This past weekend, which in the season of Advent we call Gaudete Sunday – a time to rejoice in preparation of the coming of Our Savior -- the word Tragedy took on a new meaning for all of us. What happened in Newtown, CT chilled us not only because of its proximity to New Jersey, but also because, in the faces of the victims, we saw our own children, our own teachers and neighbors.

And while a continuing sense of shock will weigh on our shoulders in the coming days and throughout this Christmas season, we must and will resolve to act to make this incident the last.

The almost 1.5 million Catholics of the Archdiocese of Newark offer their sympathies and prayers for the victims of the Newtown attack and their families. All of the parishes of the Archdiocese of Newark will remember them at Mass in the days and weeks ahead, in the sure and certain hope that they have received The Embrace of Our Heavenly Father.

We also offer our prayers and support to our leaders, who now once again must seek to find a solution to the sin of gun violence in our society.

Already this week, the Archdiocesan Schools Office has provided all of our 74 elementary and 30 high schools significant resources to assist teachers, guidance counselors and administrators to console and reassure the 34,000-plus students whom we serve in this education ministry. The administrators and volunteer catechists who are responsible for the almost 70,000 students in Religious Education programs in our 220 parishes also have received this same information and resources.

I am thankful that the schools of the Archdiocese benefit from extremely strong security systems and procedures and that no similar incident has ever occurred in a Catholic school within the Archdiocese of Newark. However, we cannot be complacent about our children’s safety. I have called on all of our schools and Religious Education programs to review all of their emergency security procedures, to reinforce the importance of them to staff, students and parents alike, and to look to strengthen and enhance them in the weeks ahead.

To parents, faculty and staff in our schools and Religious Education programs, I say: Now is a time for consolation, for brave thoughts, and for turning fear into love – both for those who have perished in Newtown, and for our own children here in New Jersey.