News

A woman cries during prayer vigil.

A woman reacts during a prayer vigil at the Academy of Holy Angels following a shooting earlier in the day at Annunciation Church in Minneapolis Aug. 27. The shooter killed two students and injured another 18 people. (OSV News/Reuters/Tim Evans)

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About 2,000 people processed into the Academy of Holy Angels High School gymnasium to attend a standing-room only vigil Aug. 27 in honor of the Annunciation Parish and School community after a mass shooting at the school's commencement Mass earlier in the day.

Members of the Annunciation community and nearby Catholic parishes and schools attended the service, led by Archbishop Bernard Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis and Fr. Dennis Zehren, Annunciation's pastor. Gov. Tim Walz, U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar and Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison were among the state leaders in attendance, local TV reported. Members of other faith traditions also attended the vigil, one of several in the Minnesota area Aug. 27.

Hebda told the crowded gymnasium that he hoped the community gathered in prayer gave the families a sense that they were not alone, The Guardian reported. Hebda said he was moved by the children's stories that friends shielded them from the bullets and praised their courage and love amid a tragedy.

The archbishop noted the many condolences have come in from around the world, including from Pope Leo XIV.

Minnesota Public Radio reported that Hebda talked about the inscription at the front of the Annunciation Church that reads: "House of God and the gate of heaven."

"How is it that such a terrible tragedy could take place in a place that’s the house of God and the gate of heaven?" he asked. "It's unthinkable."

Fund for Minneapolis shooting victims

The Catholic Community Foundation of Minnesota has established the Annunciation Hope and Healing Fund in response to the deadly shooting during Annunciation Catholic School's first all-school Mass of the year.

"Principal Matt DeBoer urged us to act. He asked us to pray — and to keep moving into action to support the Annunciation community," said CCF President Anne Cullen Miller.

The fund will provide financial support to the Church of the Annunciation for both parish and school needs, as well as assistance for those directly impacted by the tragedy, including children, families, teachers, staff and worshipers

The foundation will manage contributions at no administrative cost, ensuring that grants can be directed to the church, school, and, if necessary, to broader needs in the Catholic community that emerge as a result of the Aug. 27 shooting.

Donations can be made online here.

Klobuchar told the Minnesota Star Tribune that the family of one of the children who were killed this morning attended the vigil.

"Watching that mom and dad with the little sister there is something I will never forget," Klobuchar said. "It is brave to be here tonight."

Walz lamented that children just starting the school year "were met with evil and horror and death."



Candles and white roses honor victims of the shooting at Annunciation Church in Minneapolis Aug. 27. (Zoe Ryan)

"The vigil is the beginning of healing," said Katie Snee, a teacher at nearby Our Lady of Peace Catholic School. She said the shooting, which killed 2 children and injured 18 people, left people with "an unreal feeling. We're heartbroken."

The shooter, Robin Westman, a Minneapolis resident who had attended Annunciation school, died by a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

A woman standing next to the line of people entering the gymnasium, offered hugs from her golden retriever. Inside, many people were hugging others and crying.

"I've been crying all day," JoAnn O'Rourke, an Annunciation parishioner, told the National Catholic Reporter. "We're all trying to process this. It's so horrific [what happened] to these babies. At the end of the day, they're babies. … They were in these little pews, in these little uniforms."

Prelates wait to enter a prayer vigil at the Academy of Holy Angels following a shooting earlie

Prelates wait to enter a prayer vigil at the Academy of Holy Angels following a shooting earlier in the day at Annunciation Church in Minneapolis Aug. 27. About 2,000 people attended the vigil. (OSV News/Reuters/Tim Evans)

Rourke's husband had attended Annunciation parish and school; their three children also went there. "The school helps kids build empathy for others and they try to make kids well-rounded," she said. She sat with her three college-age children, who notified her of the shooting.

When her kids were younger, O'Rourke wondered if the values learned at Annunciation would carry with them. She said she doesn't wonder about that anymore.

Many graduates of Annunciation attend high school at nearby Academy of Holy Angels, where the vigil was held.

"The vigil is a good example of other parishes coming together," Rachel Erazmus said. "It's such a true family."

Erazmus graduated six years ago from Holy Angels High School and attended the vigil with her mother.

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Attendees said they were at a loss for what other steps churches could take to prevent this violence. The archdiocese provides training for church staff regarding maintenance of church grounds, including whether to lock church doors during Mass, a decision left to parishes. Annunciation had locked church doors during the Aug. 27

Mass, preventing the shooter from getting inside.

The Gospel reading chosen for the vigil was the story of the Annunciation. In his homily, Hebda highlighted themes of light and darkness.

Hebda encouraged people to look for hope amid their pain and referred to Annunciation's Scripture theme this year — "A future filled with HOPE!" — inspired byHe implored.

Jeremiah 29:1 says: "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

National Catholic Reporter staff contributed to this report.

This story appears in the **Minneapolis church shooting** feature series. View the full series.