

February 15, 2018

Dear church family,

The Florida High School shooting yesterday in Parkland (February 14th) has left us all struggling for answers, particularly students and family members who have lost loved ones or have loved ones who were injured. With the large number of victims and family members there is a certainty that some will be known to members of our church. Already this morning I listened to one of our members whose family has been touched by this tragedy. Our sadness cannot be contained and we mourn deeply.

As followers of Jesus Christ we know that Jesus will overcome the sin and brokenness of this world, including this deadly mass shooting. Yet, for many of us – particularly the families who have suffered directly by this tragedy – it is difficult to believe this right now. Pain of this magnitude is not easily processed, nor should it be.

In the coming days, weeks, and months, you may be called upon as a friend and Christian to minister to persons struggling with this tragedy. I offer here some guidance:

1. Don't politicize this incident. There certainly will be a political response from our local and national leaders, and a response from them, regardless of political persuasion, is appropriate. But as a friend and member of Christ's Church, pay attention to the pain that is brought to you. Those who are hurting need to be taken seriously without political rhetoric coming into the conversation.
2. Permit those who hurt to feel their pain deeply. Don't minimize the pain, or the depth of this tragedy with well-intentioned, but unhelpful, comments such as, "It will be OK." Simply listen to them, weep with them, and love them.
3. Communicate your love for them and that you are available to them at any time to listen to them, be a support to them, and to love them. At such times few people seek from us clever answers to the evil and pain in the world. What they are hungry for is someone to simply stand with them in the midst of their pain.
4. Remember that we are a Stephen Ministry congregation with people who are highly trained to listen compassionately and to provide appropriate care. Contact the church office for making a referral for a friend or for your own care.

Naturally, if the question is pressed, "Where is God in all of this?" the answer is that God is present in God's Church, loving the community through the hands and hearts of all those who are followers of Jesus Christ and working God's healing in ways not always apparent. We, as Christians, are the continuing presence and work of Jesus in the world. We are God's response.

Pray for the healing of those injured, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Pray for the families who have lost loved ones. Pray for our first responders as they care for our community. Pray for our nation that these senseless tragedies will end.

With gratitude for each of you,

Dr. W. Douglas Hood, Jr.
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