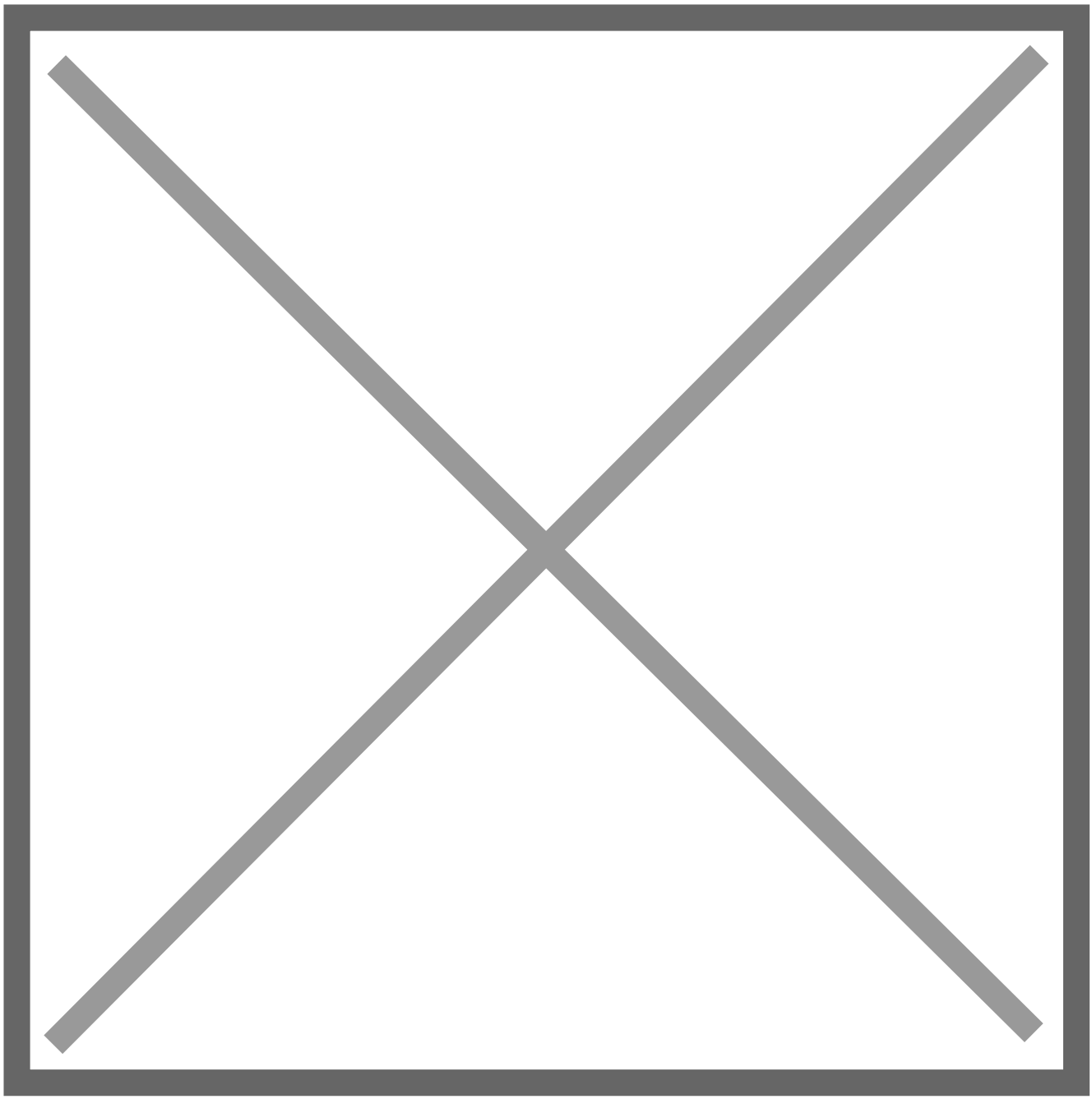
News



People in Chicago march and pray to end gun violence May 19, 2018. (CNS photo/Joshua Lott, Reuters)



by Catholic News Service

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Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago offered prayers for slain police officer Ella French and her family and friends "as they cope with the terrible reality that their loved one was taken from them in another act of senseless violence."

In an Aug. 11 statement, he also offered prayers for her critically wounded partner and his family.

The partner's name was not released but news reports said the 39-year-old officer, who is married and has a young son, remained hospitalized as he continued to fight for his life. He was shot in his right eye and brain the night of Aug. 7 in the gunfire that took French's life in Chicago's West Englewood neighborhood.

"We can only imagine their pain, as we hold them in prayer and stand with them and all first responders who risk their safety every day to protect our communities and keep the peace," Cupich said.

French and her partner pulled over a driver for having expired tags on the car. After initially being cooperative, news reports said, the occupants of the car fatally shot French and critically wounded her partner.

Brothers Emonte Morgan, 21, and Eric Morgan, 22, have been charged in French's killing. A third person, an Indiana man, has been charged with buying the gun used in the fatal shooting. It was a "straw purchase," because a felony prevented the alleged shooter from buying the gun himself.

Cupich called the shooting just the latest example of an "epidemic of gun violence" in Chicago, the state of Illinois and the country at large that state and federal lawmakers are failing to act on.

"The degree to which we take seriously the epidemic of gun violence will be measured by the effort we put into ridding our streets of illegal guns and weapons of war," he said. "Every day our elected officials fail to institute commonsense gun-reform laws, such as universal background checks and crackdowns on straw purchases, is a day we fail as a society to uphold the value of all human life."

"Our commitment to protecting life," he said, "will be judged by the work we put into building up the common good and redressing systemic injustice" including by acts of charity, such as "giving food to the hungry, working to know our neighbors in need, no matter where they live."

"Committing acts of violence against the innocent can never be excused," the cardinal said, but "that does not mean we are released from the responsibility to understand why such violence plagues our city and our nation."

"How can we understand such tragedies when none seems susceptible to logic? How can we make a difference when the crisis seems so enormous?" he asked.

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Chicago is experiencing "a season of senselessness," Cupich said, "with gun violence rising and mass shootings becoming a regular occurrence. But we can never allow ourselves to become numb in the face of injustice, no matter how crushingly common it seems."

During the Aug. 7-8 weekend across the city, Chicago police said 73 people were shot; 11 people were killed, including French. More than half of the shootings took place during a 10-hour span.

In the first six months of 2021, more people were shot and more people were killed in Chicago than during the same time period last year. An analysis by the Chicago Sun-Times showed that from Jan. 1 through June 8, the city recorded at least 1,892 shootings, 336 of which were fatal.

"We shudder when we hear of the child hit by gunfire, but do we remember her name? We mourn the slain police officer, but do we see beyond the uniform?" Cupich said.

"These questions are not meant to condemn, but to awaken us from the zombified state of polarization that suffuses our society today," he said. "We pick sides, even neighborhoods, rally with the like-minded, close ourselves to conversation with those who might disagree, derive meaning from the conflict, and gather ourselves into silos of politics, culture and even religion."

The cardinal noted that French's brother Andrew, an Iraq War veteran, "wanted us to understand that his sister's decision to join the force grew out of her commitment to social justice."

One example of that was French driving a 1-month-old baby and her mother to the hospital in July after the child suffered a gunshot wound to the head during a mass shooting in Englewood on Chicago's South Side. The infant survived and is recovering.

In his statement, Cupich quoted Andrew French telling the Chicago Tribune: "My sister's always been a person of integrity. She's always done the right thing even when nobody's looking."

"Of course, as Andrew knows, God was looking," the cardinal said. "God sees with the eyes of a loving parent. Even when we are beset by grief, feeling utterly alone, on the precipice of despair, God never abandons us, because we are his children, all of us."