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"Prayer that leads to action" is needed to counter a bewildering rise in mass shootings and gun violence, said Atlanta Archbishop Gregory Hartmayer.

The archbishop, a Conventual Franciscan, released a May 4 statement following two deadly mass shootings that took place within a week of each other in Georgia.

The first saw five women shot, one fatally, in the waiting room of an Atlanta medical office May 3. Killed in the attack was Amy Wald St. Pierre, 38, a 2003 graduate of Blessed Trinity Catholic High School in Roswell, Georgia, and an employee at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Hartmayer offered his "deepest condolences to [St. Pierre's] family and community."



Archbishop Gregory Hartmayer at the Cathedral of Christ the King in Atlanta in 2020 (CNS/Georgia Bulletin/Michael Alexander)

In a Facebook post, Blessed Trinity's alumni group shared news of Pierre's passing "with a heavy heart," asking for prayers for "the Wald and St. Pierre families ... during this difficult time." The suspect, Deion Patterson, 24, was apprehended later that day.

On May 4, Kentavious White, 26, killed his grandmother and mother, along with 41-year-old McDonald's manager Amia Smith before taking his own life. The attack occurred in the rural town of Moultrie, Georgia, some 200 miles from Atlanta within the Diocese of Savannah.

"We barely had time to process [the May 3] shooting and the manhunt that followed, when we [learned] of another shooting ... a devastating loss for any community," said Hartmayer.

He also pointed to the Feb. 28 shooting death of 20-year-old Jatonne Sterling, who was killed behind the Lyke House Catholic Center, a Newman Center located at the Atlanta University Center Consortium in downtown Atlanta.

The May 3 Atlanta shooting — during which Patterson is reported to have become agitated over a declined prescription for Ativan, an anti-anxiety drug — "has brought the dual epidemics of gun violence and mental health care challenges into sharp focus right here at home," said the archbishop. "Families are mourning, patients and medical staff are in shock. We are all feeling the impact today."

Hartmayer said that "every act of violence makes the world a little bit darker ... [and] can erode our hope and challenge our faith."

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As "schools practice active shooter drills in the wake of more mass shootings on campuses across the nation," said the archbishop, "there does not seem to be any safe place anymore."

Yet "we cannot ... surrender to despair," he stressed.

While admitting he does "not have any concrete answers today," Hartmayer pledged to "commit to action" instead of "just offering words in the wake of the [shootings]."

The archbishop said he would look "for ways that the church in Atlanta can support efforts to make our communities safer and more supportive for everyone."

Prayer, particularly the well-known Prayer of St. Francis, "offers a model of actions we can put into practice as a starting point to personal conversion, community action and hopefully, change for the good of all," said the archbishop.

He quoted in full the text of the prayer — which serves as a short litany for peace, humility and nonviolence — inviting all to "pray it with me with your words and your deeds."