

IN EVERY BODY, A SACRED HEART

A Nuns Against Gun Violence prayer vigil
for National Gun Violence Awareness Day | June 7, 2024



“Our Lady, Mother of Ferguson and All Those Killed by Gun Violence”

Icon by Mark Doox

NUNS
AGAINST GUN
VIOLENCE

(In the center of the prayer space, place a vessel of water and a small branch that will be used for sprinkling. Before the prayer, assign participants the various readings.)

CALL TO PRAYER

In 2024, National Gun Violence Awareness Day coincides with the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This Catholic feast day recalls that in Jesus, the heart of God was ripped open by violence. That the heart of God is an open sanctuary for all those who suffer violence, for their families and loved ones. That from the heart of God flows healing for all victims of gun violence. That the heart of God pumps holy energy into all those who advocate against gun violence. And so we have chosen for the theme of our 2024 prayer vigil “In Every Body, a Sacred Heart.” As we begin our prayer, I invite you to gaze contemplatively at the icon on this prayer service. It is called “Our Lady of Ferguson and All Those Killed by Gun Violence.” The icon was painted by Mark Doox and commissioned by the Rev. Dr. Mark Francisco Bozzuti-Jones. It was inspired by the murder of Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, who was shot and killed on August 9, 2014, by Darren Wilson, a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis. In the icon, Mary is depicted as a Black woman with her hands up. Where her womb would be is a small black silhouette of Jesus in a similar posture but in the crosshairs of a gun. The posture, while a clear reference to the “Hands up, don’t shoot” slogan birthed in Ferguson, is also the “orans” position of prayer. Orans, which in Latin means “praying,” is a position that symbolizes pleading or supplication to God. Gaze for a few moments at this image. What feelings arise in you? With what resolve to action are you inspired?

After the time of contemplative gazing, invite people to share something of what they experienced. When the time of silence and sharing is completed, the prayer leader begins the opening prayer. The leader invites the participants who can to raise their arms in the orans position during the prayer.

Opening Prayer

Vulnerable God, the Sacred Heart of Jesus was ripped open by violence. We believe that in every body beats a sacred heart. We raise our voices in anguished prayer for victims of gun violence—hearts stopped, relationships severed, communities terrorized. We gather today to raise our hands in supplication for an end to gun violence. Fill our upraised arms with courage to strengthen our resolve to educate and advocate for an end to gun violence. May all bodies be cherished, know tenderness and pleasure and the justice of wholeness. Amen.

Opening Song: “O Christ, You Did No Violence” by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

AURELIA 7.6.7.6 D ("The Church's One Foundation")
O Christ, you did no violence yet you were crushed with pain;
You suffered great injustice to make us whole again.
As lambs are led to slaughter and sheep in silence wait,
You gave your life to offer a love that conquers hate.
You gave your life to save us, yet, God, we now confess:
Forgetting that you love us, we live in hatefulness.
We tolerate injustice that breaks the human soul;
We overlook the madness as violence takes its toll.
When children hear the popping of one more fired gun
And know there is no stopping and look for where to run,

When workers face oppression, and women face abuse,
Lord, hear your world's confession, for there is no excuse.
Our games and movies teach us that violence is all right.
O God, our greed is boundless; our wealth depends on might.
Our nations' moral failings in politics and war
All lead to countless killings — to violence you abhor.
The patterns of our violence give shape to all our days,
Yet you, O God, are gracious; your ways are not our ways.
Now by your Holy Spirit, we pray you'll make us new,
Till peace becomes our pattern as we all follow you.

LAMENT

Reading: John 19:31-34

Now since it was preparation day, in order that the bodies might not remain on the cross on the sabbath, for the sabbath day of that week was a solemn one, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs be broken and they be taken down. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and then of the other one who was crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out.

Response by Rev. Dr. Ellen Clark-King

Let us lament with all those who are touched by gun violence.
Let us lament the shooter's choice for violence.
Let us lament laws that allow the violent easy access to guns.
Let us lament our politicians' unwillingness to work for change.
Let us lament with the hearts broken by loss today.
Let us lament all the lives cut short today.
Let us lament, O God, and then let us rise from our knees to work for
change. In the name of Christ, the prince of peace. Amen.

Petitions of Lament

Leader: As we pray petitions of lament. I invite you to place your hand on your sacred heart and become aware of the sacred hearts whose beating is stopped by gun violence, of loved ones whose hearts are broken. The response to the petitions is: ***Fill our hearts with your transforming love.***

Giver of Life and Love, you created all people as one family and called us to live together in harmony and peace. Surround us with your love as we face the challenges and tragedies of gun violence. For our dear ones, for our neighbors, for strangers and aliens, and those known to you alone, Loving God, ***Fill our hearts with your transforming love.***

God of Righteousness, you have given our leaders, the President, the members of Congress, the judges of our courts and members of our legislatures, power and responsibility to protect us and to uphold our right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. For all who bear such responsibility, for all who

struggle to discern what is right in the face of powerful political forces, Loving God, *Fill our hearts with your transforming love.*

Merciful God, bind up the wounds of all who suffer from gun violence, those maimed and disfigured, those left alone and grieving, and those who struggle to get through one more day. Bless them with your presence and help them find hope. For all whose lives are forever marked by the scourge of gun violence, Loving God, *Fill our hearts with your transforming love.*

God Who Remembers, may we not forget those who have died in the gun violence that we have allowed to become routine. Receive them into your heart and comfort us with your promise of eternal love and care. For all who have died, those who die today, and those who will die tomorrow, Loving God, *Fill our hearts with your transforming love.*

God of Justice, help us, your church, find our voice. Empower us to change this broken world and to protest the needless deaths caused by gun violence. Give us power to rise above our fear that nothing can be done and grant us the conviction to advocate for change. For your dream of love and harmony, Loving God, *Fill our hearts with your transforming love.*

RESOLVE

Reading: John 7:37-39

On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed, “Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: ‘Rivers of living water* will flow from within them.’” He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive.

Response by Michele Bisailon, DHS

Side 1: Heartbeat of our God,
called to circulate,
to be lifeline
to this Body of Christ.

Side 2: Heartbeat of our God
called to bring God-life
to each cell, to ev’ry being:
nourishing, fulfilling,
calling forth life.

Side 1: Heartbeat of our God,
called to share life
to give, to receive,
to bring back
for purifying
for reconciling
for enabling more life
to the heartbeat of our God.

Side 2: Heartbeat of our God,
called to be—
for others,
for oneself
for all of creation—
symbol of fullness of life
sign of the passion which flows
from the One who is life,
Who calls to commitment
to caring
to total giving.

Side 1: Heartbeat of our God,
may we follow the beat
and love of your heart,
source of our life and passion,
to respond to the beating heart
of the world today.

Side 2: Heartbeat of our God,
give us the courage
to be voice for the voiceless
to be leaders in the movement
to end gun violence
to be your compassionate presence to victims
and forgivers of perpetrators.
Bring our hearts to beat with yours
in our efforts to resolve this
crisis of our times.

Petitions of Resolve

The response is *Merciful God, hear us.*

We will pray for those killed and wounded by guns, for families and friends, for the shooters, *Merciful God, hear us.*

We will recognize gun violence as a critical and preventable problem. *Merciful God, hear us.*
We will hold the gun industry accountable and ensure adequate oversight on the marketing and sales of guns and ammunition. *Merciful God, hear us.*

We will raise our voices asking our legislators to enact gun laws to protect all in our society. *Merciful God, hear us.*

We will collaborate with allies who seek to end gun violence. *Merciful God, hear us.*

We will strive to become instruments of peace. *Merciful God, hear us.*

RITUAL

Participants are invited to extend a hand in blessing over the vessel of water as a reader prays the blessing:

God of abundant life, bless this water. Help us to remember the rivers of living water, of divine love that flow in every heart. Fill us with the conviction that every body contains a sacred heart. Let us remember those sacred hearts we have lost this year to gun violence, both those who have died and those who have been wounded as well as those sacred hearts who committed these acts of violence. As these waters remind us, we are all one body; our sacred hearts are connected to one another. As we receive this blessing, may we commit ourselves to helping one another recognize our sacredness and the living water that flows from within. From that place of believing in our sacredness, empower us to work to create communities and societies where nonviolence and peace are the norm and not the exception. Amen.

Sprinkling of Water: *The participants are sprinkled with the water that they have just blessed.*

CLOSING PRAYER

As we have blessed our sacred hearts, give us the courage, Spirit, to enter the world committed to the hope of a gun-free future. Lead us Jesus, the Crucified and Resurrected One, to those sorrowful places of trauma and help us to be voices that cry out for mercy and change. Now with God our Creator, let us sing together our resolve to work for this emerging vision of a peaceful world.

Closing Song: “**God of Mercy, You Have Shown Us**” by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

BEACH SPRING 8.7.8.7 D ("God of Day and God of Darkness")

God of mercy, you have shown us ways of living that are good:

Work for justice, treasure kindness, humbly journey with the Lord.

Yet your people here are grieving, hurt by weapons that destroy.

Help us turn to you, believing in your way that brings us joy.

On a street where neighbors gather, shots are heard; a young girl dies.

On a campus, students scatter as the violence claims more lives.

In a family filled with anger, tempers flare and shots resound.

God of love, we weep and wonder at the violence all around.

God, we pray for those who suffer when this world seems so unfair;

May your church be quick to offer loving comfort, gentle care.

And we pray: Amid the violence, may we speak your truth, O Lord!

Give us strength to break the silence, saying, "This can be no more!"

Options for those who prefer to use recorded music at the beginning and/or end of the prayer:

- Monica Brown, [*You Know My Heart*](#)
- Dougie Maclean and Kathy Mattea, [*This Love Will Carry*](#)
- Jan Novotka, [*O Great Love*](#)
- Lori True, [*Show By Your Life*](#)
- Lori True, [*Let Our Heart Be Transformed*](#)
- Kathy Sherman, [*Walk In The Heart of God*](#)
- Kathy Sherman, [*The Heart Knows*](#)