NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (https://www.ncronline.org)

Milwaukee bishops urge prayers, reflection on violence after killings

Brian Olszewski | Aug. 9, 2012

People hold a sign as they gather for a candlelight vigil Tuesday in Oak Creek, Wis. (CNS/Reuters/John Gress)

MILWAUKEE -- The killing of six Sikhs at their temple Sunday in the Milwaukee suburb of Oak Creek brought an outpouring of spiritual support from leaders in the Catholic community, as well as a call for the entire community to examine violence in U.S. culture.

Assuring the Sikh community "that our prayers go out in solidarity with you," Milwaukee Archbishop Jerome E. Listecki said Monday, "There's an aspect of we want to do something to help ease the pain of that community; one of the things that immediately comes to mind is prayer so we turn our hearts and attention to God.

"We pray for God's consoling and healing to be there for the Sikh community," he said.

In an interview with the *Catholic Herald*, the publication serving the Catholic community in southeastern Wisconsin, Listecki said he had just returned from St. Lawrence Parish in St. Lawrence, Wis., where he celebrated Mass, led a eucharistic procession and enjoyed a picnic dinner with parishioners as part of their annual feast day commemoration when he heard the news.

"I was totally taken aback. I was totally shocked that anyone would come in and do such an act of violence, but also to do it within the context of church, temple, synagogue, mosque," he said. "Here are people coming together to worship God, and what happens? They're confronted by evil. This tells us that we have to be mindful of evil in the world."

According to police, the shooter entered the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin during a religious service and shot into the gathering using an automatic weapon.

He killed four people inside the temple and two more outside, then wounded a police officer. A second officer shot and wounded the gunman, 40-year-old Wade Michael Page, who then killed himself with a shot to the head, the FBI said Wednesday.

FBI officials also said investigators were no closer to a motive for the shooting spree. Page has been linked to white supremacist groups, and news reports said he was involved in an underground music espousing white

supremacy.

Retired Auxiliary Bishop Richard J. Sklba, long active in interreligious and ecumenical affairs locally, nationally and internationally, said Catholics should consider several things as a result of what happened at the Sikh temple.

"We, as Catholics with our commitment to global solidarity, because we are Catholic, there is a universalism in our faith that we who are committed to global solidarity will be ever more conscious of the need to respect all religious traditions throughout the whole world," he said.

The bishop said that, "because of our strong sacramental tradition," the murders should serve as an opportunity for renewal of respect for all holy places and "every place that is deemed holy by those who gather."

He also discussed an important religious item in the Sikh faith that symbolizes adherents' own commitment to rejecting evil and violence: the *kirpan*, which is a miniature sword or dagger. The Sikh faith requires formally initiated members to at all times wear a *kirpan*, which is usually carried in a sheath and worn beneath clothing.

"It a symbol of their commitment to fight evil and to resist violence," the bishop told the *Catholic Herald*.

Sklba said when Pope Benedict XVI visited the United States in April 2008, Sklba, as then-chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, welcomed the pope to a meeting with interreligious leaders.

But the Sikhs were not among them, the bishop said, because the FBI would not allow anyone with weapons near the head of a sovereign state.

"So, because of government regulations, we were forced to take them off the list; that was a sadness, particularly because of the symbolism of the sword," the bishop said. "And that's what makes this all the more ironic -- and tragic. The very people that are committed to fight and resist evil have become themselves a target in a twisted fashion of the same evil."

Catholic News Service reported at the time that, rather than compromise on religious tenets that treat wearing a *kirpan* as a sacred obligation for professed believers, Sikh leaders and representatives of the USCCB agreed they should quietly decline the invitation to participate in the meeting.

Sklba said he hoped that following the killings at the temple, the entire community would examine "the violence that is woven into our culture, entertainment and society."

"And look again at this gun control issue. It is not the solution to every issue, but it is a piece of the solution. And just as worship sites (are posting signs) all over are saying, 'Guns are not allowed here,' there's more at stake societally than putting the statement on the door, than just protecting ourselves," he said. "It's a witness to the larger community that there's something wrong with all the gun-toting that people are espousing and attempting to protect."

In his "Herald of Hope" column for the Thursday issue of the *Catholic Herald*, Milwaukee Auxiliary Bishop Donald J. Hying wrote, "the culture of death will continue to flourish as long as we collectively allow it by remaining indifferent, by feeding it our entertainment dollars, by accepting violence as normal, by not articulating and proclaiming the Gospel of life.

"Peace, respect, reconciliation and justice are hard work and can only be sustained by a proper understanding of the human person as worthy of absolute respect, as the proper end of all human activity," he added.

Among religious leaders who expressed support for Wisconsin's Sikh community was the chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Auxiliary Bishop Denis J. Madden of Baltimore.

"We Catholics mourn with our Sikh brothers and sisters," he said in a statement Monday. "The U.S. bishops stand with the Sikh community and reject all violence, particularly violence inflicted out of religious intolerance," the bishop continued. "We are especially saddened that this horrendous act was carried out in a house of worship against people joined together as a family to worship God."

Source URL (retrieved on *07/27/2016 - 14:43*): https://www.ncronline.org/news/faith-parish/milwaukee-bishops-urge-prayers-reflection-violence-after-killings