



THE  
**CHURCH COUNCIL**  
OF GREATER SEATTLE

100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

## **A SHORT MEDITATION IN LIGHT OF THE TRAGEDIES IN EL PASO AND DAYTON**

By Michael Ramos, Executive Director

The numbers are numbing. Two hundred fifty three mass shootings in 2019 already and counting. Two hundred seventy-five people dead from these acts of horrific violence, ninety-three since June 15, 2019, and so many more wounded, and even more whose lives and bodies are shattered. (Resource for up-to-date numbers: Gun Violence Archive: [www.gunviolencearchive.org](http://www.gunviolencearchive.org))

The reality is nauseating. People fleeing schools, churches, temples, mosques, worksites, bars, office buildings, stores. Suspended disbelief, not again, viewing tragedy unfolded at a distance...unless it's where you live. A sense of society having lost control, a feeling of powerlessness, then resignation about what is to be done.

People killed by guns that shoot fast, with features to inflict maximum damage. To take lives of beloved human beings who belong to families, to relations, to our communities and cities, to our nation.

Loved ones need to grieve, to know support, to talk with others who now, so sadly, have been through a similar experience, perhaps Parkland, or Las Vegas, or Charleston, or Orlando, or Pittsburgh, or Sandy Hook, or Poway, or if we allow ourselves to think beyond our borders, Paris or New Zealand or Norway. To affirm life in the face of death, to find a way out of no way forward, to assemble resources to survive, to live in spite of fear and nightmares, to recover sanity, to find voice.

Let us vigil and mourn for those who suffer, who have experienced loss, whose lament cries out to God, "How long?" Let us light a candle that communicates, flame to flame, that we are with you in the crucible of pain, we cannot know what you feel, how your heart aches, but we offer our flicker of hope in love. And we believe that our message of solidarity travels through the airwaves and lands in these sacred, blood-stained places and makes a difference. For we are bound together, as Dr. King said, our lives are intertwined in a mutual garment of destiny. For people of good will and faith, we are drawn in to offer balm to the awfulness of ongoing trauma.

We must advocate for laws that require background checks, that halt proliferation of assault rifles and other instruments of death, that limit access for people who, for any number of reasons, present a risk for harming self and/or others. At the city level, county level, state level, federal level, to wage peace through speaking truth to power and call for an end to the bloodshed. To announce a different way, to offer a vision, lens and compass, that status quo will not be tolerated, and like a tree standing by the water, we shall not be moved until a justice beyond words, beyond prayers, the justice

of God's dream for the wholeness of our communities is realized. We stop (from the madness), we pivot (from our own inertia and complicity), and we walk (to create the change we want to see).

And then we need to breathe deeply and recognize that **we must transform the very structures, systems, and institutions that feed hate and violence.** Failure to condemn racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, homophobia, gender-based violence, and yes, the proliferation of the guns that turn rhetoric of dehumanization into acts of terror, is complicity. We are each and all responsible for doing our portion to repair the "world" that glorifies violence, that sanctions hatred, and that feeds condemnation of people labeled "other". Perhaps doing what is right ("it is always the right time to do what is right" – Dr. King) in the here and now is a most patriotic step.

I believe such acts are also countercultural. The nausea and numbing can lead to inertia and even paralysis. Further, hate and violence are tolerated by certain institutions of government and powerful, monied and militarized interests. And allowed to fester by the atomization of modern society, the erosion of public discourse and the silence of communities of faith.

**Let us call the worship of guns and their use to maim, destroy and kill human souls what it is: idolatry. Let us name what cooperation with White Supremacy and White Nationalism is: idolatry. Let us identify what vilification of immigrants as if they were not human beings is: idolatry.** The worship of the gods of walls, separation of parents and children, mass incarceration, greed and jingoism have only one fate from the eyes of faith: to be torn down and dismantled. Anything less is a diminishment of faith. Participation in such false worship in a consumeristic, individualistic and "America First" culture is practiced by too many "religious" people. It jeopardizes the soul of our nation.

May we lead with an ethic of compassion for all our neighbors rooted in relationships with people different from us and whom we have the potential to know, trust and befriend.

May we counter hate and violence with a practice of loving "as others wish to be loved."

May we dismantle the places and spaces of violence in our hearts and become part of the "soul-force" that disrupts destructive narratives and constructs a new story of authentic community.

May we possess holy impatience before senseless domestic terror and claim our own power as agents of change.

And may we bear the promise of hope that the tears of sorrow from gun violence may over time be transformed into radiant joy, part of the mystery of God's unfolding creation in us and through us, without exclusions.

Embodied justice is true worship. Let blessed rage ignite the spark of the divine in each of us and restore us to the ground of our convictions and to the tenacity to persist, resist and co-create. May we have courage to be uncomfortable in joining our "still, small voices" into a symphonic chorus that says no to gun violence and yes to ever-widening communities organizing for peace with justice together.