos ha salvado.
Conviértenos en tu voz. (Estribillo)

Pan anhelamos, son muchos con hambre.
Sedientos de agua, aún tienen sed.
Haznos tu pan, pan compartido,
Que da al mundo de comer. (Estribillo)

Refugio anhelamos los desamparados,
Buscando calor y del frío escapar.
Haz de nosotros albergue y amparo,
Paredes de piedras vivas. (Estribillo)

Muchos los fieles, muchos los dones.
Y corazones que piden sanar.
Seamos siervos del uno al otro,
Haciendo el reino llegar. (Estribillo)

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Spanish translation © Pedro Rubalcava and Jaime Cortez.

Sending Forth

[If you are gathering in a group setting for your vigil, read the closing reflection aloud.]

As we close our prayer today, take a moment to observe the way your candle's flame moves in response to your breath.

Call to mind the promise of the prophet Joel, who predicted the moment of the pouring-out of God's Spirit on all the people, when our sons and daughters would prophesy, when our old men would dream dreams and our young men would see visions. We pray together that this be our renewed moment of dreaming, of vision, and of prophecy, that we might be the ones through whom the breath of the Spirit will move into a disarmed future.

Blow out your candle now, in confidence that even as this single candle is extinguished, our collective light continues to be lifted in this night. Let our prayer continue, carried on the Breath of the promise of a new and hopeful future.

Amen.

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