

Campus ministries pray, light candles of healing for Virginia Tech students

By Shirley Atencio, Catholic Campus Minister at Adams State College

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE OF CATHOLIC LIFE

PUEBLO - "When darkness seems so powerful that it threatens to overwhelm us, as it did on a Monday morning at a college campus in Virginia, we are to light a candle, the very light of Christ, and lift it high so others might see. May God be with the community of Virginia Tech as we light our candles of healing."

These words were spoken by a pastor at a memorial vigil following the April 16 shootings at Virginia Tech. Hundreds of services were held across the nation as people gathered in prayer during this emotional time. So it was on many college and university campuses where the specter of violence hit closest to home.

At the five residential campuses within the Pueblo diocese, it was no different.

"Our campuses joined in prayerful solidarity with other college communities in hopes of creating God's peace in the hearts of young people" said Susan Searle, campus minister at Western State College.

Being present to students during this time was a concern of college staff, as well as campus ministers. Those in ministry felt inspired to provide spaces of quiet and beauty that would reflect hope. In collaboration with key campus organizations, campus-wide observances were planned. Special prayers were offered at all student Masses.

"It was important to honor those lives that were lost and to be a sign of God's love and hope in the world" said Joyce Archuleta, who ministers at CSU-Pueblo.

During the prayer vigil at the university, both President Joseph Garcia and Interim Dean of Students Arrow Kennedy were present. Kennedy called the campus a "sacred space," likening students, faculty and staff to "shepherds" responsible for keeping the campus safe.

Likewise, at Adams State College, safety concerns were addressed within a discussion facilitated by Dean of Students Ken Marquez and Counseling Director Gregg Elliott, with President David Svaldi.

Clockwise: About 30 attended the service sponsored by the FLC Newman Club.

Virginia Tech students kneel at memorial during a candlelight vigil. Flavio Perez, the father of Daniel Perez Cueva, stands in his home in Lima, Peru near pictures of his son, Daniel, one of the victims. Catholics pray during an April 19 Mass at the cathedral in Seoul, South Korea, in memory of the victims of the Virginia Tech massacre. Eric Brinker, a junior at Virginia Tech, and Chris Smith, a sophomore, attend a special Mass at the Newman Center in Blacksburg, Va. Matt Alfano lights a candle at the Fort Lewis College chapel. National photos by CNS/FLC photos courtesy of Eli Rubel and The Durango Herald, Durango, CO.

"Talking about how to make the campus better really helped" commented ASC student Nick McGrath, who felt the discussion aided in fostering a spirit of unity. On some campuses, a poignant reminder of the reason for gathering was the presence of people from Virginia. Several were either alumni of Virginia Tech or had close ties to that university. According to Wivina Vigil, campus minister and instructor at Fort Lewis College, ten such honored guests were present at their chapel's interfaith vigil. All were thankful for a supportive place to come together since they could not be with family and friends from home. In various ways, through inspirational readings, prayers, reading of the victims'

names, hanging of peace cranes, and singing, spirits were lifted on each campus.

One woman, an expectant staff member, tearfully thanked students for positive insights they shared. She said she needed to believe her child would be born into a good world. Lingered for a while at ASC's Japanese garden, community member Josephine Gosiak shared, "Our immediate response is horror, anger and grief. Coming to this was helpful in moving forward, looking toward prevention."

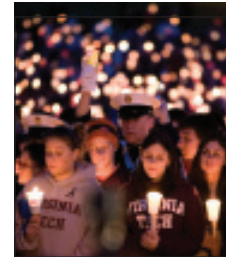
Recognizing the need for continued efforts toward prevention, Catholic Campus Ministry continually seeks bridge-building opportunities. In May the Gunnison Ministerial Alliance will observe the National Day of Prayer. Searle will

participate by offering a prayer in remembrance of all young people who have tragically lost their lives to violence in the past year. Efforts such as this help form valuable connections that make it easier to come together in times of need.

The commitment to walk with students at key moments of faith has been reaffirmed in the Pueblo Diocese for many years.

"Our diocese has been very supportive of the campus communities under its care, helping our students feel the support and connectedness of our faith community," said Janet Johnson, who serves Mesa State College in Grand Junction.

It was this connectedness that lit the candles that began to heal hearts. ☩



Solution to campus violence much more than gun control, experts say

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The chorus of voices calling on Congress and legislatures around the country to bring about better gun control following the campus massacre at Virginia Tech has already begun.

"For too long Congress has stood idle while gun violence continues to take its toll," said Rep. Carolyn McCarthy, D-N.Y., in a statement. "The unfortunate situation in Virginia could have been avoided if congressional leaders stood up to the gun lobby."

But experts on U.S. Catholic campuses say many other factors played a role in the Virginia Tech tragedy and the solution to campus violence will involve much more than gun control.

For some people, gun control is a personal cause. McCarthy, who is Catholic, has made it her signature issue since before her election to Congress in 1996. Three years before she took office, her husband was killed and her son wounded by a shooter's rampage on a suburban New York commuter train.

Josh Sugarmann, executive director of the Violence Policy Center in Washington, said tragedies such as the April 16 shootings at Virginia Tech "are the inevitable result of the ease with which the firepower necessary to slaughter dozens of innocents can be obtained."

"We allow virtually anyone the means to turn almost any venue into a battlefield," he added in a statement. "In the wake of these shootings, too many routinely search for any reason for the tragedy except for the most obvious — the easy access to increasingly lethal firearms that make mass killings possible."

Although many Washington insiders see little chance that Congress will approve comprehensive gun control legislation before the 2008 elections, James Kelly, a professor of social work and director of the Grace Ann Geibel Institute for Justice and Social Responsibility at Carlow University, a small Catholic liberal arts school in Pittsburgh, says the tragedy might serve to convince a wider segment of society that gun control is necessary. "Gun violence in the urban centers of this country has been a problem for many years," Kelly said. "But for most people it has not risen to the level of social problem that requires a universal approach."

Because "any parent can identify with the parents of these (Virginia Tech) victims," now the group with a stake in the debate over gun control "is in a sense all of



Roanoke Firearms store owner John Markell walks outside his shop in Roanoke, Va., April 18. The chorus of voices calling on Congress and legislatures around the country to bring about better gun control following the April 16 campus massacre at Virginia Tech has already begun.

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us," said Kelly, who is also an associate professor in Carlow's School for Social Change.

Kelly said the shootings also might serve to shine a light on the increasing number of college students with mental health issues. He said he has seen a growing problem at Carlow and heard from colleagues that the same thing is happening on their campuses.

"At least for a period of time some attention will be paid," he said. "But will it be piecemeal? Will any program be identified (that will make) people feel they're actually doing something? I don't know."

Don Lindley, who teaches psychology, sociology and criminology courses at Jesuit-run Regis University in Denver, was a member of the Denver Police Department for 33 years. He endorses a two-pronged approach to the problem of campus violence.

First, those responsible for campus security must be

"given the tools they need to do the job," including adequate training, decent pay and respect for their professionalism, he said. "And they must be armed."

Many in the academic community might find that unacceptable, he said. "But I find it a great deal more unacceptable to have students' killed or wounded by violent individuals on campus, he added. "And we know we have violent people on our campuses or with access to our campuses."

The second part of Lindley's solution is for everyone on campus — and in society in general — to "take more time with people, try to identify when someone is hurting."

"How long does it take to give someone a social stroke?" he asked. "And that might be all that someone needs."

The Rev. Bill Stewart, a philosophy professor at Carlow who is also a Pentecostal minister, says the solution to campus violence might need to go all the way back to 360 B.C. and Plato's "The Republic," in which the Greek philosopher advised the censorship of artists and poets who have "a propensity toward images of vice."

With the average U.S. child viewing 12,000 to 15,000 murders on television by the time he or she reaches adolescence, Americans need to rethink what they are doing to themselves by accepting "a culture awash in images of violence," he said.

"The larger issue is this: All of us appreciate the expiration dates on our food cans and we know there are certain things we should not ingest," Rev. Stewart said. "Are there certain things that we are ingesting into our own souls that we should not?"

"We all know that a certain diet can contribute to hardening of the arteries," he added. "But a hardening of the heart can be worse."

In their 1995 document, "Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action," the U.S. bishops also said "no one response" can solve the problems of gun and other violence in our society.

"We have to address simultaneously declining family life and the increasing availability of deadly weapons, the lure of gangs and the slavery of addiction, the absence of real opportunity, budget cuts adversely affecting the poor, and the loss of moral values," they said. ☩

