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Parishioners arrive for the first Mass at Annunciation Church in Minneapolis Aug. 30, 2025, wh

Parishioners arrive for the first Mass at Annunciation Church in Minneapolis Aug. 30, 2025, the scene of a shooting. The shooter opened fire with a rifle through the windows of the church and struck children attending Mass Aug. 27 during the first week of school, killing two students and wounding 18 others. (OSV News photo/Tim Evans, Reuters)

Joe Ruff

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Minneapolis — August 31, 2025

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Recalling the fear and the cries from students, parents and school staff to "get low, stay down, stay down, don't get up" as bullets tore through Annunciation church at an all-school Mass in Minneapolis, Father Dennis Zehren, the pastor, said it marked a new beginning.

Four days after the now-desecrated church remained closed, the auditorium in the parish school next door was filled with more than 400 people on Aug. 30, hugging, talking, crying and even smiling.

They were celebrating the first weekend Mass since the attack Aug. 27 that killed two students at the elementary school, wounded 15 others and three adults, as

Father Zehren was presiding. The suspected shooter was found dead at the scene of a self-inflicted gunshot wound, police said.

Archbishop Bernard Hebda concelebrated the Mass, and Deacon Kevin Conneely, who ministers at the parish, assisted and read the Gospel. It drew people not only from the parish, but from other parts of the archdiocese, including Paul and Maggie Wratkowski and their three children of St. Cecilia in St. Paul.

Father Dennis Zehren, pastor of Annunciation Church in Minneapolis, becomes emotional as h

Father Dennis Zehren, pastor of Annunciation Church in Minneapolis, becomes emotional as he speaks to the media Aug. 30, 2025. (OSV News /Tim Evans, Reuters)

"We're here to support the Catholic community, the people that are here," Paul Wratkowski said. "God wants us to thrive in community and support and love one another."

But at this Mass, members of the congregation were not in the pews to which they had grown accustomed, Father Zehren said. They were in folding chairs, with the sanctuary on the auditorium's stage. And they were still wrestling with the tragedy that had unfolded.

"It's clear to us all here at Annunciation that we will be sitting in a different pew for a long time to come because of what happened," Father Zehren said in his homily, as the church remained closed and must be reconsecrated before it can be used again for worship.
The Scriptures for the day point to humility, Father Zehren said. Jesus encourages his listeners in the Gospel passage from Luke to avoid taking the seat of honor at a banquet feast. Rather, take the lowest place.

"My good people of Annunciation, my good people of Minneapolis and beyond, we are in a very low place," the pastor said. "We are in a lower place than we could have ever imagined. We can look around and see that this is not our normal seat. This is not where we usually gather, not in our usual worship space."

At the same time, they were seated in the high school auditorium where Masses had been held for decades before the new church was built in 1961, Father Zehren said.

"Jesus speaks about humility, so we come back to our humble beginnings," Father Zehren said. "That's what this day represents. It's a humble beginning. … It's a call to begin again. The tricky part about the virtue of humility is that we don't always get to choose the seating, the chart."

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At times, people get the seat of honor, or a seat where they are comfortable, with "all sorts of nice cushions," the priest said.

"But sometimes we have to sit in the dust," he said. "It's a very humbling seat. I know the best thing we can do is just sit there for a while. … Jesus says, 'Can you just sit with me here, in the dust? Because that's where he is. It's the same dust that Jesus fell in when he was carrying the cross. It's the same dust that he bled in. Jesus said, 'Can you just come sit with me and sit in this humble place?"

"That was the very first message we heard on Wednesday morning, when the first bullet came through the window, and the voices crying out, 'Down, down. Get low, stay down, stay down, don't get up,'" Father Zehren said, his voice breaking with emotion.

"But when we were down there, in that low place, Jesus showed us something," he said. "He showed us, 'I am the Lord even here. I am the one who descended into hell. I am the one who had taken on all the darkness and evil in this world, all the forces of darkness and death and evil.' Jesus pointed and he said, 'Can't you see how weak it is? Can't you see how desperate it is? Can't you see that this can never last? Can't you see that this is not why God created us?'"

"Then he showed us. He began to show us a light. It's a new light. The light of a new day is breaking," Father Zehren said. "We watch for that light of a new day…That light of the world is Jesus Christ."

A statue of the Holy Family is seen before the first Mass at Annunciation Church in Minneapol

Flowers were placed on a statue of the Holy Family on Aug. 30, 2025 before the first Mass at Annunciation Church after an assailant opened fire with a rifle through the windows of the church and struck children and adults attending Mass Aug. 27. (OSV News photo/Tim Evans, Reuters)

"It reminds us, when death and darkness have done their worst, that's when God says, 'Now see what I will do,'" Father Zehren said.

Annunciation parishioners Sean O'Brien, his wife, Mallory, and their four children were at the Aug. 30 Mass. Sean O'Brien was at the all-school Mass as well, with their 2-year-old daughter, when the shooting occurred. Their fourth grader and first grader were in the pews. Their preschooler was in the church basement. None of them were injured.

"I think capturing how we all felt in such a strong way from the pulpit, it's really meaningful to have a leader (Father Zehren) who can speak to that emotion," said O'Brien, a lifelong member of the parish, where his grandfather was a deacon.

"I came in here optimistic that this community would rebuild, and I now have never been more certain of anything in my life," he said. "I can't wait to see what the Lord will do now."

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