

Our unending prayer

I received word of the Marshall County High School shooting while reading a 900-year-old prayer for peace.

By [Steve Pankey](#)

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As I write, police are on the scene at yet another school shooting. This one occurred in the geographical confines of the Diocese of Kentucky, where I am canonically resident. I have a friend who graduated from [Marshall County High School](#). Because of these things, in spite of living in a world that has made me numb to such tragedy, this one feels different.

It won't take but but few hours before the lives turned upside-down by this act of violence will be traded for political capital. The sides will line up as they always do, wagging their fingers at the other. Religious leaders will follow suit. People will offer thoughts and prayers. Others will respond by lambasting their thoughts and prayers as hollow. I fear that we are on the verge of an era in which things are so politicized that as Christians, we forget what a powerful force prayer is.

I received word of the Marshall County High School shooting while reading the Book of Common Prayer collect for this Sunday:

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

According to Marion Hatchett's *Commentary on the American Prayer Book*, this prayer was originally found in the Gregorian Sacramentary, which means that it is roughly 900 years old. For 900 years, the people of God have prayed this

prayer. For eleven hundred years of Christian history before that, it can be assured that people prayed that God might grant peace. Even before the advent of Christ, the Jewish word of greeting to stranger and friend alike was Shalom, a wish for peace and wholeness. It is our unending prayer.

I agree with Pope Francis, who said, “You pray for the hungry and then you feed them. That’s how prayer works.” When we pray for peace, it requires that we are ready to work for it. This doesn’t mean that we work only so our political agenda can win the day, but rather, we work toward the restoration of all of humanity to right relationship with God and with each other. It means praying for and working toward a spirit of cooperation, in which our government can make sensible choices around gun control, mental health spending, and law enforcement policy. It means praying and caring for those who are ostracized and marginalized. It means sacrifices on our part in order to make the world a safer, healthier, and holier place than it is right now.

Prayer works. And so, today, I invite us all to add our voices to the unending prayers of the saints who have asked God to bring peace to our world.

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