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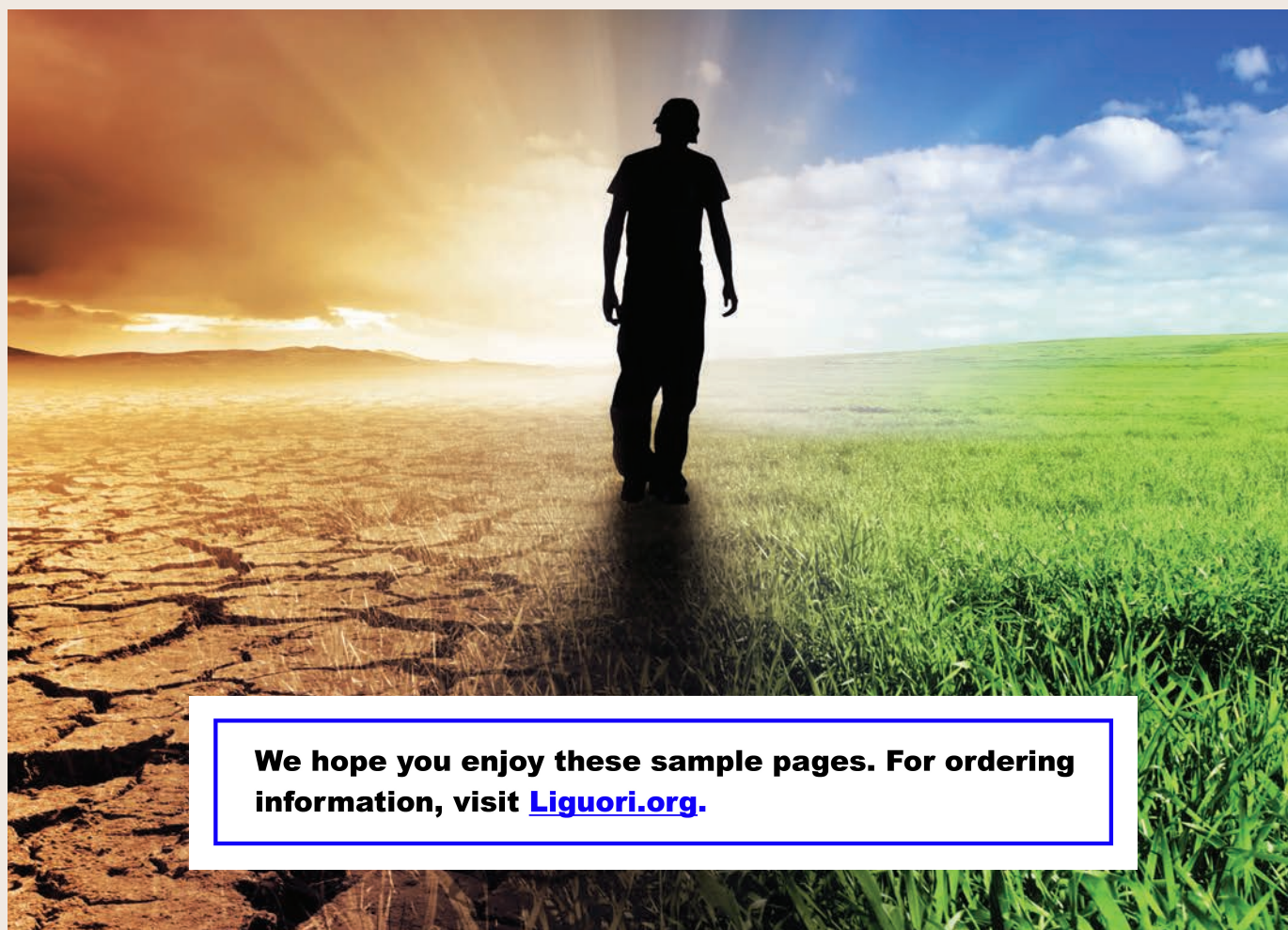
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RESPONDING TO TRAGEDY WITH HOPE AND LOVE

When a tragic event occurs, we may ask why these things happen. Some in despair might even ask, *Where is God?* Yet it is our Christian hope that propels us forward through the darkness. BY GRETCHEN L. SCHWENKER



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Violent acts are reported from throughout the world with increasing frequency, feeding into the now standard 24/7 news cycle. We absorb these accounts from distant places—and sometimes uncomfortably close to home.

Maybe one incident stands out for you; it could be a school shooting, such as the Columbine school massacre, or an act of terror, perhaps the Boston Marathon bombing or the events of 9/11. We find ourselves virtual witnesses of many acts of violence: people just doing their jobs are executed, gun violence randomly takes a child's life, refugees flee deadly conflicts, school children are abducted, people are killed in their place of worship, and genocide occurs without mercy.

Too many innocent people die in these disturbing, senseless acts. Others survive but carry with them the trauma of injuries, torture, or loss of home and way of life. They may be left with years of emotional and psychological struggle. They may be deeply grieving because someone they loved was one of those murdered. An understandable reaction is to ask why these things happen at all. Some in despair might even ask, *Where is God?*

Yet, it is in these wrenching moments that we most need God. The psalmist tells us that “the LORD is close to the brokenhearted” (Psalm 34:19). Our hearts may be broken, but God is near. As Catholic Christians, we have faith that God is always with us along our life's journey, no matter how difficult it may become. As Pope Francis has

written, “Faith is not a light which scatters all our darkness, but a lamp which guides our steps in the night and suffices for the journey” (*Light of Faith*, 57).

Coping with violence is, sadly, part of the journey. So, how can we help to heal the trauma that follows? Remaining persons of hope and love and having the strength to find peace again can be overwhelming. Parents, worried for their children's psychological wellbeing, face explaining the unexplainable. For support along this ragged path, we look to the Bible and what our Church teaches about how to live with the tragic reality of violence.

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