

In lieu of in-person testimony at the hearing on Jan. 28, I would like to submit an Op Ed article the Hartford Courant ran on 12/23/12. It can be found at this link below.

<http://www.courant.com/news/opinion/hc-op-austin-newton-shootings-should-make-us-angry-20121221,0,3875363.story>

Thank you.

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Use Anger Over Newtown To Undo Injustice

By STEPHEN AUSTIN | OTHER OPINIONThe Hartford Courant
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Last Sunday, our church honored the peace candle of Advent; but the events in Newtown nine days ago make us wonder whether we'll ever experience such peace.

There is little comfort we can offer those families that will replace their sorrow and the unbelievable ache that overwhelms their hearts. This Christ child we say we're waiting for during Advent is named, among other things, the Prince of Peace; yet Newtown is burying 20 of its children and six adults because of the most egregious act against the young and innocent this nation has seen in decades — leaving us stymied and perplexed, having no direction to aim our anger.

Well, perhaps we should aim it at ourselves.

All the psychologists in the country will never convince me that there isn't evil in the human condition: The massacres of Columbine, El Cajon, Aurora, Virginia Tech and Portland are evidence of that. And being a good minister, I preached the requisite message of consolation and comfort for several of those tragedies. But apparently, they were not enough ... and thus came the shootings at **Sandy Hook Elementary School** on Dec. 14.

Well, I'm done.

I'm done telling my church or anyone else that the peace of God will overshadow the grief of these families, who will frankly not get over this during their lifetime. I'm done pretending the prophet Jeremiah was just clinically depressed when he said, "They say 'Peace, peace' ... but there is no peace." What I will say, I steal from the lines of **Sean Connery** —, speaking to Elliot Ness in the movie "The Untouchables" — as he was dying after being hunted down by **Al Capone**: "What are you prepared to do?"

Newtown was a travesty, no one disputes; but fewer are willing to admit that we participated in it — as a society that could neither figure out how to meet the true needs of this twisted perpetrator prior to his meltdown, nor to set legislation in place to disempower those who decide to play host to such evil. Our lethargy, our apathy, our focus on self-comfort in some way enabled this.

This young man had an automatic weapon because we permitted him to have one. So what, finally, are we prepared to do? And what do we think these children, now sitting in the arms of God, are hoping we're going to do? Do we really think the most important thing coming out of this tragedy is to make sure that we are feeling OK?

Did we arrive at our respective religious services last Saturday or Sunday, hoping they would focus on comforting us? My interest in my congregation feeling comforted is trumped by this: I want them to feel angry. Then I want to help them figure out how to appropriately and effectively engage that anger. I would dare say there is an anger of God which fills the hearts of his children in moments like this, to allow our fury at these tragic events to cause us to spew out the word "ENOUGH!"

Anger not for revenge, but to bring resources to bear in order to undo the acts of injustice and sheer insanity that continue to infest our world, and that of our children.

Jesus said, "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." He was not concerned with "keeping the peace," but with telling the truth — challenging society to live by that standard, and act according to the integrity of their consciences and the law of compassion.

Truth has fewer friends than accommodation, and true peace comes with a price-tag attached: the cost of living and speaking according to what we know is right — morally, spiritually, politically — despite the reaction it might incur, or the hornets' nest it might disturb.

We have an opportunity as a religious collective in Connecticut to say, "No more." We will not empower evil to go unabated or unchecked any longer. We will not simply mourn its victims while pretending our impotence and inaction had nothing to do with it. And we will not suppose that our passivity equates to innocence.

The peace of God? How do we find it after events like last weekend? We become it. We allow ourselves to become the conduits for its manifestation, by once and for all speaking the truth and standing by it. This is the peace we should be craving, and pursuing, and celebrating this Advent.

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