

As Tucson mourns, victims are remembered

TUCSON, Ariz. – With flags nationwide flying at half-staff and people pausing for a moment of silence Jan. 10, the victims of the Jan. 8 mass shooting in Tucson were being remembered for their warmth and goodness, some for their sense of public service, and several for their involvement in their churches.

The attack during a Saturday morning meet-your-congressional-representative event at a Safeway shopping center left six people dead and another 14 wounded, including Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, 40, who hosted the event. The alleged shooter, Jared Lee Loughner, 22, was stopped by bystanders and is being held on initial federal charges related to the deaths of two U.S. government employees – a federal judge and a congressional aide – and the attempted murder of Giffords and two of her staff members.

Amid the outpouring of grief and shock in Arizona, the personal stories of the shooting victims were putting their faces into focus for the world.

U.S. District Court Judge John M. Roll, 63, and Christina Taylor Green, 9, who were killed, were both active in their Catholic parishes. Roll, the chief judge of the Tucson federal court, had stopped by the shopping center in northwest Tucson to see Giffords on his way home from morning Mass at St. Thomas the Apostle Church. Bill Badger, one of several people who tackled the shooter to stop his rampage, despite his own gunshot wound, also is active in the parish he shared with the judge, according to Fred Allison, spokesman for the Tucson Diocese.

Young Christina Green came to meet Giffords with a neighbor because she was so interested in civics, having just been elected to the student council at Mesa Verde Elementary School. The third-grader also was part of a children's choir at St. Odilia's, the Catholic church a few blocks from the shooting scene where a healing and remembrance Mass was scheduled for Jan. 11.

The young athlete was part of a sports-focused family. Her grandfather is former

major league pitcher and manager Dallas Green, and her father, John Green, is a scout for the Los Angeles Dodgers. The only girl on her Little League team, Christina was born on Sept. 11, 2001, and was featured in a book called "Faces of Hope," about 50 babies born on that day of terrorist attacks on the United States.

Roll, a fourth-degree member of the Knights of Columbus, was remembered as "a person of great faith and great integrity" who was a devoted member of two Tucson Catholic parishes, according to Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas. Bishop Kicanas returned to Tucson hastily from the Middle East, where he was to attend the annual Coordination of Episcopal Conferences for the Church in the Holy Land, representing the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The bishop was to preside over a Mass for the Healing of Our Community, Remembrance of Those Who Have Died, and for the Consolation of All Victims and Their Families at St. Odilia's, where Christina Green made her first Communion last spring.

"'Let the children come to me,' Jesus said (Mt 19:14). Christina is with him," wrote Bishop Kicanas to parishes.

Roll for many years began his day by serving at Mass as a lector at Sts. Peter and Paul Parish or St. Thomas the Apostle Church, the bishop said. "He lived his faith as a servant of our nation for the cause of justice."

Allison said he regularly saw Roll at the daily noon Mass at St. Augustine Cathedral, a few blocks from the federal courthouse downtown.

"He was absolutely dedicated and devoted in terms of daily Mass attendance and dedicated to the ministry as a lector," Allison said. "His faith was a wellspring of who he was as a judge and in his marriage.

The bishop put words to the emotions felt by people in Tucson and around the world who watched events unfold at the suburban shopping center.

"It is incomprehensible that such a horrible tragedy could happen in the community that we love so much," he wrote in his letter. "I am shocked and devastated as I see the horrible pictures on the news and hear the reports of those who have been killed

and injured.”

In a message, Bishop Kicanas sent to Allison as he left Jerusalem to return to Tucson, he said watching the television coverage from afar was overwhelming. “I could not sleep. I just wanted to return home as soon as possible.”

He noted that “as I would expect, the community has risen to the occasion,” with bystanders stepping up to help at the scene, medical personnel working feverishly, and public servants “trying to find answers to a horrific act of violence perpetrated against innocent people, everyone praying and offering support and condolences.”

He said that before he left the Middle East, he concelebrated a Mass with 10 other bishops in a small Catholic church in Jericho, where only about 50 Catholic families are in the village, “but they all expressed to me their condolences for what happened in Tucson and promised their prayers as did each of the bishops from Canada, Albania, France, Germany, England and the Holy Land. Their comfort and heartfelt prayers meant a lot.”

Bishop Kicanas went on to observe that “in the Holy Land, violence is feared and expected. Violence, too often, tears apart both the Israeli and the Palestinian people. Each community knows well the result of senseless violence. Their families have mourned the loss of loved ones and cared for those injured.

He added that the people in Jericho, hearing about the Tucson events, asked him how to prevent such acts of violence.

“I wish I knew the answer,” he wrote. “But as the world continues to seek an answer to that question we can, each in our own way, strive to respect others, speak with civility, try to understand one another and to find healthy ways to resolve our conflicts.

“But right now it is important as a community to pull together and to reach out in care and concern to all who have been affected by this tragedy,” he added.