

Reflection for PBSC, September, 2019
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It has been quite a summer in Dayton, Ohio. It began on May 25 when the KKK held a rally at Courthouse Square in downtown Dayton. Days after Montgomery County issued a permit to a Ku Klux Klan-affiliated group to rally on Dayton's Courthouse Square, a coalition of community groups mounted an effort to counter the planned event. In the end there were 9 Klan members who showed up and 500 to 600 counter protesters to say there is no room for hate in Dayton. I was proud of our city.

Then on Memorial Day, after a lovely day for picnics and outings, the weather turned ugly that night. There were 15 tornadoes that devastated parts of the city. The parts that were hit were generally lower income areas. Many apartments, houses, and businesses were destroyed. The extent of the devastation was not really known until the next morning. Many trees were down, houses were without roofs and parts of buildings were in the streets and on lawns. There was no electricity in the hard-hit areas. One place that was hit was a water pumping station so areas were without both electric and water for days. The people of Dayton came through again and donated water, food, and money. There were even people who pitched pop-up tents near the worst areas to provide water and food for the volunteer workers as they worked to clean up the trees and debris created by the tornados. Again, I was proud of our city.

On August 4 we woke up to the devastating news of a mass shooting in the Oregon District (an entertainment district downtown) with 9 people killed. This was less than 24 hours after 22 were killed in another mass shooting in El Paso, TX. The shooter, the 10th fatality, was killed by the Dayton Police. Again, the city rallied. There was a vigil that night in the Oregon District to pray for the victims and for the city. Streets were packed with people, gathered to mourn and to try to comprehend that this could happen here. Again, I was proud of our city. #Dayton Strong.

As a congregation we could not remain silent after such a horrible tragedy. Our newly elected Community Council issued a press release in which we said that we "strengthen our resolve to counter and overcome the negative influences in our culture that result in this violence and to demand sensible legislation that works for the good of all people, not for the powerful few. . . . We believe that each person is precious in God's eyes, even those who commit acts of violence. As Daytonians, El Pasoans and so many others have been demonstrating, let's continue to show our care and concern for our neighbors, especially those who are on the fringes. . . . In doing this, together we build a more peaceful and loving society where the power of love, not hate, is triumphant."

It seems that each day brings a new tragedy, a senseless shedding of blood by violence. As people dedicated to the Precious Blood of Jesus, we are called, at this time in our country and in our world, to be witnesses of God's reconciling and redeeming love; maybe in a way we never have before. It is a great challenge for us. May we accept the challenge!