

Office of the Bishop

February 15, 2008

Dear Friends,

In the wake of the shooting tragedy at Northern Illinois University on Thursday, I am asking all our congregations and fellowships to offer prayers this Sunday for the DeKalb and Northern Illinois communities, and in particular the victims of the shooting and their families; and all those responding to this tragedy. Our prayers must include the young man who allegedly perpetrated this tragedy and took his own life, and the family and friends grieving his action and death.

I spoke with the Rev. Mark Geisler, rector of St. Paul's parish in DeKalb and the president of the United Campus Ministry board, on Thursday afternoon to let him know that his parish and the ministry are in our prayers as they cope with this devastating news and provide care and comfort to the university community and family and friends of those affected by this calamity. Dawn Jones, the director of the United Campus Ministry—a partnership of the Episcopal, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and United Church of Christ campus ministries—and her fellow chaplains of the associated campus ministries at NIU have been engaged in providing pastoral care and hospitality to the university community since the news unfolded yesterday afternoon. The Lutheran Campus Ministry, where the United Campus Ministry offices are located, is just a block from Cole Hall where the shootings occurred. Last night Dawn and the ELCA chaplain Diane Dardon led outdoor prayer vigils for students, faculty and the general public which drew over 400 people. Other vigils have been scheduled, including an ecumenical prayer service at the Newman Catholic Student Center at 7:30 pm Friday, a public vigil on the Martin Luther King, Jr. Commons outside the Holmes Student Center at 9 pm Friday, and on Sunday at Cortland United Methodist Church in Cortland on the east side of DeKalb. According to Dawn the university and the campus ministry association will be planning a memorial service in coming days.

The Lutheran Campus Ministry center has been open since the campus authorities ended the lockdown last night and will be open throughout the weekend for prayer, meditation, conversation and counseling. Local churches are being contacted for food to serve to visitors to the center and for clergy to offer pastoral care services. These efforts are being coordinated by Bishop Gary Wollersheim's office of the Northern Illinois Synod of the ELCA in Rockford.

St. Paul's parish is planning a prayer service for 5 pm Friday. On Saturday afternoon on my return from presiding at the funeral for the Rev. Sherman Miller at Emmanuel, Rockford, I will be stopping in DeKalb to visit Mark, his parish leaders; and Dawn and members of campus ministry community. They have all been doing incredible work as caregivers, prayer partners, listeners and sojourners for those deeply affected by this tragedy. Please include them in your prayers in the days and weeks ahead. This is very demanding and emotionally exhausting work, and any support that we can provide will be a blessing to them.

Below is a message from Mark to our diocese:

I would like to thank you for all of your prayers and support during these horrific hours at NIU. Obviously, people in the DeKalb/Sycamore area are in a state of major shock. Students and faculty with whom I have talked are "in different places." For some, the full impact of this has not yet hit. Others have needed help trying to process what it is they are feeling. So many are grateful that they, along with friends and loved ones, are alive. Our prayers certainly go out to the families of those who died or have been injured.

Episcopal Relief and Development is in contact with Mark on how ERD might assist, and my office will be relaying information on memorial plans and the needs of the campus ministry's pastoral outreach. For now, let us pray for healing for those wounded, physically and spiritually, and for the repose of the souls of those who died:

Daniel Parmenter
Catalina Garcia
Ryenne Mace
Julianna Gehant
Gayle Dubowski
Stephen P. Kazmierczak

Below you will find information on supporting the pastoral outreach and on participating in vigils and memorials. A resource for understanding and coping with traumatic stress, prepared by the Rev. Canon Randall Warren, canon for pastoral care, is attached to this message. Feel free to copy and distribute it as needed.

In Christ,

Jeffrey D. Lee
Bishop of Chicago

Resources and contacts

Dawn Jones, director of United Campus Ministry at NIU
(815) 758-8176 dejones39@aol.com

The Rev. Mark Geisler, rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, DeKalb
(815) 756-4888 frmark@tbc.net

The Rev. Canon Randall Warren, Canon for Pastoral Care, Diocese of Chicago
rwarren@episcopalchicago.org 412-751-4209

Northern Illinois Synod of the ELCA
103 West State Street, Rockford IL 61101-1105
815-964-9934 <http://www.nisynod.org/>

Northern Illinois University <http://www.niu.edu>

Facebook group: Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families at
<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=7880939436&ref=mf>