

Catholic officials call for prayer, action after Colorado shooting

WASHINGTON (CNS) – Catholic leaders are calling for prayer and action in response to the May 7 school shooting inside a charter school near Denver. One teenager died and eight other students were wounded.

“Action is needed to attempt to reduce the frequency of these heinous acts,” said Bishop Frank J. Dewane of Venice, Florida, chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In a May 8 statement he also called for prayers, urging Catholics around the country “to pray for the dead, injured and for the loved ones left behind and for healing in the community.”

“This shooting reminds us yet again that something is fundamentally broken in our society when places of learning can become scenes of violence and disregard for human life,” he said, adding that Americans should “deeply examine why these horrific occurrences of gun violence continue to take place in our communities.”

The shooting took place at STEM School Highlands Ranch in Highlands Ranch, Colorado, a suburb of Denver located in the Diocese of Colorado Springs. The two shooters, teenagers who attend the K-12 school, are now in police custody.

Kendrick Castillo, an 18-year-old senior whose last day at school was to have been May 10, was killed in the classroom gunfire. His father, John Castillo, told reporters he son was a hero and he wants people to know about him.

A student who witnessed the shooting told NBC's "Today" show that Castillo "lunged" at one of the shooters to save others.

The public charter school – which focuses on science, technology, engineering and math and has more than 1,850 students – will be closed through May 10, and crisis counselors were scheduled to be available for students May 8 at nearby St. Andrew United Methodist Church.

Colorado Springs Bishop Michael J. Sheridan said in a May 8 statement that he was "deeply saddened and disturbed by the shootings that occurred" and said he echoed the reaction of Bishop Dewane.

He also urged Catholics to "pray and offer sacrifice for the students, teachers and families impacted by this tragedy, that through the Divine Mercy of Jesus Christ, they may find healing and consolation."

Denver Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila said in a May 8 statement that his "heart goes out for the student that was killed and the eight others who were injured in the tragic shooting at STEM School Highlands Ranch. Let us pray for them and their families in this time of sadness and grief."

"The heart of all Colorado is with the victims and their families," Gov. Jared Polis said in a May 7 statement.

The shooting took place a week after a gunman killed two students and wounded four others at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte and nearly three weeks after the 20th anniversary of the Columbine school shooting in Littleton, Colorado, about seven miles from STEM School Highlands Ranch.