

Could Connecticut School Shooting Wake Up the Church in New England?

There's never any indication that a day that starts as mundanely as any other will turn out to be so unfathomably unlike any other. But, this day, it didn't take too long before we knew it was not going to be business as usual.

As soon as I pulled into Walnut Hill's car park, I was greeted outside by Paul Cathcart, one of our Pastors of Care, who said he'd received a reverse 911 call that there'd been a school shooting in—the town where his 8-year-old son attends school.

With his wife, Stacy, on the way to pick him up, we then learned that the shooting was at Sandy Hook Elementary, their son's school. Clearly, letting them drive themselves would have been careless, so I jumped in the car and **prayed** them through the 10-minute drive up I-84 to Sandy Hook.

On the way there, Stacy received a text from a friend that their son Alasdair was safe, having been “rushed to safety,” as Paul would later post on Facebook, “by a very courageous teacher.” But, of course, that took only a palpable edge off our drive. What else would we find there?

When we arrived on scene—the mad chaotic logjam of emergency vehicles, first responders, mini vans and frantic parents—Paul simply jumped from the car, knowing his son was safe, and sprinted into the fray to see how he could be helpful.

I called in reinforcements, and two of our **youth pastors** and another of our care pastors came. We soon found ourselves at the fire house, where parents and children were being reunited. We prayed with anxious parents—several who attend our church—as they waited to see a glimpse of their child,

unscathed. We prayed for little kids. We just prayed.

Soon, things started to calm down; the enormity of what we'd soon learn had yet to be disclosed. I made my way back to Sandy Hook's downtown, which basically consists of an intersection with a few shops and restaurants and a liquor store. And that was where I saw it, directly outside the liquor store: an A-frame sandwich board, with a hand-written sign that said, simply and poignantly, "Say a prayer."

I have no idea whether that shop owner knows Jesus. I have no idea his denomination, his political bent, his views on anything else. I just know that he knew what we needed to do on this day. We needed, of course, to say a prayer to remember the God that New England has—for too long—largely forgotten.

When it began to dawn on everyone that 20 sets of parents would never be reunited with 20 small innocent children, we had four pastors in the room where the parents waited. My wife, Ruth (our Pastor of Women), was one of them. She and the others described the gut-wrenching scene when Gov. Dannel Malloy told them their children were killed as "a moment we'll never forget."

They came back to the church wrecked, heartbroken and exhausted. And yet, there was still ministering to do that night. In an emergency meeting of our pastors and directors, we made a decision to cancel a scheduled performance of our Christmas musical, and instead hold a community prayer service so people could come, stand together and pray for one another.

In just a few hours—with the word spread like wildfire through Facebook, on our website and via text messages—we gathered, 500-strong, to pray, to weep, to share and to worship the God we know as Protector, Comforter, Healer and Lord.

We prayed. We prayed for the families of those who perished—including two mothers who attend our weekday women's ministry and lost children; we prayed for those who were in

that school and saw horrible things; we prayed for the greater Newtown community; we prayed for first responders; we prayed for each other. And we prayed—we prayed powerfully and pointedly—against the evil one, casting him out of our community in the name of Jesus.

Earlier in the day, in that fire station, a guy walked past muttering “Jesus.” But he said it in such a way that I knew he wasn’t crying out to the Lord; it was a cry of disbelief, almost an epithet. He knew His name, but it was quite clear he’d lost the meaning of the Name. He, like so many others in this part of New England—where we calculate about 3 percent are evangelical Christian—is living in pretty much a godless state. It’s a place where people have little time for God, and it must perplex Him that—when tragedy of this magnitude strikes—the churches fill up ... for a time.

Our **prayer** is that this evil, this unspeakable horror, would be the turning point for what God is doing in New England. We’ve spent the last nearly eight years here, breaking up the land and laying seed for a harvest—or **revival** in New England.

Maybe, just maybe, this is the wake-up call. Maybe, just maybe, this is when the church springs into action, being the hands and feet of Jesus and shining His light in this darkness. People here need Jesus and it’s our job to introduce Him to them.

Walnut Hill Community Church is mobilizing. We’re lining up counselors to minister to the grieving. We’re collecting money, to be spent in a way that will bring long-term benefit to a broken community. We’re linking churches together, so that—together with God—we go forward from this horrible day and come away better.

Clive Calver is the senior pastor of Walnut Hill, a network of five charismatic evangelical churches serving more than 3,500

people in western Connecticut. He and his wife, Ruth, live in Newtown and ask for your prayers. Find out more at .