



Thinking Out Loud

A Response to Suffering

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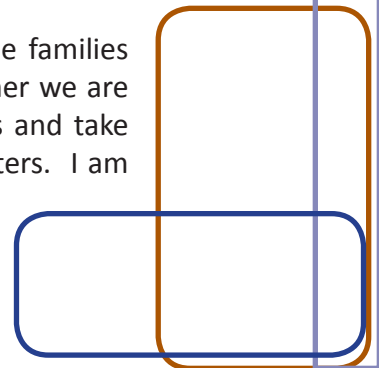
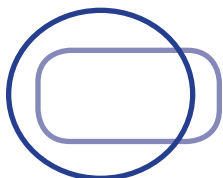
Guest Editorial
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Our community is suffering. Recently Sarasota Police Chief Peter Abbott shared a poignant story about a young man, Delvis Fernandez, just discharged from the military. The Chief was introduced to him a few weeks ago and they talked about Delvis' intention to join the police force. On Friday, October 24th he was shot and killed. I read about this tragedy in the local paper.

Our community is suffering. What I was not aware of was that this is the sixth murder in north Sarasota in less than eight weeks. I learned this at an October 27 meeting at the Robert Taylor Center. Intended to be an update on the City of Sarasota's New Beginnings in Newtown, this meeting became a rallying point for righteous outrage that reasonably attends the pain of loss. It was neighbors turning to each other wanting to take back their place and looking for help.

Our community is suffering. Yes, these murders, all of them, occurred in Newtown and north Sarasota. What if the location of these six murders was in the Gulf Gate area? Or in Venice Gardens? How would the outrage be shared? What would your family be talking about at the dinner table? And what would be on the agenda at the neighborhood association meetings?

The victims do not live down the street from me. The families are not a part of my social circle. Nevertheless, together we are citizens of this community and citizens make decisions and take actions based upon their belief that what they do matters. I am searching for a way to express my outrage and my passion so that I too can change things for the future.



In my role with SCOPE, I am familiar with the statistics about our community. I can paint pictures with these data that show our beauty and that show our despair. I know that the data that indicate despair are very different for those who are not white. This is true for school performance, health, income and much more.

The point I hope to make is that when suffering is a part of this community it insinuates itself into the lives of everyone here. The plea for change is not isolated to one place or neighborhood, and responding to the call for help is not the responsibility of government alone. Both the cry and the response are much louder, and more powerful, when they come from the lips of the many.

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Can we find the broad community voice that also screams with passion for the fallen and for the future?

What response has the power to transform us?

Being aware of this new and historical suffering makes it impossible to go back to the illusion that these murders are relevant only to some other distant place. What response has the power to transform us? What barriers need to be dismantled and connections need to be strengthened to decrease the suffering?

One member of the crowd at the October 27th meeting said that he plans to call his fellow African-American fathers to conjoin their energy in new ways. Another voice asked that the power of the pulpit and the force of local congregations turn their attention to changing the future of the community.

These ideas emerged through an acknowledgement of the local community struggle, which includes the lack of jobs and the fatigue of entrenched and institutional racism. They also signaled possibilities for the broader Sarasota County community.

Suffering, when acknowledged, addressed, and transformed, can lead to tremendous thriving. Are we ready to respond, together as a community? It is time.

