

# REFLECTIONS ALONG THE WAY

Dear friends,

News alerts flashed across the nation on July 13: former President Donald Trump had been wounded in an assassination attempt at a rally taking place on the Butler Farm Show grounds. One bystander was dead; two others were seriously injured; the shooter had also been killed.

A frenzy began: journalists descended, pundits opined, and politicians moved to the microphones. But the news resonated differently in and around Butler itself. Here, this event was not just one banner headline among many. It was happening right here, among neighbors. Everyone knew someone who had been present to witness the violence. The victims of the shooting—Corey Comperatore, David Dutch, James Copenhaver—were people known by their neighbors, not as political stereotypes, but as friends, volunteers, family men.

And then there was the setting of the shooting: the Farm Show grounds. For nearly eighty years, the Butler Farm Show has been a beloved community event, a place where people gather across generations to affirm their connections to the land and to one another. This act of violence designed to tear people apart had happened in a place that usually serves to bring people together.

In the months prior to the assassination attempt, experts raised the alarm that Southwest Pennsylvania is at elevated risk for political violence. They noted that, compared to other states, Pennsylvania has a higher rate of involvement in extremist organizations and hate groups, and that local elections officials have faced more threats and harassment in Pennsylvania than in surrounding states.

But these same experts tell us something even more important: in the face of political violence, we still have a choice. We still have agency. We can still make change. In the face of the vicious cycle of violence (institutional distrust, powerlessness, polarization, and violent acts), we can instead build the virtuous cycle of peace: safety, institutional legitimacy, agency, and belonging.

What's more, faith leaders are uniquely equipped to do this work. We already use the tools of peacemaking every day, knowingly or not. We are building community where people know and trust one another across difference. We are fostering opportunities for people to speak honestly and openly with one another. We are reminding one another that our ultimate identity is not found on the ballot but in the baptismal font. We have what we need to make peace—and our communities need these tools we bring.

And so, an ecumenical group of pastors from the Butler Clergy Network made plans to participate in the opening ceremonies of the Farm Show. Together, they prayed for a community grieving and healing. Together, they rededicated this space for community flourishing. Together, they redefined Butler's identity: not a headline but a home. For their grateful neighbors, this ritual made a real difference.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you," Jesus promised. When violence, polarization, tragedy, and division threaten to tear us apart, the Prince of Peace has already given us what we need to be peacemakers. May we use Christ's peace wisely in the days ahead!

Your sister in Christ,

The Rev. Liddy Barlow  
Executive Minister  
Christian Associates of Southwest PA

PS – If you would like to know more about how faith communities can foster peace in their communities, download the Peacemakers Toolkit from Common Ground USA: [sfcg.org/peacemakertoolkit](http://sfcg.org/peacemakertoolkit).



Photo by Brian Cohen



Clergy lead prayers at the Butler Farm Show