News

An older white man wearing glasses and a violet zucchetto speaks

Archbishop George L. Thomas of Las Vegas talks about the experience of receiving his pallium from Pope Francis at a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican June 29, 2023, the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

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Archbishop George Leo Thomas of Las Vegas said he is "holding close" those affected by a mass shooting on the University of Nevada, Las Vegas campus.

Three people were killed and one wounded when a former professor opened fire on the campus Dec. 6 shortly before noon. A day later several news reports said that investigators found that the deceased victims were faculty or staff and not students.

The gunman -- who was later killed in a shootout with law enforcement -- was identified as Anthony Polito, 67, according to multiple law enforcement sources. The Associated Press reported him to be an academic who had unsuccessfully sought a position at the university, having previously worked at East Carolina University in North Carolina.

Las Vegas Sheriff Kevin McMahill said in a post-attack Dec. 6 press conference that "four additional people" had been "transported to nearby hospitals suffering from panic attacks," while two officers had sustained minor injuries while searching for the shooter.

The attack, which McMahill denounced as a "heinous, unforgivable crime," took place at an outdoor gathering where students were "playing games and eating food," with "tables set up ... to build Legos."

"No student should have to fear pursuing their dreams on a college campus," he said.

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He praised law enforcement and first responders' "seamless" efforts to contain the shooter, whom he said was "immediately" engaged by a UNLV police officer.

At the press conference, Adam Garcia, UNLV's director of police services and vice president of public safety services, announced the university would be closed through Dec. 8.

In a statement posted on the Archdiocese of Las Vegas website, Thomas said his "thoughts and prayers are with the families of the victims and the survivors of this tragedy.

"May the embrace of the Lord, compassionately hold and console those who are suffering," he said. "May his comforting presence bring solace and strength to their hearts, granting them the grace to face their challenges with hope and resilience."

The university's St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Newman Center announced on its Facebook page it would partner with the nearby St. Viator Catholic Community for a Taizé candlelit prayer service on the evening of Dec. 7 to honor those affected.

Las Vegas remains the site of the worst mass shooting in modern U.S. history, in which 58 people were slain and 500 injured over the course of 10-minutes in a 2017 attack on concertgoers by high-stakes gambler Stephen Paddock, who then killed himself. Two survivors later died of related injuries in the years after the attack.