

Dear McFarlin,

In the wake of the shooting in Uvalde, Texas, as well as the many that have come before and after, I feel compelled to share my heart. As a pastor and father, when I imagine a classroom of children and teachers lying lifeless and bloody on the floor with terrified survivors close by, I am overcome with feelings too deep for words, feelings of both compassion and outrage.

Why would I write on this matter at this time and perhaps not speak out in this way about other issues and matters? Simply put, imagining the horror and terror, the pain and trauma that is experienced in those moments when innocent children are being massacred, are trying to stay alive and are watching brutal carnage happen, rises to a level of such intense and gripping sorrow that I am compelled to say something! I cannot not do something.

I have sent letters to my representatives in the U.S. Congress and in the Oklahoma Legislature asking them to do more to protect our children from violence. I know that just stating what I did might be construed as being too political. I do know that there are strong disagreements about causes and solutions of such vile violence. But I mean this to be pastoral not politically partisan. This comes out of my heart for children and the innocent, and I believe that you are equally heart-stricken. I know that every one of us deplores the killing of children and other innocent victims. I know that we are deeply troubled that there have been at least 27 school shootings and over 228 mass shootings (four or more victims) in the US since January 1, 2022.

I believe that many portions of our Scriptures call upon us to be people of action, to "*be doers of the Word and not hearers only.*" I am not telling you what to do or what solutions you should promote. I am only saying that each and all of us are called to do something in keeping with the convictions and clarity of our conscience as informed and shaped by our faith in God through Jesus Christ and as guided and goaded by the Holy Spirit.

Because of our differences over the causes and over how to effectively prevent such horrible happenings, many in our government entities find themselves, even as we the people find ourselves, to be in some degree of gridlock over what is needed most. Gridlock sadly leads to inaction so that nothing to very little changes. We can grieve, talk, think and pray but unless we and our society also do something more innocent people including more precious children will likely die. As McFarlin we can prayerfully discern any ministries that could address some of the contributing causes that exist both in the lives of persons and in our society.

I would urge each of us to prayerfully discern both our convictions and the actions we believe are needed and then take some kind of action. In addition to prayer, one way to take action is to communicate requests to our representatives and leaders. If you are convicted to do so, you can find your representatives' names and e-mail addresses at this website <https://openstates.org>.

“And this is my prayer, that our love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help us to determine what really matters, so that in the day of Christ we may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:9-11).

Seeking to be faithful,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pastor Rockford".

P.S. Below is a copy of the prayer I prepared for worship on May 29. I offer it as guide to continued prayer.

May 29, 2022 Congregational Prayer

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.** Lord of life, while funerals, memorials, burials and earthshaking sorrow unfold, we feel the deep agony voiced in Jeremiah and quoted in the Gospel of Matthew as mourning for the slaughter of the innocent, saying, **“Thus says the LORD: “A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.”** We feel the bitter grief, are horrified and yet can hardly imagine the sorrow, dismay, anger and other feelings of those at the epicenters of devastation and violence. Without adequate words, we pray for every traumatized and broken heart (Jeremiah 31:15 and quoted in the Gospel of Matthew 2:18). Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

With the Psalmist and out of our broken and bewildered hearts we ask: **“How long, O Lord, must we bear pain in our souls and have sorrow in our hearts all day long?”** How long, how many times must we hear the jackhammer of gunfire and the stories of nightmarish violence? How long shall the violent enemy of grace and peace gain the upper hand? Oh, that we might find the end (Psalm 13:2). Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

In the Gospel of Luke hear the heart of Jesus as he contemplates violence that will come to his people, saying as he weeps, **“If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you when...they will crush you to the ground, you and your children”** (Luke 19:41-42). Hearing this heartbroken plea of Jesus, we pray that we might recognize the things that make for peace, that we might see how to prevent violence and promote peace where we live and that national, state and local leaders might learn how to strengthen safety and security. Help us to determine that we will actively work to transform lives from violence to peace, that as faith-filled citizens we will elect officials who will lead and take action and that we will so inject communities

with the good news of the grace and love of Christ that we will help to alter the course of current behaviors. Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We hear your vision and will for the world from the prophet Isaiah, saying, ***“I will appoint Peace as your overseer and Righteousness as your manager. Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders”*** (Isaiah 60.17-18). Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Yes, Lord, hear our deep yearning for your strong and healing grace, your deep and enduring peace and your constant, consoling presence, as together we pray what we have learned from Jesus: **Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**