

Words

There is an old saying: sticks and stones can break your bones but words can never hurt you. Unfortunately, that is not true. Words are powerful things and can do great good, like conveying love and forgiveness. However, their power to harm is also clear. Mean-spirited political rhetoric fills the airways and communication networks, destroying trust, dividing people, and too easily, inciting physical violence. Verbal and cyber bullying harm its victims – children and adults – by destroying self-esteem, fermenting isolation, and tearing apart trust in relationships. Words can build trust and community, bridge differences, and promote understanding. Or, they can quietly maintain the status quo, even where it is destructive, racist, discriminatory. . . Words can cause unintended harm, as when cultural context is not taken into account; their role as code words (e.g., slang racial slurs) is not understood; their changing meaning is not acknowledged; their context is not considered (e.g., making a big fuss over Father's day around a fatherless child).

When using words, start with the words of Jesus and with prayer to ground yourself in the will of our loving God who desires the best for all people. Keep in the center of your thinking the power of love and the indispensable importance of empathy for others as you chose your words, and always, always listen more than you speak.

Remember in Prayer:

- **Those dealing with winter storms & cold weather** – especially those with no shelter. Remember the west coast which is facing severe flooding & mudslides; & tornados in the south.
- **Iran** –peaceful protests against the extreme Islamic government, & their violent repression continues. At least 516 protestors have been killed & at least 19,000 have been arrested according to human rights groups in Iran. The government will not release official numbers.
- **China** – The government has dropped its COVID rules. Now, new COVID cases & deaths are skyrocketing & overwhelming their medical system. The government is responding by no longer reporting case or death numbers. The possibility of developing new variants with so many new cases is serious.
- **Ukraine where war continues** – attacks against Ukrainian civilians are cutting power, heat, & water in the midst of winter. A major Russian attack this week on a civilian apartment building has killed more than 40 people including children.
- **Somalia** – severe food insecurity continues. Drought & violence have displaced millions.
- **Victims of Gun Violence** – Already in January, 1,951 people have died in gun violence (up 787 in a week) including 90 children (up 33 in a week). 1,498 people have been injured (up by 581 in a week) including 188 children (up 66 people in a week). 1,122 of the deaths are suicides (up 462 in a week). There have already been 30 mass shootings (up 8 in a week) this month. (Gun Violence Archive statistics). Remember all those effected by shooting incidents – especially that of the 6-year-old who intentionally shot his teacher in Virginia. (He used his mother's gun.) In 2021 an estimated 4.6 million children in the U.S. were living in a home with at least one unlocked and loaded gun. 54% of guns in the U.S. are not stored safely (the National Firearm Survey).
- **The continuing COVID Pandemic & the 'Tripleemic'** (COVID, RSV virus & flu). COVID case numbers are climbing. Cases of RSV have dropped & flu cases are starting to; however, holiday gatherings may cause a surge in all three. New variants, now circulating, are the most contagious yet. 2,500 people (including 90 in Ohio) are dying every day of COVID. The number of cases of strep A infection among children is also growing. **A number of diseases** (measles, polio, etc.) which have been under control or nearly eliminated are back because children are not getting their regular vaccines.



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