

The Episcopal Diocese of Virginia

Statement of the Bishops of Virginia in Support of our Youth Following the Parkland Shootings

Young people across the nation and across the Diocese are on the move. Led by passionate and articulate teenage survivors of the Ash Wednesday shooting in Parkland, Florida, they have found their voices. They are harnessing their pain to engage with articulate passion the leaders of our nation.

Under the leadership of teens, a mass social media movement is underway. Plans are taking shape for a nationwide student witness on March 14 and for a march in Washington on March 24. Young people from congregations across our Diocese are making plans to participate in order to add their voices and their perspectives to those who are saying, "No more. The violence stops here."

We Bishops of the Diocese of Virginia stand with our youth and uphold them as they find their voices. We commit our time and resources to connect and support those who are speaking out against violence. Instead of providing organizational leadership in this moment, we intentionally leave open space for young voices to rise. We will pray with our youth on the March 14 Day of Lamentation, and we will go to Washington with them on March 24.

Are we being biased in taking this position? Yes, we have a strong bias - a Jesus bias, to use the imagery of our now-retired brother bishop, Ted Gulick. We share a bias based not on one political party or another, but on the life-affirming Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are biased toward Jesus' life-giving cross, toward Jesus' death on that cross, and toward the new life given on the other side of that cross. We are biased toward life, the fullness of life that God intends for all people - not only after we die, but the fullness of life right here and right now.

The prophet Isaiah wrote in his vision of the peaceable kingdom,

"The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them." (Isaiah 11:6)

Our youth are leading the way now. In thanksgiving for and support of their Gospel witness, we walk with them. We invite the prayers, action and witness of all members of our Diocese on this road toward safety and life for all.

The Rt. Rev. Shannon S. Johnston

The Rt. Rev. Susan E. Goff
The Rt. Rev. Robert W. Ihloff