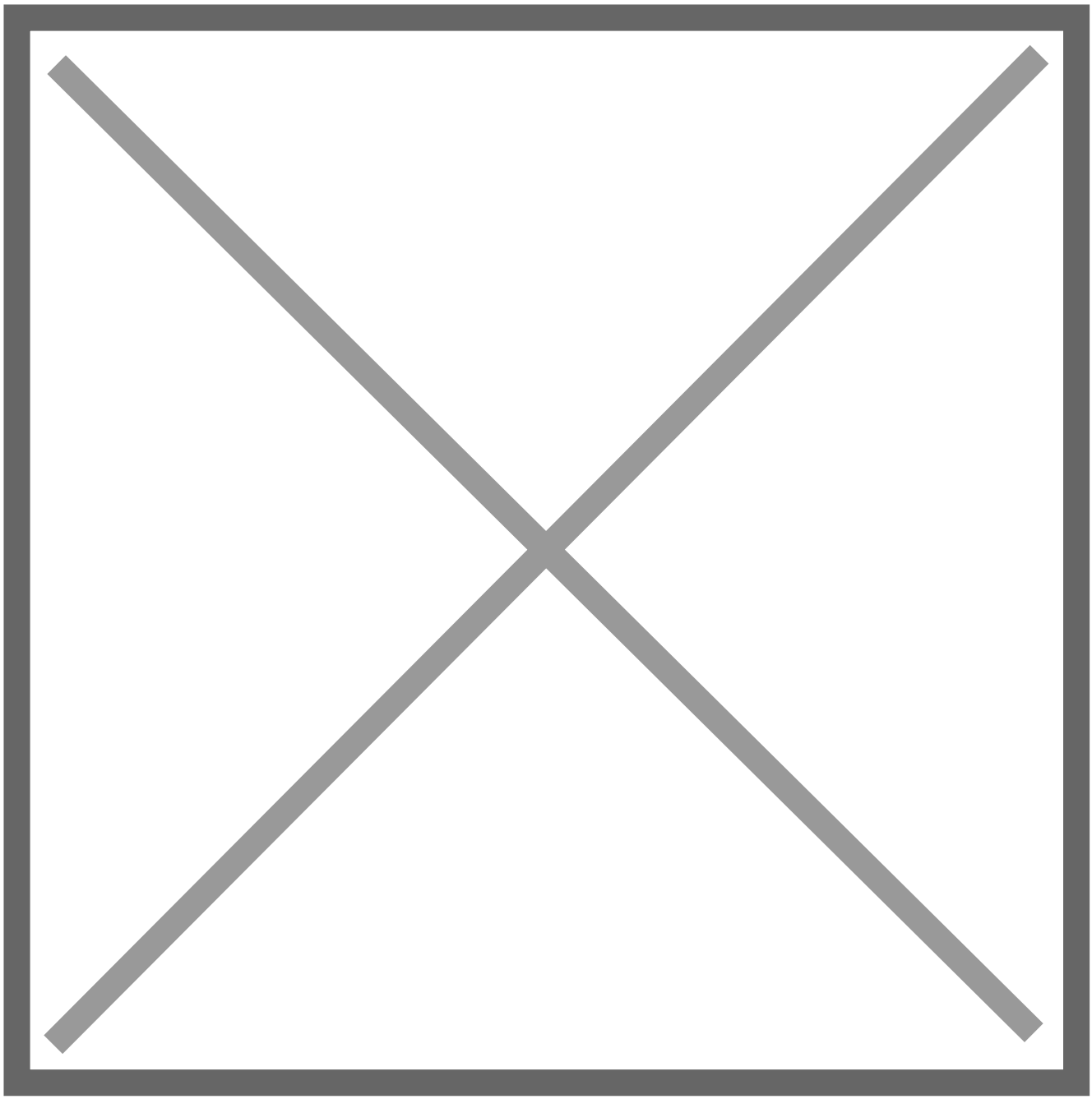
News



Archbishop Bernard Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis leads an interfaith prayer service at the Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis Aug. 28, 2025, following a shooting the previous day at Annunciation Catholic Church. A shooter opened fire Aug. 27 through the windows of the church adjacent to Annunciation Catholic School and struck children attending an all-school Mass during the first week of school, killing two and wounding 21 others. (OSV News/Reuters/Tim Evans)

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Getting to know more deeply the people of Annunciation Catholic Church and School in Minneapolis since a fatal shooting Aug. 27 during an all-school Mass has made clear how important prayer has been in keeping them together, Archbishop Bernard Hebda said Dec. 6.

"The community has been gathering for Mass weekly, even the first weekend" after the shooting that killed two students — Harper Moyski and Fletcher Merkel — and wounded 21 other people, "which had to be so difficult," the archbishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis said in an interview with Tom Halden, director of the archdiocese's Office of Communications.

Weekly Masses have been held in the old church that's part of the school, the archbishop said. "But I came many times for the evening rosary," a practice of the Minneapolis parish since the shooting," and saw "how devoted people were to prayer," he added.

"And so many of them had come to me and said, 'Archbishop, when can we get back into the church? We miss adoration.'"

The archbishop spoke in the hours after a special Mass and rite of reparation that restored the church for worship.

The faithful of Annunciation were welcomed by other churches for adoration of the Eucharist in the three months after the shooting, but "to be able to pray in their own Blessed Sacrament Chapel before the Eucharist was something they were hungering for," the archbishop said. "And to be able to do that now, I think, will be a game changer."

The rite of reparation includes sprinkling the altar and sanctuary, the church walls, and the congregation with holy water. It was a touching moment, the archbishop said.

"I was glad to share that with the pastor, Fr. (Dennis) Zehren," the archbishop said. "But I noticed how many people wept as the holy water was falling upon them. It's a very simple ritual, but very beautiful as well."

During Mass, the Eucharist was placed in the tabernacle, and Deacon Kevin Conneely, who ministers at the parish, led a procession with the Eucharist into the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, the archbishop said. After the Mass, a reception was held for those who wished to visit.

"Our church is so good with simple symbolism. I think that's what I heard at the reception after the Mass," the archbishop said. "People were so grateful for the opportunity to come together and to pray, and how significant it was for them to have the Eucharist again in the church, both in the adoration chapel, but then in the tabernacle in the sanctuary.

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"So many times when we gathered for prayer, people would look inside the church. You could still see through the glass front windows. They were saying how painful it was not to see the sanctuary candle lit."

"Now, I think," Hebda added, "it is a great sign of hope that Jesus is in that church. He so much wants to be with us in times of trouble, those times when we're really tried. Jesus wants to be part of that."

Another touching moment was Zehren's emotion during the Liturgy of the Eucharist, when the archbishop, Fr. Tom Margevicius — the master of ceremonies for the Mass — and others at the altar laid their hands on Zehren's arm in recognition of the hard

moment, the archbishop said.

"The last time that he was in the church for Mass, it was disrupted," Hebda said. "To be back in that same space, I can't imagine what was going through his mind. But it's that sense of Jesus having come to die to give his body and blood to strengthen us.

"It's so meaningful as we pray the prayer of consecration and particularly praying, as Fr. Zehren did, for the members of the community, but also for those who have died. I'm sure he very much had Harper and Fletcher in mind as he was praying those words."

About two dozen priests and deacons of the archdiocese attended the Mass. Priests were seated in the area of the church where Harper and Fletcher died, the archbishop said.

"So many of the parishioners mentioned that it was significant for them," Hebda said, adding that Deacon Conneely explained to him that it was planned for the priests to be there, as one way to honor the memory of the two students.

As the Annunciation community moves forward, it will be important to recognize that people are not in the same place of healing, "and that we want to be patient and loving of our brothers and sisters who are still really having a difficult time," the archbishop said.

"I think this is going to be a long-term process to bring healing into this community, and people are going to be at different spots," Hebda said. "We want to make sure that we're able to embrace all of them. That we continue to let all people know that they're welcome here at this church, a church that offers hope, a church where Jesus reigns. I think that's the way in which we're going to move forward."

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