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Metro

'Lives have been changed forever' by Conn. massacre

By **Martine Powers, Jaclyn Reiss and Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE STAFF AND GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS DECEMBER 14, 2012

 ARTICLE

 PHOTOS

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NEWTOWN, Conn. — The crowd spilled from the warm church into the darkness Friday night, a crowd filled with people seeking consolation. Priests at St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church asked that the windows be thrown open so those huddled outside could hear words and hymns that provided only the smallest measure of comfort.

“Thinking about those little children,” the Rev. Robert Weiss said, “we now have 20 new saints looking over us in all the days to come.”

“Think,” he said, “of all the families whose lives have been changed forever.”

In the hours after a gunman shot and killed 20 children and six adults at an elementary school in this Connecticut bedroom community, a town in mourning wondered how a bright day could turn so irretrievably dark, how their hometown — with no warning — became the site of one of the worst mass killings in American history.

“This is the worst thing we’ve experienced here in Newtown,” said Lieutenant George Sinko of the town’s Police Department, as the fuchsia sun set in the distance. “Tragic.”

On a night turned cold, dozens stood outside the church, breaths wispy in the air. Lorine Watkins, 49, was there with her husband, Chris, 44. They stood, like so many others, for upwards of two hours, listening to strains of the service.

“We came out to offer support to the community and to the poor families that lost loved ones in this awful tragedy,” Lorine Watkins said.

“I have no doubt the town will heal,” Chris Watkins said. “We will pick each other up and get through this.”

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A few miles away from the Catholic church — and several hours earlier — families and emergency workers descended on a one-story brick firehouse. It was the place to which students fled after shots began ringing out. It was the place where parents, many arriving in black vehicles, learned if their children were dead or alive.

The firehouse was decked in red and green Christmas lights, its white steeple adorned with a wreath that glows. Rows of 7-foot fir trees, part of a Christmas fund-raiser, were shoved aside to make room for the four firetrucks pulled out to make room for the people inside.

Dozens of reporters gathered outside that firehouse, waiting for details of the morning's grim toll.

Steps away, a family had painted words more than a foot high onto large pieces of plywood: "GOD BLESS THE FAMILIES."

Next to it, an American flag hung sideways.

Dozens of parents, terrified and confused, ran to the firehouse, searching for their children and trying to understand what had happened at their beloved school, Sandy Hook Elementary.

Joe Wasik, whose daughter attends Sandy Hook, said his wife received an emergency alert about 10 a.m. Wasik left work and sped to the school, then to the firehouse.

"I just wanted to be with my daughter," he said.

"There were so many people. Everyone was looking for their kids," Wasik said. "It was pandemonium."

In the firehouse, Wasik said, officials grouped children by age. A cluster of parents stood nearby.

Wasik craned his neck, looking for any sign of his daughter, Alexis, a third-grader. And, then, he saw her. She burst into tears when she saw her father.

Wasik said his daughter told him her teacher had secreted her into a closet in the classroom.

As she was being escorted out of the school, Alexis saw someone lying on the ground.

Later, on Friday afternoon, a blond woman in a white coat and jeans — her identity unknown — ran up the street from the school to meet a man wearing a brown UPS uniform, and they embraced.

“David, I’m so sorry,” said the woman, who appeared to be a member of the school’s staff. “I’m so sorry. My phone was dead.”

Colleen Poundstone’s property is adjacent to Sandy Hook, and on Friday, she recalled watching a small group of about five small children from the school running past her home.

They seemed to be without an adult and were so terrified they kept running even after Poundstone tried to hail them and offer them shelter in her home.

“They would not even talk to me,” Poundstone said.

One child, a boy, said the same thing, over and over, she recalled:

“I just want to go home. I just want to go home.”

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