

Presiding Bishop and House of Bishops,

Hello, my name is Philip Schentrup and I want to thank you for granting me the opportunity to address you today.

I've come before you today to provide witness for my daughter Carmen who was murdered on Ash Wednesday of this year in Parkland, FL, and to ask for the continued and vigorous support of the House of Bishops and all its members to prevent gun violence in all its forms.

Carmen was an amazing, youthful, energetic, and compassionate young woman. A girl who was 16 going on 25 but still came and gave her dad and mom a hug before bed every night. Carmen was a gifted academic, having gone through school as a literal straight A student, even though she had taken almost every AP course offered by her high school. Carmen had won academic scholarships and had been accepted to the honors programs of multiple universities. We are unsure which school Carmen would have finally chosen, but I can tell you she was focused on becoming a medical researcher. Carmen was determined to find the cure for ALS; a devastating disease that had stricken two people Carmen loved. Carmen was also a gifted musician who played several instruments and sang in the church choir but she loved to play the piano the most. Carmen often filled our house with music. Carmen was not a 'born' leader and was naturally shy, but she became leader by choice. Carmen chose to push herself and to put herself in uncomfortable situations so she could help lead change, as when she became president of our church's youth group. I've often said that Carmen was going to change the world, and I have no doubt that my daughter, who made learning look so easy, was filled with compassion and understanding, and pushed herself to make things better even when she was scared would have done just that. All Carmen's promise came to an end, though, on Ash Wednesday when a troubled young man with a history of hate and violence walked into her school and shot her 4 times with an AR-15. The gunman would kill 16 others, injure 17 more, and shoot approximately 150 rounds in a 6 minute period. (pause)

As terrible as our loss from gun violence has been, though, my wife April and I have been fortunate. Fortunate to have the support of family, an amazing parish community, our bishop, and the love and outpouring of people from around the world. Sadly, too many families affected by gun violence do not have the same support and have suffered in anonymity as the rest of the world barely notices. Our hearts go out to them and I pray that we find ways to help them with their pain and sorrow.

As April and I have tried to come to grips with our tragedy caused by gun violence, we have been confronted by a sobering fact. There is a dilemma at the heart of our great country, and it is a battle between fear and hope. Many people in the US have been taught to fear their neighbor. Many advocacy groups and politicians have discovered the power of fear to sell their message and routinely sow fear to advance their agendas. It is all too common to hear things like, someone is going to attack your family, be prepared. Someone is going to steal your freedoms, defend yourself. Someone is coming to take your job, brainwash your kid, or destroy our Judeo-Christian values. The world is unsafe; people are bad.

In stark contrast, however, as Christians our second Great Commandment is, "Love thy neighbor as thy self". It commands us to love unconditionally. Given the current state of politics in our country it is clear to me that we as Christians in the US have failed to live into and evangelize this message. How can we love our neighbor as ourselves when we dehumanize the immigrant, we hate people who don't look like us, act like us, or believe as us? The Christian message of hope and love is being drowned out by fear-mongering and profiteering.

In the Church, however, April and I have hope. Strengthened by the resolve the House of Bishops showed in March by your statement against gun violence and with faith that we have the power to change things and make this world a better place. The Church and its message of hope and

unconditional love has made radical social change through the millennia, including modern times. The Church must continue to speak out with its message, perhaps now louder than ever before. And just like Carmen, we have to go outside our comfort zone to make this change. We must all put ourselves in uncomfortable positions if we truly want to change the world. In this we have no choice, for only then will we truly be able to call ourselves the Church, the body of Christ.

In closing, I would like to thank this body for taking the time to hear our plea and for the love and support you have shown my family and victims of gun violence more broadly. I thank you also for your ministry and the amazing work you have committed your lives to. I pray that God bless all of you.