

First Presbyterian Church | Ann Arbor, MI
Prayer after Gun Violence
December 2, 2021

*How long, Lord, must I call for help,
but you do not listen?
Or cry out to you, "Violence!"
but you do not save?
Why do you make me look at injustice?
Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?
Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.
Therefore the law is paralyzed,
and justice never prevails.
The wicked hem in the righteous,
so that justice is perverted.*

Habakkuk 1:2-4

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit.
Psalm 34:18

Our hearts are broken by sadness with news of the school shooting at Oxford High School earlier this week. At times like this we don't have many words that can be said – I certainly don't. Our young people have so much that is already pressing upon them: stress, anxiety, the trauma of violence in our world, and so much more. Let us lean on each other in this time, and know that each and every one of you is beloved. God loves you unconditionally.

In her book, "Braving the Wilderness," Brene Brown has a chapter titled, "Hold Hands with Strangers." In it she tells a story about the school shooting that happened at Sandy Hook Elementary school in 2012. At the time she lived in Texas, but her children were the same age as the targeted students. She recalls joining with local parents and grieving with them. She says, "An experience of collective pain does not deliver us from grief or sadness; it is a ministry of presence. These moments remind us that we are not alone in our darkness and that our broken heart is connected to every heart that has known pain since the beginning of time." We weren't made to carry our burdens, our grief, our pain, alone. It's one of the reasons we gather together as a community, because in our pain, grief, sorrow, and fear, we are called to draw near to each other, just as God has drawn near to us.

Emmanuel, God with us, we are broken.
Broken by violence,
broken by grief,
broken by confusion.
Our hearts are with people in Oxford, MI
devastated by a terrible crime.
We are lamenting with those who have lost loved ones,
feeling for those who are traumatized,
wondering in disbelief.
As we digest these events and read and see the news,
we have questions that haunt us;

Why would someone do this?
Why are lethal weapons so ready at hand?
How do we protect our children?
How should we respond?
We wonder about other troubled people
whose hands hover over guns,
whose thoughts stray to innocent victims.
Today we pray for an advent miracle,
that you would open our eyes to a way forward
against powers and principalities that feed on bloodshed.
Show us a way that politicians and lawmakers and average people
can work together to make a safer society,
a society free from gun violence.
God of love, help us embrace each other when terror strikes.
God of comfort, we need your advent here.
God of hope, be near us. Amen.

**Please visit the Washtenaw County Community Mental Health Website for resources
if you or someone you know needs mental health care:**
<https://www.washtenaw.org/839/Community-Mental-Health>

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Prayer adapted from prayers written by Carol Penner