News



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A church in the Diocese of Pittsburgh announced Aug. 13 it was canceling a popular summer event, its parish festival, after receiving what it called "a disturbing message."

In a news release, the diocese didn't disclose more detailed information but only said that an office in its pastoral center received a handwritten letter that said "cancel August 14-17 Festival Security Problem is Huge," and that "only one parish, Our Lady of Grace in Scott, was scheduled to hold a festival on those dates."

The release mentioned recent incidents of mass violence in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, and also the Squirrel Hill neighborhood in Pittsburgh, where a synagogue was the scene of a mass shooting in October 2018.

"Although there was no direct threat, the letter raised grave concern due to the appalling chain of mass violence that our nation has experienced," the diocese said. "Fr. David Bonnar, the priest-administrator, was immediately notified, and he immediately notified law enforcement. The sender has not been identified, so Fr. Bonnar announced today, with deep regret, that the festival has been canceled."

In an Aug. 13 story, the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review daily newspaper said the priest was worried about safety and didn't want to risk loss of life, even if it meant the parish would lose money.

"The loss of income to Our Lady of Grace Parish and School, and to vendors who were scheduled to work at the festival, pales in comparison to the loss of lives in Dayton, El Paso, Squirrel Hill and too many other places," said the news release. "The diocese supports the decision not to risk becoming another name in that tragic litany. But we mourn the loss of carefree community that should be the hallmark of these joyous events."

The cancellation is not the first of its kind in Catholic parishes this summer.

Shortly after the shooting in El Paso, the Diocese of El Paso announced that it was canceling "out of an abundance of caution" a festival-like celebration called a "kermess," which is popular among Catholic Latino populations, that was scheduled to take place at Our Lady of the Light Church in early August.

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