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Bells toll for Conn. shooting victims; churches call for political activism



View Photo Gallery — In Newtown, Conn., and elsewhere, a moment of silence was held for victims of the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Twenty children and six faculty and staff members of the school died in last week's massacre.

By Jeannine Hunter and Hamil R. Harris. [E-mail the writers](#)

Bells tolled at houses of worship across the country Friday morning — including most prominently at the Washington National Cathedral and Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception — in memory of those who died tragically in Newtown, Conn., last week.

To some faith groups, the ritual was a time to sorrowfully remember and pray for the 26 children and school staff members who died in the school shooting, as well as, in some cases, the troubled shooter who killed his mother and himself.

Video

Bells tolled for each of the victims of the Newtown massacre at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Northeast Washington. Bells tolled for victims all over the country on Friday. Monsignor Walter Rossi talks about the significance of

But to others, the ringing of the bells served as a call to political activism, primarily to limit the availability of guns and ammunition and to expand access to mental-health care.

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the bells.

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“Remember the 28 who died in Newtown,” prayed the Rt. Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington at the National Cathedral, where an interfaith group of religious leaders held a news conference Friday to call for moral leadership in response to the massacre.

“We will never forget, Lord God, and we pledge to honor their memory by doing what we all know is right,” Budde said, reiterating pledges to reform gun legislation and cultural attitudes toward violence.

With bowed heads, the coalition of 20 leaders huddled solemnly together behind a microphone as the bells rang at the cathedral and nearby churches. Among them were Rabbi David Saperstein, who directs the Reform Jewish movement’s Religious Action Center; and Imam Mohamed Magid, executive director of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society, a progressive mega mosque in Northern Virginia; and the Rev. Carroll Baltimore, first vice president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention.

Rajwant Singh, chairman of the Sikh Council on Religion and Education, expressed his support for the cause at the gathering, adding that it has been four months since the [shooting at a Wisconsin Sikh temple](#) where seven people, including the gunman, were killed.

“Those bullets that hit Sandy Hook have hit the Sikh community again,” said Singh, who wore a green turban to commemorate those lost at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

He said that people who are moved to action should “continue to raise their voices to stop this violence.”

Some experts this week noted that another key issue on faith leaders’ agenda is a push to limit violence in popular culture, including movies and television shows, a topic that has long been close to the heart of traditional evangelical advocates.

The call to action has included both conservative and liberal voices.

The Rev. Richard Cizik, president of the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good, said at the cathedral press conference that there needs to be a change in the gun culture embraced by some conservative Christian leaders and politicians.

“We need a conversion,” he said. “American evangelicals need to be born again on this issue. . . . The power of these weapons and the bullets that ripped into every child and adult that were there should haunt us.”

Meanwhile, liberal faith leaders who have struggled in recent years to inspire the level of activism of conservative Christianity see an opportunity after the Newtown shootings and President Obama’s reelection.

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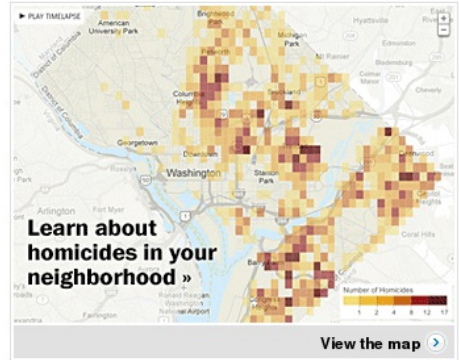
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