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## S.A. Unitarians hold vigil after Tennessee shooting

[George Zarazua](#) - Express-News

For parishioners of San Antonio's two Unitarian Universalist churches, hate hit close to home this Sunday.

"It is now our moment to face fear and choose love," the Rev. Bret Lortie told grieving parishioners who gathered Wednesday evening inside First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Antonio.

Parishioners from that church and the Community Unitarian Universalist Church held a candlelight vigil in support of its denominational sister church in Tennessee, where a gunman killed two and injured six others Sunday.

Knoxville authorities arrested Jim D. Adkisson, 58, and charged him with first-degree murder. In his car, authorities discovered a four-page letter, indicating the attack was prompted because of the church's liberal beliefs, including its acceptance of gays.

Lortie told about 100 people who attended Wednesday's vigil to stand by the church's beliefs and affirm the gunman's inherent worth.

He said the shooter at Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church chose to embrace the evil that lurks in the human heart, alongside with goodness.

"It may be difficult for us to forgive at this point," he said. "But, even in our grief today, we can acknowledge that .□.□. the man who emptied his 12-gauge shotgun into the heart of that Knoxville church .□.□. was a hurt and hurting soul."

Lortie asked parishioners, "What do we do when fear knocks at the door?" and "What do we do when this sanctuary no longer feels like a sanctuary, but a target?"

He then reassured them: "We will not go home."

When Lortie asked if anyone wanted to share their thoughts, Jan Realini, who was serving as usher, stepped forward.

Realini said she was moved by one of the victim's actions.

Greg McKendry, 60, an usher at the Tennessee church, was killed blocking one of the shotgun blasts, according to authorities.

"That's the kind of heroism that I think if I knew I could do if I were in the same situation I would be very happy," she said.

Don Hymel also stood up and spoke, saying the congregation's response to the shooting reaffirmed his support of the church.

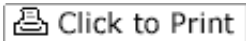
"To see that our response to an event that came out of anger and hatred is one of love and fellowship, I think I'm in the right place," Hymel said. Lortie told the congregation their work wouldn't be done unless it learned to forgive and to love again.

The service ended with parishioners singing "Spirit of Life" as candles were lit.

"We will find each other again," Lortie said. "We will find love again."

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