

# RIGHT or WRONG? Responding to tragedy

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**In light of the recent events at Virginia Tech, how can my church respond to this tragedy—and others like it? And what can my congregation do to prevent alienation, hostility and anger around us?**

Many of us have been asking the same questions in the aftermath of the shootings. Nothing seems to unite us a people as much as this senseless taking of human life. The immediate response by churches was to pray and offer comfort and encouragement. People around the world prayed for the injured, the survivors and the first responders to the emergency—police and medical workers—who personally witnessed the devastation. Continue to do so.

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Promoting God's peace is an appropriate—perhaps the most appropriate—response God's people can offer. Understand the peace that comes from God is much more than absence of conflict. Peace suggests well-being and wholeness that we receive as God's gift to us. Pray that God

will comfort and restore the lives of those affected by the shooting. Pray for the family of the shooter as they grieve for their loss. Pray also that our society may allow them the space to rebuild their lives.

Get involved in your community. Hear Jeremiah's words to an exiled people: "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare" (Jeremiah 29:7).

Recognize the extent of anger and hostility in our society. Address these issues in your own life. Remember that inappropriate public expressions of anger often arise from inner turmoil.

Reflect Christ's hope and offer hope as an alternative to anger. Establish lasting relationships with people. Volunteer to work with children and teenagers. Demonstrate Christ's love and your concern to them.

Accept ambiguity. Despite what we can do to overcome anger and alienation, we can offer no guarantees that this will never happen again. Evil exists in our world, and nothing can fully eliminate it.

Pray for students and staffs at your local schools. Realize the rampage at Virginia Tech has local effects. Educational institutions across the United States reviewed security plans in the aftermath of the shooting.

Mental illness often lies behind perpetrators of violence. Encourage government leaders to provide funding for identifying and treating mental illness.

Most of us have wondered if we could become victims of such attacks. It may sound trite, but live each moment fully and completely. We have no promises for tomorrow. Life is fragile.

Offer the world hope. Remind those with whom you have influence that God

is working through Christians to make this world a better place.

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