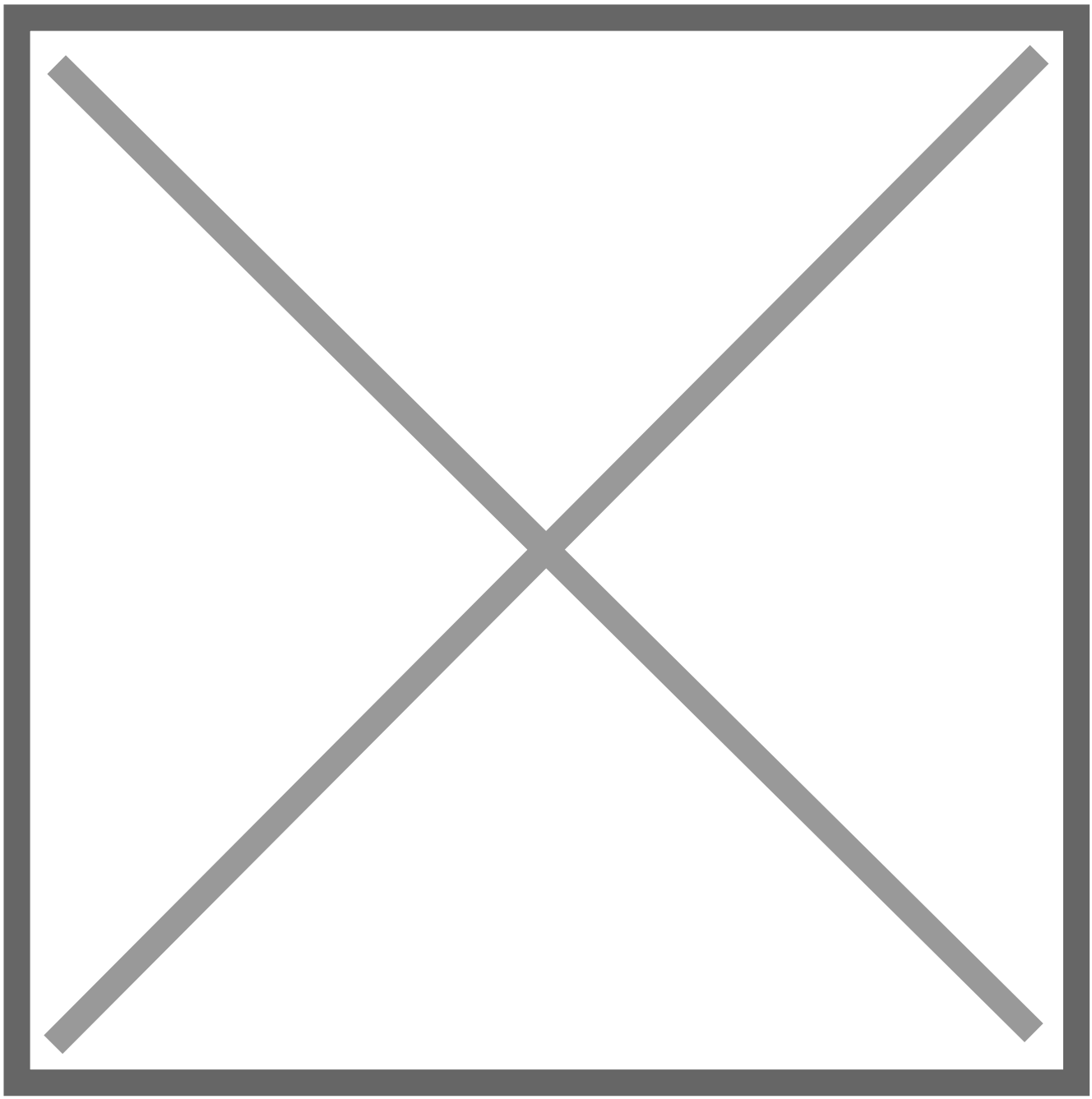
News



The faithful gather with Archbishop Bernard Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis and Auxiliary Bishops Kevin Kenney and Michael Izen, Fr. Dennis Zehren, pastor of Annunciation, Fr. Tom Margevicius, master of ceremonies, and Deacons Kevin Conneely and Eric Cooley in front of the main doors to Annunciation Catholic Church in Minneapolis Dec. 6, 2025, for the "Rite of Reparation After the Desecration of a Church." (OSV News/The Catholic Spirit/Joe Ruff)

Joe Ruff

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Minneapolis — December 8, 2025
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On a cold, wintery day, with the congregation gathered around Archbishop Bernard Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis and Auxiliary Bishops Kevin Kenney and Michael Izen outside the main doors of Annunciation Catholic Church in Minneapolis, the rite of reparation began Dec. 6 that restored the space for worship.

The special Mass was held more than three months after an Aug. 27 shooting during an all-school Mass killed two students — 8-year-old Fletcher Merkel and 10-year-old Harper Moyski — and injured 18 students and three adults. The suspected shooter died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound at the scene, police said.

"My brothers and sisters, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead proclaims that evil and death do not have the final word; God does," the archbishop prayed outside the church, with temperatures in the low 20s.

"An Easter preface of the Eucharistic prayer proclaims, 'By dying, he destroyed our death, and by rising, restored our life,'" the archbishop prayed. "As our archdiocesan patron St. Paul asserted, 'Where, O death, is your victory: Where, O death, is your sting?'

"Our Blessed Mother lived this faith and cooperated with God's plan for her life, despite the difficulties it would occasion. We profess that our souls now will rejoin

hers in proclaiming the greatness of the Lord in this church, dedicated in her honor, and now reclaimed for the glory of God."

Accompanied by chanting of the Litany of the Saints, servers entered the church carrying incense, the cross and candles, followed by the bishops, vested in purple, deacons, and priests of the archdiocese in white vestments, other liturgical ministers and all the assembly.

The parish asked that the media not be allowed inside for the Mass. Materials prepared for the rite suggested that part of the litany would include prayers related to the rite of reparation, including the faithful praying "bring healing to those who were injured," "bring healing and comfort to those suffering the harm done to their children," and "restore the sanctity of this church, dedicated to your glory and the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary."

Inside the church, the altar was bare, unadorned with candles, altar cloths, flowers or other displays of joy, the materials stated. Hebda, Kenney and Izen processed to their chairs.

A deacon filled two vessels with water and the congregation joined the archbishop in prayer as he blessed the water "which will be sprinkled on us as a memorial of our baptism; it was used when this sacred space was first consecrated, and will now be used in reparation for the evils which have occurred."

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Escorted by deacons, Hebda and Fr. Dennis Zehren, pastor of Annunciation, sprinkled the altar and sanctuary, the church walls and the congregation with the holy water.

Readings from the first Saturday of Advent included verses from Isaiah proclaiming, "O people of Zion, who dwell in Jerusalem, no more will you weep; He will be gracious to you when you cry out, as soon as he hears he will answer you."

The Gospel from Matthew recounted Jesus visiting towns and villages, teaching in synagogues, proclaiming "the Gospel of the Kingdom, and curing every disease and illness."
After the readings and Hebda's homily, the altar was prepared for the celebration of

the Eucharist, and the Mass proceeded.

In notes prepared for his homily, the archbishop began by recounting the "blustery day in March of 1963, as the church universal was engaged in the renewal brought about by the Second Vatican Council, this church was formally dedicated by Archbishop (Leo) Binz."

The parish had been in existence for more than 40 years, and the building had been in use for a few months, the archbishop wrote.

"As part of that ritual, Archbishop Binz would have anointed the altar and walls of the church with sacred chrism," he continued, "the same chrism that is used to claim an infant as a child of God in baptism, the same chrism that is used at confirmation to seal us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the same chrism with which the hands of a priest are anointed, the same chrism that is poured on the head of a bishop on the day of his ordination.

"The anointing with sacred chrism is a sign of being set aside for God, of being claimed by God," the archbishop wrote. "If there was any question about that in the case of Annunciation Church, one would only have to look at the inscription on the facade: 'This is the house of God and the gate of heaven.'"

The readings at a Mass of dedication don't focus on the building, the archbishop noted. "But rather on the people who make up the community that will worship there, the living stones, who, being nourished by the Eucharist and strengthened by the other sacraments, are called to go out of the church, out of the sacred space, and renew the world."

Still, the building is important in part as "an architectural recognition of the truth that we're all created to give God praise."

"We know all too well what happened here, however, on the morning of Aug. 27. This safe haven, this place of refuge, this foretaste of the order of the heavenly kingdom, was disturbed by a chaos that no one could have imagined," the archbishop wrote. "It's for that chaos that we've come together to engage in this act of penance and reparation this day.

"This community will never forget what happened that day and will forever remember with great love Harper and Fletcher, whose beautiful and inspiring lives were cut short as they and fellow students gathered for the Eucharist," he added.

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The archbishop expressed gratitude for Zehren and Matt DeBoer, principal of Annunciation Catholic School, and for the children and parishioners of Annunciation, for reminding the faithful that Aug. 27 wasn't the end of the story.

"I've never seen such an outpouring of love and mutual support as I have witnessed here these last three months," the archbishop wrote. "The sorrow understandably lingers, but there's a Christ-centered resilience here that is remarkable — and praise God — it's been contagious.

"Today we gather penitentially for this rite of reparation in the hope of restoring the order that Christ desires for his Church, his family. We cannot undo the tragic loss of Fletcher and Harper, but we can communicate to the world that we recognize that the power of God is far in excess of any evil; that where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more," he wrote.

"We cannot let Satan win, and we, by God's grace, reclaim this space today for Christ and his Church."

The light that illuminates and reminds the faithful of Christ's presence in the tabernacle and in the community must be shared with others, the archbishop said.

Advent is an appropriate time for the rite of reparation as the church prepares for Christmas and the reality that Jesus came into the world, took on weak human flesh to be with sadness and grief, to be with the Moyskis and the Merkels, and with all those impacted by the tragedy of Aug. 27, the archbishop wrote.

"I thank you for being with me this morning," the archbishop wrote, "for praying with me for God's blessing on this space and this community. May it be a moment of true renewal for our Church, here at Annunciation and throughout our archdiocese. Praised be Jesus Christ, now and forever."