

The members of Richmonders Involved to Strengthen our Communities, along with the rest of the Richmond Area are at a loss for words after yesterday evening's mass shooting during Huguenot High School's Graduation. Details are still being uncovered, but to the best of our knowledge, seven individuals have been shot and two have died.¹ So, we pray for healing and comfort for the victims, their families, and our entire community. May God's light shine in this time of darkness.

We also know that shootings like this happen far too often. On average, there have been 1.2 mass shootings a day in this country.² And with 30 deadly shootings in Richmond so far this year, it seems that every week, one of our neighbors is shot dead in the streets.³ Something must be done. And therefore, we also pray that we as a community come together and find meaningful solutions to prevent this evening's tragedies from happening again. As an interfaith group of 20+ Richmond Area congregations, we know God desires for us to work towards a more just city just as much as he commands us to comfort those who suffer from injustice. So while we pray for healing, we also pray for the community to come together and imagine a city where all streets, buildings, schools, stores, parks, and places of worship are safe. A city where those who seek to carry out violence are embraced by their neighbors, shown the light, and lay down their arms. A city where students can look forward to their graduation being a safe place to celebrate one of life's most joyous occasions.

We, as members of RISC, know that this safer and more just city can be made a reality if we set our differences aside and work towards a common goal of putting an end to senseless gun violence. Cities across the country have implemented community-based violence intervention programs such as Group Violence Intervention, a program that finds the small percentage of people that are responsible for the majority of the gun violence in any given community and provides them with the support and resources they need to leave a life of violence. As a result, these cities have cut gun violence in half and have proven that something can be done to prevent the tragedy we have experienced.⁴ Richmond, there is no reason that we as a community cannot take similar steps. Let us join hands and work towards making this the just and safe city that God intended it to be. Our lives and the lives of our loved ones depend on it.

In Grace in Peace,
RISC

¹ 6 June 23. WRIC. <https://www.wric.com/news/local-news/richmond/shooting-reported-in-monroe-park-area-of-richmond/>.

² 6 June 2023. Gun Violence Archive. <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>.

³ 6 June 2023. RVA Major Crimes Unit, <https://www.rva.gov/police/major-crimes-unit>.

⁴ Group Violence Intervention. <https://nnscommunities.org/strategies/group-violence-intervention/>.