

On the occasion of the shooting at Virginia Tech

The horrendous events at Virginia Tech remind us how little separation there is between those of us living in Oregon and our neighbors in Virginia. Tragedy, grief and hope bridge miles between our two states.

With increasing frequency, I have been asked, "What can we do to help at this time?" While I have no definitive answer to this complex question, there are a few thoughts I can share. First, we can mourn, grieve and share our empathy with our brothers and sisters whose lives are tied to the Virginia Tech campus. Our grief comes from shared tragedies, including the senseless shooting at Springfield High School in 1998. Our mourning pours out from the well of universal pain and suffering that comes from our ability to share in the loss of another person. We empathize because we know what it is like to have children on college campuses away from home, family and friends who struggle with severe depression and mental illness, and the hope that every day will be free of violence.

Second, we can join together in asking the question, "Why?" At a time like this, there are no easy answers, no simple formulas that will explain this tragedy. Joining together in the question is part of the process of loss and healing, leading us to join together in the truly universal attempt to move from despair to hope.

Finally, we can join together in prayer. Prayer offers that unique opportunity to spill out our anguish, to name those who are dead or wounded and to lift up their family and friends, and to renew our strength to work as peacemakers to address the issues in our society that contribute to a culture of violence. And as we pray, it is also important to remember the family of Cho Seung-Hui, the young man who killed his fellow Virginia Tech students and faculty members.

As we struggle with the complexity of events that will continue to unfold at Virginia Tech over the months ahead, may our prayers and hopes join with God's healing presence and contribute to the time when this type of violence will be no more.

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