

**PRAY** Creator  
God, you bless us with being. To  
you every creature is sacred.  
Help us see one another with  
your eyes. Amen.

**ON OCTOBER 6, 1998**  
a biker found **Matthew  
Shepard**, 21, beaten, bloodied,  
and left for dead out on the  
Wyoming prairie. This gay college  
student had lain tied to a wooden  
fence for 18 hours. He never  
regained consciousness and died  
October 12, 1998, surrounded by his  
family.

**ON OCTOBER 8** **Russell  
Henderson** and **Aaron  
McKinney** were arrested  
for the crime. On April 5, 1999,  
Henderson pleaded guilty to  
felony murder and received two  
consecutive life sentences. On  
November 5, 1999, McKinney was  
convicted of first-degree felony  
murder and second-degree murder  
and sentenced to two consecutive  
life sentences.

**IN NOVEMBER, 1998,**  
five members of **New York  
City's Tectonic Theatre  
group** went to Laramie to  
research how residents felt and  
thought about this hate crime.  
The play, *The Laramie Project* by  
Moises Kaufmann, grew out of 200  
interviews and six trips to Laramie.

**IN 2008,** members of  
**Tectonic Theater Project**  
returned to Laramie to find out what  
has happened over the last 10 years.

**ON OCTOBER 12, 2009,**  
the 11th anniversary of  
**Matthew's death**, *The Laramie  
Project Epilogue* premiered in 100  
cities across the country, performed  
simultaneously by high schools,  
universities, and professional  
regional theaters.



# SPiRIT

By Joan Mitchell, CSJ

The Duluth Central High School students who performed *The Laramie Project* as their school play in Duluth, Minnesota, insist **Matthew Shepard did not die alone**. The play documents family and townspeople's responses to Matthew's beating and death. In performing this play the students tell his story and recognize art can help end hate.

"Matthew Shepard can give us hope," says drama teacher Liz Larson. "This play about hate can give us hope. The word *heart* contains the word *art*. Art takes us to the heart, to one another's hearts."

"We've seen bullying over the internet increase significantly since *The Laramie Project* first came out," says Kent Knutson, director of the Minnetonka, Minnesota, High School production, citing recent news stories about young people committing suicide after internet bullying. "We wanted to do this play to help celebrate our differences, instead of fear them."

What did the student actors learn in performing this play? "Whether you agree or disagree about homosexuality, you have to respect people," said Julie Trudeau. "No one has the right to hurt anybody else—ever." Julie



Actors recreate the scene outside Matthew Shepard's funeral. Fred Phelps preached hate across the street. Matthew's supporters surround Phelps and sing "Amazing Grace."

# NOT ALONE

## Every hour someone commits a hate crime.

performed three roles in the play—Alison Mears (girlfriend of one of the boys who beat Matthew), a news reporter, and a grandmother from the town.

“Homosexuality and bullying are hard subjects to talk about, especially in high school,” said Ryan McCartan, who played Matthew’s father, Dennis. “Some people just blew the play off, and that’s okay because we didn’t expect to take all 700 audience members with us on the journey. But we took at least one, and that’s a start. The play is a catalyst for change.”



Katherine

“Last night and tonight it hit me how big an effect just one story can have,” says Anne Harala, who played a news reporter and the foreperson of the jury. “Hearing people in the audience cry, I realized the play has a domino effect.”

“In high school you can get trapped, all wrapped up in your high school stuff and not see that hate occurs, not see the hatred people have for those who are slightly different,” adds De’Lon. “What we’re doing with the play is sending a message of hope—that a hate crime like this won’t happen again. We’re giving people the message that maybe Matthew died for a reason. He didn’t die alone.”

**D**o high school kids have problems accepting gays? “Our school has a lot of antigay rhetoric, a lot of hatred. When kids see this play, it gives them a chance to really think about what’s going on,” Central student director Jan Tilley says.

“This morning in metalworking this guy told our teacher he didn’t want to go to a play about a touchy



**The Laramie Project Epilogue revisits the town 10 years after Matthew’s murder to ask, has the murder had a lasting impact on the community? How has the town changed? Theater company members re-interviewed some of the people from the original play, as well as Matthew’s mom, and, from prison, Aaron McKinney. Jesuit High School of Portland Oregon was one of only a few high schools chosen to perform the Epilogue opening day.**

subject,” says Jeff Schmitz, agreeing. “She said he could go to the library. Then she got into this deep discussion about how we shouldn’t shy away from controversial things. We need to face up to life. People are gay. They are not evil people. They’re people.” Jeff played a reporter and doctor.



Ryan

“I think the show raises the idea that we are all human, all similar in universal ways,” says Katherine Fried. “You may be gay but you are still a human. That sounds funny but it’s important to remember. Being gay is only one aspect of a person, and if you don’t agree with that it’s okay, but he or she is a person just like you. He or she has relationships, a life, and it’s really important to respect that.”

“The students of this generation see that the gay community is getting stronger and growing,” says Jacob Fazzio, who played the president of the University.



Jacob

“But this play is not about being gay. It’s about the reactions that the community had to the problem, and the problem was the lack of respect.”

**A**ndy Olson liked the Catholic priest’s observation. “The priest is saying the attackers did violence to Matthew, but anti-gay rhetoric is also violence—the seed of violence. It brings home all the antigay rhetoric that we hear in high school. I wonder if Aaron McKinney’s teachers heard anti-gay rhetoric from him, if they could have changed what happened. What if they said, quit calling kids fags. It’s not okay to scapegoat gays and lesbians.”

“The Church teaches that we must respect gays and lesbians. They have the same dignity every human being has. The Church doesn’t accept sexual relationships between gays and between lesbians, but it’s not wrong to be gay,” explains Sister Joan to the group.



# SUNDAY GOSPEL

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

## Which law is most basic?

**NARRATOR:** When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, who put a question to him about resurrection from the dead, the Pharisees assembled together. One of them, a lawyer, tried to trip Jesus up.

**LAWYER:** Teacher, which commandment of the law is the greatest?

**JESUS 1:** “You shall love the Holy One, your God, with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment.

**JESUS 2:** The second is like it. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments rest the whole law and the prophets.

Matthew 22.34-40

**QUESTIONS** 1 What hate rhetoric gets used in your school? What are ways to stop it that have worked? 2 Why do differences matter so much among teens? 3 How do you respond to Dennis Shepard’s speech. 4 How does loving ourselves affect our relationships with others? 5 How does God’s love for us affect how you treat others?

“Playing the part of Jedediah helped me,” says Darren Hall. “He was basically me six months ago. I was raised as a Christian Pentecostal to think that homosexuality is wrong. I asked why? Why is because the Bible says this. Then I saw the gossip and back-stabbing that goes on in the church. I started to think how can you persecute so many people and gossip yourselves? God did not put us on this earth to judge other people. We need to love.” Besides Jedediah Schultz and a Baptist minister, Darren played Aaron McKinney.

As De’Lon Grant delivered Dennis Shepard’s speech against the death penalty at the sentencing of the young man who killed his son, listeners were crying throughout the auditorium.

*Matt officially died in a hospital in Ft. Collins, Colorado. He actually died on the outskirts of Laramie, tied to a fence. You, Mr. McKinney,*

*with your friend Mr. Henderson left him out there by himself, but he wasn’t alone. There were his lifelong friends with him, friends that he had grown up with.*

*You’re probably wondering who these friends were. First he had the beautiful night sky and the same stars and moon that we used to see through a telescope. Then he had the daylight and the sun to shine on him. And through it all he was breathing in the scent of the pine trees from the snowy range. He heard the wind, the ever present Wyoming wind, for the last time. He had one more friend with him; he had God. And I feel better knowing he wasn’t alone.*

*I miss my son, but I am proud to be able to say that he is my son. I would like nothing better than to see you dead, Mr. McKinney. However, this is the time to begin the healing process. To show mercy to someone who refused to show any mercy.*

## How do I treat myself?

- I’m never happy with what I accomplish.
- I’m harder on myself than others.
- I accept compliments well.
- I feel inferior to other kids.
- I take criticism well.
- I work out to feel better.
- I’m better than most people.
- I sometimes give in to peer pressure if it means being liked more.
- I never worry about people liking me.
- I only feel important when other people say good things about me.

## How do I treat God?

- I take God for granted.
- I appreciate something in creation every day.
- I treat everyone made in God’s image with respect.
- I appreciate being alive.
- I go to Mass to be a part of the family of God.
- I work for justice because Christians must continue Jesus’ work.
- There’s too much evil to believe God is all powerful.

## How do I treat others?

- I compliment people when they do a good job.
- I don’t judge people by their outward appearance.
- I am as polite to younger kids as to those who are older.
- I don’t repeat gossip.
- I am honest with people.
- I don’t listen to or tell discriminatory jokes.
- I associate with people regardless of how much money they make.

# Loving God and neighbor.

**W**e all keep lots of rules every day. Call friends. Finish homework. Eat healthy. Be on time. Don't try drugs. Go to church with the family. Help out at home. Go to sports events at school. Practice piano, swimming, speech, running, yoga—whatever. Don't turn left in front of traffic.

The teachers who studied the Law of Moses in the Old Testament identified 613 different laws. Some of these laws, such as the ten commandments and love your neighbor as yourself, are basic. Jesus also teaches them. But some laws said no to specific actions for reasons lost in history; for example, "You shall not round off your hair at your temples...or tattoo any marks upon you" (Leviticus 19.27-28).

Jesus sums up the whole Law of Moses in two commandments: love God and love your neighbor as yourself. The command to love God with all one's heart, mind, and spirit comes from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy 6.5. The command to love our neighbor comes from a collection of laws called the Holiness Code in the Old Testament book of Leviticus (19.18).

To love God above all is the call in the first three of the ten commandments. First, worship only God, not idols. Second, keep God's name holy and keep the promises we swear in God's name. Third, keep Sabbath holy as one day a week to appreciate God's gifts in creation.

To honor and respect one another is the call in the other seven commandments—to love our neighbors as ourselves. The word *as* makes our neighbors our equals.

Israel's history reminds the people of God that they once knew the suffering and degradation of slavery in Egypt and therefore should never enslave or degrade

others. "The alien who resides among you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19.33-34).

Loving our neighbors as ourselves is another way of expressing the golden rule—"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The golden rule challenges us to develop empathy—the ability to feel with others. To empathize is to walk in our neighbor's shoes, to put ourselves in another's place, to imagine what it is like be least.



A clumsy classmate doesn't want to be teased any more than I do. I need to learn why a young Muslim woman wears a headscarf just as I want my peers to know why I value doing service work or sing in the youth choir at church.



Serving pancakes Saturday morning at a Dorothy Day Shelter

Today in our society, advertising teaches us to put ourselves first, to give ourselves all we deserve. Violence in our headlines makes us fear our neighbors. In cities we may not know our neighbors' names.

In his counter-cultural teaching Jesus insists loving God and loving our neighbor are inseparable. We cannot love God without loving our neighbor. In our diverse society we cannot love our neighbors without listening and learning their culture.

Catholic social teaching rests on the principle that every human person is sacred, made in God's image and likeness, possessing inalienable rights to life and its basics. The human person is also social. None of us thrives without interacting with family, friends, and neighbors. Loving our neighbors is vital to becoming our whole selves.

## FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Invite neighbors of diverse cultures in your area to visit your class and talk about their lives, values, and dreams.
- 2 Identify safe ways you can get to know by name neighbors on your street, road, or in your apartment building.
- 3 Practice empathy consciously for a day. Try especially to put yourself in the shoes of people you dislike or dismiss.
- 4 Talk to a classmate you don't know every day this week.
- 5 Spread good news about your neighbors and classmates.
- 6 Visit the Southern Poverty Law Center website: [www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org). Explore and use the center's tools for Tolerance.

**One cannot honor another person without blessing God who created the person. One cannot adore God without loving all God's creatures.** *Catechism of the Catholic Church #2069*