

USCCB president condemns shooting at synagogue, all 'acts of hate'

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Archbishop Lori says his heart 'broken' by tragedy of synagogue shooting

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Catholic bishops stand with “our brothers and sisters of the Jewish community,” the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops said Oct. 27 after a horrific shooting earlier that day in Pittsburgh at the Tree of Life Synagogue, described as the hub of Jewish life in that city.

During a late afternoon news conference, Wendell Hissrich, Pittsburgh’s public safety director, reported there were 11 fatalities, all adults. Six others were injured, including four members of law enforcement.

The shooting occurred during a morning baby-naming ceremony, for which an estimated crowd of 45 to 100 people had gathered, according to news reports.

“We condemn all acts of violence and hate and yet again, call on our nation and public officials to confront the plague of gun violence,” said Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston.

“Violence as a response to political, racial or religious differences must be confronted with all possible effort. God asks nothing less of us,” he said. “He begs us back to our common humanity as his sons and daughters.”

The gunman allegedly shouted that “all Jews must die” as he stormed the synagogue and then began shooting.

The suspect was apprehended and later identified as a 46-year-old Pittsburgh man named Robert Bowers. Police believe he acted alone. News reports said he was critically injured in a shootout with police before he was taken into custody. The

attack is considered a federal hate crime, and the FBI is taking the lead in the investigation.

Reuters reported that a post on social media later identified as coming from Bowers said: "I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in." It was posted shortly before the shooting on Gab, a Philadelphia-based social networking service described as an alternative to Twitter. In a statement, Gab.com confirmed the poster's profile belonged to Bowers.

In his statement, Cardinal DiNardo, who was ordained as a priest for the Diocese of Pittsburgh, said: "I commend to our Lord the victims, including first responders, and the consolation of their families. May Almighty God be with them and bring them comfort at this tragic time."

Pittsburgh Bishop David A. Zubik denounced the shooting and said the entire Pittsburgh community is devastated. The relationship between the Catholic diocese and the synagogue, he said, has been "close over many years."

In a statement to the media, he said: "May God free us from fear and hatred, and sow peace in our lives, our communities and in the world. ... My heart and prayers are especially lifted up for our Jewish sisters and brothers and the law enforcement officers who rushed into harm's way."

Prayer, loving one's neighbor and working to end bigotry must be the response to the hatred shown by the shooting, he said.

"Anti-Jewish bigotry, and all religious and ethnic bigotry, is a terrible sin," he said. "As we pray for peace in our communities and comfort for the grieving, we must put prayer into action by loving our neighbors and working to make 'Never again!' a reality."

President Donald Trump addressed the shooting as he was leaving for a rally in the Midwest and again at the rally, which he said had considered canceling because of the horrific shooting. He said he and the entire nation were "stunned and shocked by the unleashing of such terrible violence during a baby-naming ceremony."

He called it "pure evil" and a "wicked act" of anti-Semitism. The "widespread

persecution of Jews ... must be condemned and confronted anywhere it appears," Trump said. "There must be no tolerance for religious or racial hatred or prejudice."

Another Pennsylvania bishop, Greensburg Bishop Edward C. Malesic, said: "Words cannot adequately express my sorrow at this morning's horrific massacre at Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. I am absolutely heartbroken at yet another senseless act of gun violence perpetrated on holy ground."

He said his prayers and those of the entire diocese go out to those killed and injured, "including the first responders who risked their lives trying to save others. We will also pray for the loved ones of these victims and for all of our brothers and sisters in the Jewish community."

"People of faith should be able to worship God in peace and security. Our sacred places should be free of all violence," Bishop Malesic said. "May we find a way to respect the lives of one another without resorting to such brutality. We will continue to work for an end to hatred and bigotry of any kind."

Bishop Paul J. Bradley of Kalamazoo, Michigan, who was an auxiliary bishop in Pittsburgh from 2004 to 2009, weighed in on Twitter: "In the face of the awful tragedy in a Pittsburgh synagogue ... let us once more pray that God will take those killed into his merciful arms and grant them eternal rest. Let there be peace in the world and in our hearts."

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