

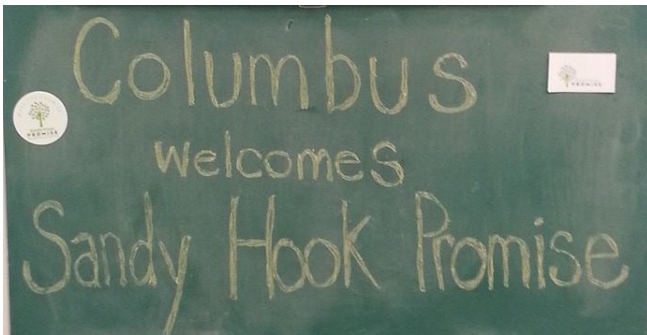


On Thursday, November 13, St John's Church was honored to host Sandy Hook parents as they shared information on how to prevent gun violence on the eve of the very first Promise Day.

The Sandy Hook Promise Foundation is a nonprofit organization founded by concerned community members and family members who lost loved ones in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting on December 14, 2012. Sandy Hook Promise exists so that no more parents have to lose a child to gun violence and believes the best way to do this is to stop focusing on the gun and come together around sensible solutions that address mental wellness, community connectedness and gun safety.



Mark Barden's 6 year old son Daniel was shot to death in his first grade classroom on December 14, 2012 at Sandy Hook Elementary School, along with 19 other children and 6 teachers who were killed in their school that day. Mark speaks of his journey to find a way forward through his grief to make a difference in our world. Mark and other Sandy Hook Parents formed Sandy Hook Promise to support common sense solutions to help reduce gun violence in our communities.



November 14, 2014 was the first "promise day" and people from across Ohio and the country pledged to have a conversation with a young person in their lives about the importance of good bystander behavior. That means if young people see or hear someone talking about harming themselves or others, they will speak up and say something.



It's not too late to join this movement—learn more at promiseday.org!



Did you know that there have been 80 gun shootings in our schools since the Sandy Hook tragedy? There IS something you can do to make a difference! See sandyhookpromise.org for additional information.



Mother of Sandy Hook victim in town to promote 'Promise Day'

by JoAnne Viviano • The Columbus Dispatch

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The mother of a 6-year-old boy who was gunned down in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting two years ago is in Columbus today to help kick off the first nationwide "Promise Day." The day encourages people to be better bystanders to protect children from gun violence.

Nicole Hockley will attend a community event at St John's Evangelical Protestant Church to launch the initiative. She'll also discuss the related "Say Something" program, which tasks adults with teaching children to look for warning signs and speak up if they believe someone might try to hurt others.

Hockley's son, Dylan, was one of 20 first-grade students and six educators who were killed by a gunman who opened fire at their school in Newtown, Connecticut, on Dec 14, 2012.

The new initiatives are projects of the Sandy Hook Promise, a nonprofit group formed in the aftermath of the tragedy in an effort to address gun violence.

Hockley, along with Tim Makris, executive director of the Sandy Hook Promise, will address clergy members, parents, educators, law-enforcement officers and other community leaders.

The Rev Virginia Lohmann Bauman, senior pastor at St John's Downtown, said that Christians are reminded in Paul's letter to the Romans to not be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil by doing good. She said the Sandy Hook parents are creating hope through healing and "transforming their suffering into something good."

"They are trying to triumph over tragedy," she said. "Sometimes there can be a real helplessness associated with these events. We don't know how we can make a difference, and these parents are showing us we can make a difference — each and every one of us."

"Promise Day," on Friday, asks people to pledge to say something if they think someone might be planning an attack and to talk to others about the warning signs that could happen.

"Students are the eyes and ears of their schools and community — if they learn to properly identify and report a threat, they can possibly help save lives," event organizers said in a statement. (continues...)



She asked about 60 people gathered at St John's Evangelical Protestant Church to participate in today's inaugural Promise Day by pledging to talk to the children in their lives and teach them to be better bystanders, to look for warning signs and speak up if they believe someone might try to hurt others.

"Promise Day is a campaign that we're launching that enables parents and caregivers in every community to take small but meaningful actions that will help protect children from gun violence," Hockley said earlier in the day. "This is a really important campaign to us, because it's not about what others can do, it's about what you can do for yourself and what you can do in your own community to make a change and be part of the solution."

Hockley was joined at the church by Tim Makris, executive director of Sandy Hook Promise, the nonprofit group behind the initiative. The group was formed by Newtown community members to address gun violence in the aftermath of the shooting.



The "Say Something" program is one of several programs that Sandy Hook Promise has developed to address gun violence, said Makris, whose son was not physically hurt in the 2012 attack but is among the hundreds of children who were at the school and are still coping with the trauma.

Makris said Sandy Hook Promise also offers training for educators and others in mental-health and wellness identification and intervention; social-development programs that teach children coping skills, anger management, empathy, compassion and respect for societal rules; and a "no kid eats alone" program aimed at reducing isolation by asking children to make sure everyone has a schoolmate to sit with in the cafeteria. The group also plans to introduce a program on gun safety next year.

He said the group studied other social-change issues, from civil rights to marriage equality, and studied how they were successful. As examples, he pointed to designated driver, recycling, seat-belt, safe-sex and anti-smoking campaigns.

"They did it at a community level," he said. "They did it by starting around the kitchen table and working your way up, and slowly but surely, you shift attitudes and you shift behaviors and the way that people act, and you get change."

Columbus police Chief Kim Jacobs also attended the event, stressing the importance of "when you see something, you need to say something." She told people not to hesitate to call police.



Prior to Hockley speaking, the church held a Taizé contemplative worship service in which members lighted candles in remembrance of those lost in the Sandy Hook tragedy. The Rev. Virginia Lohmann Bauman, senior pastor at the United Church of Christ Congregation, spoke of forgiveness and encouraged worshippers to share a word of comfort with Hockley.

"I caught a glimpse of heaven when I met the Sandy Hook parents," she said. "With their tattered hearts and faithful witness, they're showing us that even the worst evil in the world can be overcome by good."

The event was captured by a documentary film crew. Filmmaker Kim Snyder said she's been following the Newtown community for the past 20 months for the film, which will air on PBS next year.



Hockley said today's Promise Day is the start of a monthly initiative. Parents will be encouraged to take new actions each month, such as a kitchen-table conversation, community training or reaching out to someone in the community who might be lonely.

Ohio was chosen to launch the program, she said, because it has a higher incidence of gun violence than some other states, but largely because “it’s quite a melting pot of America ... it’s a really strong working-class, family-oriented state that does want to protect its children.”

Hockley said addressing gun violence isn’t about gun control or politics or policy. It isn’t about polarizing, paralyzing issues, she said. It isn’t about fighting, but about winning.

“For us, it’s not about the gun,” she said. “We focus so much more on those days and weeks and months, or even years, before someone picks up a firearm to hurt themselves or someone else — what can we do to prevent that from happening, because that’s really how you stop violence.”

As she wrapped up her comments, Hockley showed those gathered two photos of Dylan.

“When I think about what we’re trying to do here in protecting other children, I think about him as a butterfly and the butterfly theory — that one butterfly flapping its wings can cause a hurricane halfway around the world,” she said.

“And I just think if more of us would just flap our wings, then we can truly transform our country and protect our children. So when you have those conversations tomorrow, just think that you’re flapping your wings and teach the children in your life to flap their wings, too.”

To see more, go to <https://promiseday.org>.

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