



The Stomm family gathers for a photo in the front yard of their home in Minneapolis: front left, Esme, Etta and Finnegan; back left, Molly, Matt (holding Louie) and Charlize. The family lives across the street from Annunciation Church and School in Minneapolis. (OSV News/The Catholic Spirit/Dave Hrbacek)

Dave Hrbacek

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Molly Stommes was working from home the [morning of Aug. 27, 2025](#), when she heard "very loud noises" coming from just across the street, where Annunciation Catholic Church and School sit.

Two of her four children were inside the church in south Minneapolis for Mass, as was her husband, Matt Stommes, while their two youngest, both in kindergarten, were in the school next door. All four children were excited for the start of the school year, kicked off by the opening Mass celebrated by the pastor of Annunciation, [Fr. Dennis Zehren](#).

Molly, a nurse practitioner, was in a virtual meeting inside her family's home. "Probably a few minutes after the shooting, a neighbor yelled in my door that there was a situation outside," Molly, 39, recalled. "I knew then what my instincts had been telling me, that something was wrong."

Matt, also 39, was seated at Mass away from the students and teachers in a section for parents. When the shooting started, he heeded the yelled instructions to get down. Then, he crawled over to a nearby steel door of the church to try to prevent the shooter from gaining entrance. Others did the same at different doors.

After the shooting stopped, Matt began helping school leaders rush children to safety. During that process, he learned that all four of his children were unharmed — Charlize, now 13 and entering the eighth grade; Finnegan, 9 and entering third grade; and twins Etta and Esme, 5 and now entering first grade.

Outside near Diamond Lake Road, Molly put her nursing skills to work. She hustled across the street to find out what was happening. What she saw spurred her to immediate action.

"I came across the street to [see] injured children being lined up," she said. "So, I started assessing them."

As the minutes passed, Molly and others, including Matt, began "waiting for ambulances," she said. Molly and Matt sat with a seriously injured student until paramedics placed the student into an ambulance. Later, she drove the mother of another injured child to Hennepin County Medical Center in Minneapolis.

Molly and Matt talked to other Annunciation families, with some of them coming to their home. It was a natural gathering place, but a surreal one for the couple.

That day also included an encounter with [Mollie and Jesse Merkel](#), who lost their son, Fletcher, in the tragedy. Another student, Harper Moyski, was also killed in the gunfire. Two dozen others, plus three elderly Massgoers, were physically injured.

The Merkel and Stommes families had become friends, with Fletcher — a year ahead of Finnegan — teaching Finnegan how to fish and spending time with him on their combined family vacations at Grand View Lodge on Gull Lake near Brainerd.

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As the days passed, the Stommes visited with the Merckels and offered them comfort. That friendship and bond continue as the 2026-27 school year approaches.

The memories of Aug. 27, 2025, are vivid and painful for Molly and Matt Stommes, especially as they near the calendar date of the shooting one year later.

"August is a very heavy month," said Molly during an Aug. 17 interview with The Catholic Spirit, newspaper of the St. Paul-Minneapolis Archdiocese. "Our children have been so resilient, but this will be quite difficult for some of them. I think just going back to school and the anticipation of that can be exciting for some, but also difficult for others."

Just as Molly and Matt describe details about what happened the day of the tragedy, they can just as easily list all the ways people around them have offered meaningful

and practical support.

More people than they can count brought over food. "We didn't cook for over two months," Matt said.

Molly added: "At a time when you're not sleeping, you have no appetite, it was immensely helpful."

Another blessing came in the form of a puppy the Stommes family received in February. They welcomed Louie into their home after someone who knew the family made arrangements with a dog breeder.

"Obviously, raising a puppy is not the easiest, but he has been a huge joy and very helpful, particularly for Finnegan," Molly said.

After all the trauma their children went through, it was easy to embrace the idea of having a dog to provide comfort.

"Immediately after the shooting, our kids, particularly the three youngest, would insist on going to the school and church to be with the therapy dogs," Molly said. "That was a daily occurrence. They wanted to be around dogs constantly."

Another constant in the Stommes home is the steadfast level of hope fueled by their faith and resilience.

"Our school's Scripture verse for last year was chosen before this tragedy," Molly said. "I think for many of us, it kind of helped carry us through — [Jeremiah 29:11](#)," she said.

The last words of that verse were embroidered on T-shirts worn by students, parents and school staff: "a future filled with hope."

"On the days where I feel the saddest and low, I do have a lot of hope for our future, and I know that God has a plan for all of us," Molly told The Catholic Spirit.

"For me, it's helpful to reflect on how Jesus tells us that we're meant for his kingdom," Matt said. "This world is a gift, but it's not the end. And I've been given so much hope and encouragement from seeing everyone around us within this community and broader take action and spend their time serving others."

Having seen last year's theme come to life, they are now ready to embrace the Scripture verse for this school year, which is from [Luke 1:79](#) and ends with the line: "guide our feet into the way of peace."

"I love our Scripture theme for this coming year," Molly said. "That just reminds us that we are called to prayer and action."

This story appears in the **Minneapolis church shooting** feature series. [View the full series](#).