

We Must Not Let Fear Succeed in Creating Distrust, Hateful Fear

Rev. Pablo Matta, Guest columnist
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The Rev. Pablo Matta, center, checks in on each group that attended "Standing Against Fear," hosted by EPISO/Border Interfaith, on Thursday, Aug. 8, at St. Paul's Catholic Church in El Paso. Attendees were asked to gather in groups of five and ask each other, "How are you feeling?" and "How are you doing?" (Photo: BRIANA SANCHEZ/EL PASO TIMES)

On Aug. 3, our El Paso community was viciously attacked, and we are experiencing deep grief. Yes, we need to take the necessary time to process this pain and publicly lament together. But soon we must also begin to channel this sense of loss to reclaim a sense of community that we will all be proud of.

Terrorism wants to create mistrust and deep hateful fear. Such fear works to drive people away from one another. It scapegoats the immigrant, people of color, those of different faith traditions, people of a different culture and language. It twists and turns us to make others seem not human.

That is not El Paso, and we must not let fear succeed.

Our faith traditions teach us that we must stand against fear. They instruct us to "fear not," and that our resilience is found in the mixed multitude, in our diversity and compassion. The psalms tell us, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me."

This is why EPISO/Border Interfaith met Aug. 8 at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church, less than one week after the attack. Over 300 leaders gathered with a dozen public officials to share their stories and then take collective action. We felt it was important to show that we can come together as a diverse community, move out of our fear and isolation and do the important work of face to face dialogue with community, religious leaders, and public servants.



"Standing Against Fear," hosted by EPISO/Border Interfaith, on Thursday, Aug. 8, 2019, at St. Paul's Catholic Church in El Paso. The gathering was intended to help attendees "grieve and rebuild the bonds of trust to overcome fear and hate." (Photo: BRIANA SANCHEZ/EL PASO TIMES)

Our recovery will require time, generosity, and understanding. We are especially concerned for the most vulnerable among us — those who now feel uneasy in public spaces, going shopping, to worship, to school. Perhaps they suddenly feel mistrustful of law enforcement or to seek health care. Rebuilding these bonds of trust will require us to be attentive and patient with one another.

These next few weeks, EPISO/Border Interfaith will be returning to our congregations and schools, inviting people to share how they are feeling and to say what they need now to overcome this trauma. We invite others to do the same. It is through coming together that we can then develop a concerted will to create the laws to curb this senseless violence, and to create public accountability for those responsible.

We must stand up to fear with our actions.

The Rev. Pablo Matta is pastor of St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church / Dolores De Avila of St. John Paul II Catholic Church.