

Bearing Witness To Tragedy And Standing Ready To Act

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On Wednesday, October 25, 2023, my happy memories of my first few years in Community in Lewiston, Maine, changed forever. On that day, 18 people were shot and killed in the most traumatic gun violence event ever in the state of Maine. It happened in Lewiston, where I had spent the first four years of my ministry as a Sister of Mercy as a teacher. I was in my 20s; I was young and filled with zeal and joy, both as a new teacher and because of the 12 other Sisters of Mercy with whom I lived. My dream of becoming a religious sister, a woman serving God and God's people, had become a reality. That was in the early 1970s. Now, over 50 years later, the name of Lewiston no longer brings to mind the joy, youth or promise of my memories.

I visited Lewiston in December; I knew I had to return there to visit the two sites where so many were killed by a man who too readily was able to acquire guns. I drove to Lewiston with a friend, so I would not be alone. I went to the first site, Just-In-Time Recreation, which is closed now. The parking lot in front of the building was empty, as are the lives of the many who lost loved ones that day. The only way one would know something had happened was by the many flowers and signs remembering the lives lost. I went there to pray, to be present to and witness to the lives of those who can no longer be. I had hoped to pray, but I could not; I was "present" instead. It reminded me of the many times we say "Present" while witnessing to those killed in other countries. I was present.

After my time there, we drove to the second site where the killings took place, Schemengees Bar and Grill. It too was closed. There was no sign of life; it was taken on October 25, 2023. And so again, I was "present."



I still have some very good memories of Lewiston. I know a day will come when they arise first in my mind rather than the gunning down of 18 lives. I am thankful for the response of our Maine Representative Jared Golden, who both apologized to the people he serves and changed his stance in Congress to support an assault weapons ban following the shooting.

I am thankful for the work of the Sisters of Mercy and Nuns Against Gun Violence who are praying and advocating across the country to change laws and save lives. And I am thankful for the community that comes together to support one another when tragedy strikes.

My trip to Lewiston reminded me that, as a woman of God and a woman of Mercy, I had to be present again in a city where I lived in my youth. I am still alive, not like those 18 who are not. I have more to do. And as I have done my whole life, when it is time to move from being present to being a woman of action, I will respond.

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