

By Rev. Dr. Joyce Penfield, Supply priest Episcopal Diocese of Ohio & Co-Lead Akron-Canton Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America

When many think of gun violence, they think of mass shootings and the terror they pose to several persons at once—not to mention the trauma left with survivors who may have witnessed the shooting or death in the tof others or bear the wounds from bullets or are friends or loved ones of those who were wounded, killed, or traumatized. Our Litanies cry out about these shootings which have become all too familiar in our nation and we remember each location and memorialize those who were killed or wounded at that location on a certain day and year. This is one step that faith Fr communities have taken to address the two per cent of the 45,000 or more lives taken by firearms in our nation per year and the 100,000the *is try* who are injured. Mom m

We can pray z for the other 98 per cent whose lives are cut short by firearms and we can pray for the 28,000 or more children and adults who die by gun suicide in our nation each year and those who are impacted by these deaths.

In addition, our congregations can pray for those in our city or nearby cities who are fatal victims of gun homicide, domestic violence or unintentional shootings. Because these shootings are considered crimes to be investigated by the police or a Sheriff, often their names, date of event or death, age, and information about the location of the “crime” are often released to a newspaper by law enforcement. In these cases, we can obtain names and ages which can be used to SAY THEIR NAMES, PRAY THEIR NAMES so that they are not forgotten and we are reminded that gun violence is a problem for all of us. *It takes all of us to address it.*

Say Their Names (Prayers of the People):

Here is a sample prayer that I prayed on the 2nd Sunday in February during Prayers of the People when we could add other intercessions silently or aloud:

We pray for all those who have been affected by gun violence, remembering those who lost their lives in Akron during the month of January, especially: Damarcus Hartwell, 38 years old; Allison Dinkins, 38 years old; and Martel Tatum, 32 years old.

If you and your congregation or parish or ecumenical/interfaith group where you live would like to begin this monthly practice of “saying their names” to remember that all lives are precious and to make gun violence personal, here is how I began this practice and how I found out it could be used more widely than just my home parish.

How to prepare to say their names & pray them:

I began to keep a log of gun deaths in my city by month and day. To do this required a commitment on my part to review my digital version of the Akron Beacon each morning because this is the newspaper for my city that reported deaths along with the name of the victim(s), ages, location of crime scene, and type of death (gun shot, crash, fire, carbon monoxide). I learned later that when the police are called to a potential crime scene, their call goes out to a reporter who covers this beat and an authorized team from Victim’s Assistance. The reporter is given the data I just mentioned by the police because he/she is authorized to have this information. However, the name of the victim is usually issued the next day or two and the age corrected, if it was wrong initially.

I was not able to simply call the police and ask for a list of names, ages of gun victims for a given month because it wasn't what the police agreed to do or it was private or too much work. Whoever decides to keep a log is making a serious commitment to be consistent and accurate so that no victim names are omitted. (For me, logging names down was my way of countering a normalization of the loss of mostly young Black lives.) It would be better to work in pairs or a team because staying on top of this daily can be a challenge sometimes.

- Perhaps a team could be the log keeper and alternate the job by week or month.
- I think that if anyone wants to do this (or any team), they should make a commitment to continue for 1 year. Consistency is important and if it is something that a person can't continue, they could stop after 1 year and pass it on to other team members.

After I had a good system and habit of keeping a log daily, I approached the pastor of the congregation to ask if on the second Sunday of each month, if the intercessor could pray the prayer I noted above and include the names and ages of the prior month. She agreed and she helped me understand the practical process of getting this prayer & the names, ages to her secretary a week in advance who would give the same to the intercessor of that 2nd Sunday.

- I suggest only praying this prayer with current names 1 Sunday per month at Prayers of the People. It makes the logging data easier to collect & to get to the intercessor. I would choose the 2nd or 3rd Sunday. The newspapers may not get the correct name and age of the victim(s) printed for several days after the event. Later Sundays make the process easy, practical, and possible.
- If anyone in the congregation wants the name of someone who died of gun suicide to be included, I would urge that at the beginning the congregation should know that these names would be added by request from the family or friends—with no comment or explanation in the prayer.

My initial intention was to reach out to other leaders of faith communities (Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist) ask if they wanted to be on a list serve to receive these names and use in their own services. But my Interfaith Council organization suggested I simply give them the names to post monthly on their Facebook and/or Website. All I have to do now is let faith leaders know that this is available for their benefit and/or connect prayer leaders and faith leaders with knowledge of how to get access to the prayer and names.

- If you live in a rural area or a small town that does not have a lot of gun violence, you could partner with another pastor who keeps a monthly list and pray for those in that town.

In January of the new year, our newspaper prints all the gun deaths by name, age, date and maybe reason for the prior year. I have been able to get these through archive searches.

- If you don't have lots of gun violence deaths in your community/town, try searching for an entire year and then offer these names and ages in prayer during Wear Orange weekend, June 3 and 4, 2023.