News

Archbishop Bernard Hebda accepts a letter Jimmy Kaiser wrote to Pope Leo XIV.

Archbishop Bernard Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis accepts a letter Jimmy Kaiser wrote to Pope Leo XIV thanking the pontiff for his prayers for the Annunciation community in Minneapolis. Hebda delivered letters from students and families at Annunciation to Pope Leo Oct. 1 at the Vatican. (OSV News photo/Tom Halden, courtesy Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis)

by The Catholic Spirit, OSV News

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Letters from Annunciation students and their families in Minneapolis made it to Pope Leo XIV at the Vatican Oct. 1 — via Archbishop Bernard Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis as he visited with Leo for the first time.

"The recent encounter with Pope Leo was particularly meaningful for me because I had the opportunity to give to him letters that were written by students from Annunciation School and their families, thanking him for his prayers in the aftermath of the shooting that had taken place at the school in their church on Aug. 27," Hebda wrote in his Oct. 20 "Together on the Journey" weekly newsletter to the faithful.

Two students were killed in the shooting during an all-school Mass at Annunciation Church in Minneapolis; 18 students and three adults were injured. The shooter died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound at the scene, police said.

Leo has been praying for the Annunciation community. In a telegram sent to Hebda shortly after the shooting, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state, said the pontiff was "profoundly saddened" and "sends his heartfelt condolences and the assurance of spiritual closeness to all those affected by this terrible tragedy,

especially the families now grieving the loss of a child."

Leo also prayed for the Annunciation community after reciting the Angelus prayer with visitors in St. Peter's Square Aug. 31. The pope added that "we include in our prayers the countless children killed and injured every day around the world" as well as prayers for an end to the global "pandemic" of gun violence.

In his Oct. 20 newsletter reflecting on his visit with the pope, Hebda said, "The loss of life on that (Aug. 27) occasion was horrific, and the impact on students, teachers and their families traumatizing. I asked Pope Leo for his continued prayers for Sophia Forchas and the other survivors who continue their recovery, and especially his prayers for those who might find it difficult to return to Annunciation Church or even to the celebration of the Mass."

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Sophia, 12, who was in critical condition for two weeks with head injuries from the shooting, has been recovering in a way her family has described as miraculous.

Hebda also wrote that he was in Rome for the ordination of two archdiocesan seminarians as transitional deacons — Deacons Charles DeReuil II and Steven Lang.

Among the letter writers from Annunciation were Lydia Kaiser, an eighth grader at the school who was injured in the shooting, and her brother, Jimmy Kaiser, 17, a senior at DeLaSalle High School in Minneapolis.

After a Sept. 27 memorial Mass at the Cathedral of St. Paul in St. Paul marking one month since the shooting, Jimmy Kaiser handed his letter to Hebda, asking that the archbishop include it among the letters from Annunciation.

Jimmy Kaiser said he thanked Leo for his prayers and let the pope know that he was praying for him, as well.