

WORLD & NATION

Fort Worth mourns church shooting victims

FORT WORTH, Texas (CNS) — Instead of cheering fans, the football stadium at Texas Christian University was filled Sept. 19 by 10,000 mourners who gathered to commemorate victims of the church-sanctuary shooting in Fort Worth.

Participating in the mid-afternoon memorial service were Texas Gov. George W. Bush, Fort Worth Mayor Kenneth Barr, numerous local clergy and a huge number of young people who came to mark the passing of friends.

The gunman, Larry Gene Ashbrook, 47, had invaded a Sept. 15 youth rally at Wedgwood Baptist Church. Randomly, he killed seven people and injured seven others before committing suicide.

In denouncing the killings Barr said, "We will not let one senseless act of violence define what we are as a city. We have to be defined by the goodness and kindness throughout Fort Worth — that's what we are."

Speaking from a pulpit on the field, clergy of many denominations sounded a similar theme: finding faith and consolation in God and looking for good in the midst of seemingly overwhelming evil.

Among those offering reflections on healing was Father Richard Beaumont, pastor of St. Bartholomew, a Catholic church just minutes from Wedgwood Baptist.

He noted the saying "that the blood of martyrs is the seed of faith."



Reuters/CNS
A young woman wipes away tears during a communitywide memorial service Sept. 19 for victims of the Wedgwood Baptist Church shooting in Fort Worth, Texas.

"I believe the blood of these new martyrs, as well as the near blood of our near martyrs, will bring a surge of faith in our young people and in all of us," he said. "Our God wastes nothing."

Scott Colglazier, senior pastor at University Christian Church, said God's pres-

ence could be seen in the community. "It is true that God lives within us," he said, "but he also lives between us when we reach one heart into another."

To memorialize the deceased, South-west High School senior Patti Cornelius read each of their names, after which a handbell rang out a single, deep tone.

Don Browning, father of victim Sydney Browning, the Wedgwood children's choir director, told how, as a child, Sydney sang "This Little Light of Mine." She was killed as she greeted people at the church entrance.

Her father led the stadium congregation in singing the song, concluding with her favorite verse. "Let it shine 'till Jesus comes," he sang.

"And that's what we've got to do, folks," he said. "We've got to keep letting the light shine."

At the service, hundreds of singers and a large orchestra representing Fort Worth churches provided music that reverberated beyond the stadium and its parking lots.

Popular Christian vocalist Stephen Curtis Chapman also performed, promising his listeners, "We do not grieve as those who have no hope."

Also present were two students from Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo., the site of another shooting in April. "We didn't come with answers, but with prayer, love and support," they said, and then went into the crowd to speak with

students.

Wedgwood Baptist pastor, the Rev. Al Meredith, told how his young church had grown from 400 to 1,000 members in just 10 years. He said it was full of young families and many children, who that morning told him they now were afraid to come to church.

He asked that, on the eve of the Jewish holy day Yom Kippur, all Christians would join with their Jewish friends in 24 hours of fasting and prayer.

He urged them to ask God, "Lord, what do you want to change in me?"

A day after the shooting, students at North Crowley High School, where one of the deceased victims had been a student, held a memorial service in the school courtyard.

In a reference to the killer, one student prayed, "Lord, we forgive him."

Another student thanked God "for the bullet not going into Mary Beth's spine and for her heroic effort."

This was a reference to Wedgwood Baptist member Mary Beth Talley, 17, who was shot when she used her body to shield 18-year-old Heather MacDonald. MacDonald has Down syndrome.

Talley, who was wounded in the back, was released from the hospital later that night.

"I was bleeding pretty bad, and it was really yucky, and I thought 'I've got to get out of here,'" she said. "But still, I had to keep Heather down."

Religious education study shows preference for innovation

WASHINGTON (CNS) — U.S. diocesan religious-education directors rate their parishes better on teaching the content of the faith than on conveying the implications and obligations of faith, according to a national study.

The study, released Sept. 16 by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, also found that:

- Diocesan religious education officials regard traditional classroom-based programs as less effective than innovative programs that depend "on the joint commitment of pastors, religious educators and families."

- Most diocesan religious education offices offer training programs for catechists and parish directors or coordinators of religious education.

- Nearly all such offices make catechetical resources — books, videos and other materials — available to parishes.

- Most such offices gather data on parish-based religious education programs, but fewer than half do so for school-based religious education programs.

"Diocesan directors consider intergen-

eration, family-centered and Lectionary-based programs to be especially effective and innovative," the study said.

It said they cited as key components of successful religious education "the expertise, creativity and commitment of parish DREs/CREs (directors/coordinators of religious education) and catechists, the support of the pastor, and the involvement of parents and families."

The report, titled "Diocesan Profile of Catechetical Ministry," was based on a spring 1999 survey of diocesan religious-education or catechetical directors in the 181 U.S. dioceses identified as having such an official. Of the questionnaires sent out, 144 were returned.

CARA, a Catholic research agency based at Georgetown University, conducted the survey. It was part of a larger study project on U.S. religious education sponsored by the National Conference of Catechetical Leadership, the Department of Education of the U.S. Catholic Conference, and the Religious Education Department of the National Catholic Educational Association.

Drawing from the Vatican's General

Catechetical Directory, the survey asked diocesan directors to rate how well parish religious education programs achieved various catechetical goals.

In presenting the content of the faith, 69 percent thought the programs did very well and 29 percent more thought they did well. In rooting catechesis in Scripture and tradition, 60 percent thought the programs did very well, and 33 percent more thought they did well.


Large majorities said parish programs in their diocese did at least somewhat well on a series of other goals, but were far less likely to say they were doing very well.

For example, only 41 percent thought their programs did very well on fostering personal moral formation; 39 percent on

building a sense of parish community and connecting individuals to the wider church; 32 percent on conveying the centrality of the liturgy in church life; 27 percent on helping participants develop a personal spiritual and devotional life.

Fewer than 20 percent of the diocesan directors thought parish religious education did very well in raising consciousness about the social obligations of faith, promoting action for social justice, imparting a sense of responsibility in the mission of the church or increasing participants' understanding of church history.

The most typical staffing of a diocesan office of religious education consisted of one full-time professional and one full-time secretarial assistant.




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