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Dear students,

As you begin this school year, I want you to know how important you are to the teachers and administrators of your school. You do not know me, but I am a Jesuit priest and I visit your school each year as the Provincial, and I love seeing the good things happening in your school. Best of all, I get to see how much the adults at your school care for you, how much you mean to them, how much they worry about you when things in your life are hard, and how much they rejoice with you when you succeed and are happy.

You have been on my mind recently because we have seen some terrible things in our country. For reasons we do not fully understand, a number of people have turned to violence and chosen to shoot, kill, and injure many innocent victims. That has happened in Gilroy, California; El Paso, Texas; Dayton, Ohio; and many other places. When this happens, this can make us feel the opposite of what I believe God wants us to feel, which is that each and every one of our lives is important and valuable. In truth, we mean everything to God, and yet we can be tempted to think that our lives do not matter. That is not the case! Each and every one of us is loved infinitely by God!

One of the saddest, hardest things for me to accept is that people have been targeted because of their heritage. In Texas recently, a man chose to drive more than 10 hours from his home to El Paso to shoot people who are of Mexican and Latino descent—people with last names like Garcia, Benavides, Campos, Hernandez, and Flores. How many students and parishioners at Jesuit Schools have last names like these! I would never want students and families who share that heritage to think they are not valuable like jewels in God's eyes! This would be the last thing we could ever want. We know that all people are beautiful in the eyes of God. We believe that the diversity of people reflects the beautiful face of God.

But victims in that terrible crime also had last names like Johnson, Hoffman, and Grady. And I can imagine we also have students and parishioners with these names as well. The truth is, we all lose when someone does something so terrible and destructive. We all can be tempted to despair.

In the face of so much scary, shocking and sad news, I want you to know what we, the Jesuit family, stand for:

- Love in the face of hate.
- Kindness in the face of violence.
- Forgiveness when there is hurt.
- Welcome where people want to leave others out.
- Courage to speak out in the face of injustice.

This is what Jesus stood for. He walked this earth to remind us that God loves us all, and he called us to be loving of all people. There was no one who was outside of his love. May you, may we, all be loving like Jesus to everyone we meet.

I want you to know that I am praying for you as you start your school year. May you know that adults in your lives love you: your parents, teachers, administrators, and priests. We love you. Your lives are so important to us!

Please pray for me also.

With thanks for you,

Fr. Scott Santarosa, S.J.
Provincial