

Colorado Faith Communities United to End Gun Violence (CFCU) Meeting

Opening Reflection and Candle Lighting Liturgy – November 5, 2023

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In my Christian Tradition today we celebrate All Saints' Sunday – a day when we remember the lives lost in our church in the last calendar year. We read their names out loud, toll a bell, and light candles in their memory. And we give thanks for these people whose lives paved the way for our own lives...whose faith has been passed down for us to pass forward. We remember that we are surrounded by so great a "cloud of witnesses" as the writer of Hebrews says...and that we, ourselves, are today a living "cloud of witnesses" for the Way of Love of in the world.

The decisions we make today, the actions we take today – they create the legacy we leave tomorrow. And as we all know, our country's inaction and indecision on policies that would significantly diminish gun violence – are leaving a legacy of deep and traumatic loss. Violence upon violence tearing at the fabric of our souls and our society. I am grateful for the work of CFCU because it gives us all a place to put into action the convictions that we hold about the beauty and sacredness of human life.

We read in the Hebrew scriptures in Genesis 1:27 that we are created in the *imago dei* (image of God). I believe that this means the fullness of Godself *cannot* be known without each and every one of us. The glimpse of the Divine that each person gives the world is unique and irreplaceable. So when someone dies, we not only lose them, we lose part of our experience and knowledge of God in the world that we will never get back. *So - how we remember someone matters.* In speaking their names and holding space for their unique presence – we are not just remembering a person, we are remembering God's Very Being, or the Very Being of the Divine.

If each life on this earth reflects something of God's image that we would not know otherwise then when someone dies, part of God's very being dies, part of God's very image dies with them. Yes, we often say that God weeps with us at the tragic deaths from gun violence. I believe that to be true. I also believe that God's image diminishes just a bit with each life gone, just as God's image grows a bit brighter with each new life born.

How much brighter would the divine image shine in our world if we prioritized human life over gun rights?

Many Christians talk about God's salvific power for all of humanity. But how often do we talk about the power of one person's life to change humanity's experience of God? Even to 'save' humanity's experience of God? What *your* life speaks about God to the world matters. What *every* life speaks to the world about God matters.

In Uvalde, Texas – in Aurora, Colorado – in Gaza, in Palestine, In Israel, In Ukraine, In Sudan – in all the corners of the globe where people are dying due to weapons, God's image is being extinguished. And here it happened yet again, in Lewiston, Maine. It happened again, even though people all around this person were doing everything they knew to do to say "something is not right. He needs help, we need help getting him help." The systems failed...not just in how we failed to get Robert Card* help...but the systems failed his family and friends and co-workers who were trying to get him help.

So today, we read aloud and light candles for the 18 people who lost their lives in this latest mass shooting in our country: Children, grandchildren, spouses, siblings, parents, grandparents, bowling coaches, union workers, beloved members/advocates and friends of Lewiston's deaf and hard of hearing community. As I read these names, we will light candles for each one them:

*Individual white candles***

Tricia C. Asselin, 53
Peyton Brewer-Ross, 40

William Frank Brackett, 48
Thomas Ryan Conrad, 34

Michael R. Deslauriers II, 51
Maxx A. Hathaway, 35
Bryan M. MacFarlane, 41
Keith D. Macneir, 64
Ronald G. Morin, 55
Joshua A. Seal, 36
Arthur Fred Strout, 42

Stephen M. Vozzella, 45
Lucille M. Violette, 73
Robert E. Violette, 76
Joseph Lawrence Walker, 57
Jason Adam Walker, 51
William A. Young, 44
Aaron Young, 14

Pink candle

We light the pink candle for those wounded in body in this shooting, and for those who experienced this trauma and are wounded in soul.

Red candle

We light the red candle for the life of Robert Card** – and for all who loved him.

Yellow candle

We light the yellow candle for the many victims of gun violence whose names and faces do not make the news...whose stories remain unknown to us...but whose lives are gone due to suicide or murder or domestic violence, or because of accident (from being caught in the cross fire unawares – wrong place, wrong time).

Green candle

We light the green candle for the victims of gun violence who we ourselves know personally – those who have died or been wounded by guns and for all those who care for them and love them. We name those we have lost aloud now: *(pause for people to say names)*

Orange candle

We light the orange candle for all those who carry guns as part of their profession, those who respond on the scene when someone is shot, who fire a weapon themselves and perhaps take someone else's life, and we light a candle for all who treat gunshot victims with medical care. For all those who live with trauma upon trauma, including all those who are actively engaged in wars around the world.

Purple candle

We light the purple candle for the division in our country over this issue. we pray for forgiveness....and we pray that the beautiful glimmer of God's image might dance across our difference and, one day, draw us together in ways that create meaningful action.

Blue candle

We light the blue candle for we who are gathered as CFCU (Colorado Faith Communities United to End Gun Violence). May we not give up hope. May we use our lives to shine brightly and our voices to speak out boldly about the belovedness of all lives.

May it be so. Amen.

**The name of the person who shot all those who were killed or wounded in Maine.*

***Any color candles may be used for this litany. I used the colors we had in our worship resource room, there is not great significance to the color choice, except perhaps purple as a means of bridging the red/blue divide in our country. As you adapt this litany you may assign colors that are meaningful to you, as well as add other categories that I have not named here.*