



*A message from a heavy heart.
Rev. Dr. Victor Aloyo, Jr., President*

Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint; heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in deep anguish. How long, Lord, how long? (Psalm 6:1-3)

Dear Seminary Community,

As I was leaving the office yesterday to go home and prepare for my sermon for this coming Sunday and the presentations scheduled for the following week, I received a text from a colleague informing me of another tragic mass shooting at a school. It seems every week, there is a headline or a happening that undercuts our best-laid daily routines or sermon preparation. Suddenly, grief, lament, anger, and frustration are simultaneously experienced. This fateful occurrence took place among our metro Atlanta neighbors of Winder, GA, at the Apalachee High School, where a 14-year-old, using an AR-platform weapon, killed two students and two teachers and injured eight other students and one teacher. We cannot fathom the grief, despair, and anguish the families who lost loved ones are going through, and the all too familiar cycle of “thoughts and prayers, time of mourning, moving toward healing, and repeating the process when the next shooting happens” is an intolerable reminder of our failure to adequately address the scourge of gun violence in this country.

What can we, as pastoral leaders, possibly say in these moments when all our hopes are dashed and our plans are disrupted? What wisdom can we pull from scripture to instill hope in the aftermath of graphic violence etched into human memory forever? Families and communities will remember where they were on that fateful day for the rest of their lives.

There are no words adequate, yet, when our language fails, we know the Spirit prays within us with groaning too deep for words. As followers of Christ, our response must start with prayer. We can turn to God to seek mercy and comfort for the victims and their families who are experiencing unspeakable pain. The fact that mass shootings continue to happen with such regularity should prompt God's children everywhere to cry out to God, asking for our Creator to grant mercy upon us, as we seem trapped in these cycles of inexplicable violence.

On the heels of beginning a new school year, I am cognizant that such events bring many questions regarding our faith on a campus that seems to be void of such violence. Yet, when such inexplicable occurrences happen, the circumstances impact us all - our call to ministry, our discernment process, sharing our scholarship for leadership & ministry formation, and how we lead and govern. Notwithstanding, let us process, confess, and acknowledge our collective pains, loss, and fear. Columbia Theological Seminary provides caring individuals who can listen and process this pain with you (see below).

In times of unexplainable tragedy, we must ask God for courage, conviction, and strength to advocate for restoration, justice, and peace in our communities. God is merciful and will not

abandon us. Like the Psalmist, we will turn from lament to hope, confident that ***"The Lord has heard our cry for mercy; the Lord accepts our prayer"*** (Psalm 6:9).

In addition to lament and prayer, we should consider how to respond. I encourage you to be open to the opportunities God places in your life as you pray and reflect. Will you join me in answering the call to take action and eliminate the senseless violence that continues to affect not only our community, but our entire nation? Will you and your peers become advocates for a safer future for all people?

We must pause our active lives to share what Jesus did - to tell the complete story. We gather daily and at least weekly to reveal a narrative the world must hear. This story of our Triune God is the foundation of our hope and advocacy! Hear our prayers, oh, Lord!

In Christ,

Rev. Victor Aloyo, Jr.
President (x4514)