

After tragedy in Texas, outpouring of help shows 'God is good,' priest says

SAN ANTONIO (CNS) – Those finding themselves between hurt and hope in difficult times need help.

This has been the case in Uvalde, Texas, since a mass shooting May 24 at Robb Elementary School took the lives of 19 children and two teachers.

Another 17 were injured, and according to news reports, six remained hospitalized as of May 30, including one in serious condition.

Catholic priests, deacons, church staff, parishioners, and staff of schools and organizations continue to provide counseling, financial aid and additional services to the families who lost loved ones and to others in the devastated community.

"God is good in the midst of the darkness," said Father Matthew De Leon, who has been helping the Uvalde community. His own parishioners have been preparing food for the volunteers in Uvalde.

He is pastor of two parishes not far from Uvalde, St. Patrick's in Sabinal, Texas, and St. Joseph's in Knippa, Texas. He also serves as pastor of St. Mary's in Vanderpool, Texas, about an hour away.

He said that he had gone to the Uvalde hospital May 24 after learning about the shooting. He had met with the injured being treated there and their families.

"Every hour during this situation, ministry changes," he said. "Every day, there is more clarity and direction about what is

needed.”

He said that he and others were now planning funeral services for those who had lost their lives in the shooting.

Father De Leon has been inspired by the people of Uvalde. “They have the gift of faith,” he told Catholic News Service.

Counseling and other services for those in Uvalde have been available at Sacred Heart Catholic Church there, as well as SSGT Willie de Leon Civic Center and the Fairplex, a meeting facility, the priest said.

Uvalde and surrounding towns are part of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, which has been assisting family members directly affected by the violent act.

San Antonio Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller has been celebrating Mass at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Uvalde daily. He also has been meeting with people to console them.

When he was asked in a May 27 phone interview how church members were managing to help those in Uvalde, he said, “We are doing well.”

“There is so much generosity in people’s hearts,” he said.

When complimented on the church’s ability to do so much for others, he humbly said, “It’s the Holy Spirit.”

Ministry to those experiencing loss involves “a lot of learning,” he said. “We go at a slow pace in accompanying the grieving. We walk at the pace of the people.”

Archbishop García-Siller said those who had survived the shooting situation also had been affected by it.

“All of us are invited to learn and grow” from such experiences, he said. “People can discover a new relationship with God.”

He described having talked earlier that day with some children at Sacred Heart Catholic Parish in Del Rio, Texas, and said he had been moved by their compassion. They had told him that they were praying for the souls of those who had died in Uvalde and their parents and for the school shooter's family.

Father Arackathara Babychan, pastor of St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in Hondo, Texas, also has been in Uvalde.

He said in a phone interview May 26 that he had been saddened by the news of the shooting. "I was shaken," he said.

"As a human being, you feel the pain," he said. "Everyone is affected."

He was at Uvalde's Civic Center the afternoon of May 25, he said. There he and a deacon talked with about 12 families. They prayed with them and listened while they shared their feelings.

"We comforted and affirmed them to show that we cared," Father Babychan said.

His said that his role was providing stability for those experiencing fear, anxiety, shock and confusion.

Father James Fischler, pastor of St. Louis Catholic Church in Castroville, Texas, has been in Uvalde, as well.

Those there had thanked the priests who had come to their town, he said in a phone interview May 27. The people also wanted to talk to them.

"One reason for the Catholic Church's recent call for participation in the synod was to listen to people," he said.

He was referring to the Catholic Church's two-year synodal process titled "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission" in October 2021. It involves listening sessions at every level of the church and will lead to a

general assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023.

The tragedy in Uvalde has made people more aware of their “common humanity, connectedness,” he said.

Father Fischler also said that Bishop Alonso Garza Treviño of Piedras Negras, Mexico, a city across from Eagle Pass, Texas, had been in Uvalde.

The bishop had told him, “We are all in this together.”