

Statement by Bishop Edward C. Malesic about Florida school shooting

As I heard about Wednesday's horrific school shooting in Florida, I struggled to find the words to convey my sorrow and deep compassion for the victims and their families and my deep frustration with yet another senseless act of violence, especially one targeting our young people. I want to start by sharing the statement from Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput, who was present with the families who lost loved ones in the Columbine massacre nearly two decades ago.

“Nineteen years ago I sat with the parents of children murdered in the Columbine High School massacre, and buried some of their dead. Nothing seems to change, no matter how brutal the cost. Terrible things happen; pious statements are released, and the nation goes back to its self-absorbed distractions.

“The latest massacre in south Florida requires two things from all of us. We need to pray for the victims and their families because — as I witnessed firsthand at Columbine — their suffering is intense and long lasting.

“And we need to be angry: angry at our lawmakers for doing so little to prevent these catastrophes; angry at our news and entertainment media for simultaneously feeding off these tragedies and fueling them with a steady stream of sensationalism and moral incoherence; angry at ourselves for perversely tolerating these things, and then forgetting them until the next round of violence.

“This is Lent. As a people, we have a lot to repent and confess. And let's not lie to ourselves that tighter gun restrictions — as vital and urgent as they now are — will solve the problem. We've lost our respect for human life on a much broader scale, and this is the utterly predictable result.”

The archbishop is absolutely right. We have all probably lost count of the number of these horrific incidents; this is my third statement since the Las Vegas shooting last October.

The sheer magnitude and number of such shootings seem to be reserved to the United States. We, as a nation, are doing something very wrong here.

Prayers are powerful, and prayers are a necessary part of any Christian response to evil. But we have to start taking action to stop this carnage. Pray to God that in addition to helping the victims and their families heal from this unimaginable tragedy, that He burn in our hearts the courage to stand up and combat this problem, whether it is by advocating for better and sorely needed mental health services, working to help end bullying in our schools, responding to the developmental needs of boys and young men so they don't resort to gun violence as a solution to their problems, working to promote respect for life, and, yes, advocating for better gun laws that make sense.

This is a multifaceted problem. There is no one easy answer to the ongoing problem of gun violence in our schools. But we must begin now to do what we can. It is already too late for so many.