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Here We Go Again

Allyson Sawtell, 3/25/21

We had another mass shooting in Colorado just the other day. Ten people were murdered in a King Soopers grocery store in Boulder, just north of my hometown of Denver. And we don't even have the luxury of exclaiming "How can this be? This has never happened before!" It's more like, "Oh shit, here we go again."

On hearing the news, probably most of us in Colorado flashed back in memory to the Columbine High School massacre of 1999, or the Aurora Theater Shooting of 2012. I certainly did.

And I went back even further, to the mid-1990s, when my home church began to conduct a Good Friday Vigil Against Gun Violence. We tried it one year, and continued it for the next 20 years.

The vigil was loosely based on the Stations of the Cross. In it, we would make pilgrimage to six or seven locations in the city where someone had been killed by a gun. At each site, we conducted a brief ritual: reading the name of the person killed and a bit about the circumstances, then, applying one of the Stations of the Cross to that situation, we'd do a short meditation on it, would sing a song, say a prayer, and lay a flower on the site. Then we'd move on, growing more and more weary as we went.

I wrote the liturgy for most of the sites over the 20 years. And each time as I prepared, I'd read over the names, sit with the names, and let their loss – and the pain – settle down around me. The names became real people, three-dimensional. But I could only imagine the wrenching, tearing, shattering of the hearts of the loved ones left behind, of the hole in their lives.

There have been so many mass shootings. And individual shootings. White supremacist-fueled shootings. Misogynist-fueled shootings. Drug or rage-fueled shootings. Domestic violence. Domestic terrorism. And some were just fatally stupid screw-ups (like the young man who tried to shoot a can off of his friend's head and missed).

And there continue to be other names – Breonna Taylor, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, George Floyd, Tamir Rice, Elijah McClain, Sandra Bland, Paul Childs, missing and murdered Indigenous women, murdered trans people of color, And more, and more.

And now we have 10 more to the list.

Denny Stong, 20

Nevin Stanisic, 23

Rikki Olds, 25

Tralona Bartkowiak, 49

Suzanne Fountain, 59

Teri Leiker, 51

Eric Talley, 51

Kevin Mahoney, 61

Lynn Murray, 62

Jody Waters, 65

Say their names, all of them. Let their lives settle around you. And say "No more!"

Then act, so that your words are not just empty promises. Work for reasonable and sane gun safety laws, including a ban on military style assault weapons. Work for accessible and affordable mental health services. Call to accountability the misuse and abuse of power that so many of those in authority hold over others. Call to accountability white supremacy, the culture of violence in this nation, rampant individualism, misogyny. Do what you can to build communities of care and compassion.

Everyone has a role to play in this endeavor. Don't go it alone, but contribute in some way.

It's on all of us to do so.



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