



U.S. Vice President JD Vance and second lady Usha Vance arrive to pay their respects at Annunciation Catholic Church in Minneapolis Sept. 3, 2025, which was the scene of a shooting. The shooter opened fire with a rifle through the windows of the church Aug. 27 and struck children from the parish school who were attending Mass during the first week of school, killing two and wounding 21 others. (OSV News/Reuters/Alex Wroblewski)



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Minneapolis — September 4, 2025

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Vice President JD Vance and his wife, Usha Vance, visited Annunciation Catholic Church in Minneapolis Sept. 3 and laid flowers at the temporary memorial where two children were killed and 21 other people were injured in an Aug. 27 shooting.

The Vances also met privately with family members affected by the shooting, including the parents of the two children who died: 8-year-old Fletcher Merkel and 10-year-old Harper Moyski.

In a statement on X following the visit, Vance wrote, "I was honored to meet with a number of grieving families and hear about their beautiful children — in particular Harper (10) and Fletcher (8), who died in the Annunciation school shooting. I also met another beautiful girl who is recovering well, thank God."

He shared two "immediate requests" from the victims' families which were prayers for a shooting victim, 12-year-old Sophia Forchas, who remains in critical condition with head injuries. "Pray for Sophia, who continues to fight for her life every day," he asked. "Pray for her health, pray for her swelling to be controlled, and pray for strength for her parents, doctors, and nurses."

The second request from the families was not to give the shooter attention, but "focus on the kids who were taken from us. I learned that Harper had a smile that could light up the room, that she loved visiting the national parks with her parents, and that she looked beautiful in her first communion gown. I learned that Fletcher was rambunctious and energetic, that he loved football and basketball, and that he had an amazing head of hair."

The shooting took place during Annunciation Catholic School's first all-school Mass of the academic year. The shooter fired from the church's exterior through stained-glass windows into the church.

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The Vances arrived at the Annunciation campus, which includes Annunciation Catholic School, at 12:05 p.m. With the second lady wearing a black skirt and long-sleeve top and the vice president in a navy suit, they placed a bouquet of colorful flowers tied with a blue ribbon in a bucket amid the large temporary memorial spanning the church's facade.

They then paused in front of a statue of Mary that stands in front of the church's entrance before entering the church. The Vances reportedly met with Jesse and Mollie Merkel, Fletcher's parents; Mike and Jackie Moyski, Harper's parents; Fr. Dennis Zehren, pastor of Annunciation Catholic Church; and Matt DeBoer, Annunciation school principal.

According to the vice president's office, the Vances also visited the area within the church where victims were shot to pay their respects to the victims and their families.

A group of protesters were gathered at the corner closest to the church, with an individual chanting "Enough is enough" over a megaphone. Protesters held up signs saying "Listen to the Pope, End the Pandemic of Arms," "JD Vance Not Welcome" and "Kids Lives Over Guns," according to a report from the press pool traveling with the vice president.

Arguments outside the church escalated as some took offense against the protesters' vulgar language. Matt DeBoer, principal of Annunciation School, rode his bicycle to Annunciation before Vance arrived and stopped to peacefully disagree with the protesters.

"We have to be better if you want something to change," DeBoer said to protesters on the street corner awaiting Vance. "We've been in this game long enough. We are better. There's no greater love than to lay down your life. These kids did that. Be better."

After leaving Annunciation, the Vances went to Children's Minnesota Hospital to visit Annunciation student Lydia Kaiser, who is recovering from surgery after being shot, with her family.

Kaiser was injured while protecting her little "buddy" during the Mass, according to her family. Her father, Harry Kaiser, the school's gym teacher, was in the church during the shooting. He "helped secure the room, to keep children safe, and stuck

with them until they were reunited with their families, even while his daughter was entering the emergency room," according to a GoFundMe site.