



# URBAN CURRENT

## Everything dies

**C**hicago's 2017 soaring body count is keeping pace with 2016's bloody horror. This reminds me of my thoughts some years ago.

My wife is in jail.

Summer swelter drapes the city like a wet quilt. I'm sitting on my front porch. It's 11:00 p.m. A siren screams by on the commercial street a half block away. I'm tired. Nearby, a dog is very agitated and letting everyone know. The familiar sound of gunfire is only slightly muffled by the quilt. It's been a long week. Now this.

Early this morning, Georgia, with others, sat in front of an abortion clinic to forestall the death of doomed babies. She was arrested and held at the Central Police Lockup in the South Loop. They have held everyone for almost 15 hours now. Presumably, she will be released tonight and catch a ride home with somebody.

I'm sitting here contemplating the madness of educated, God-fearing America having modern, bright, amazingly equipped places called clinics where human babies are brutally murdered. As well, I'm haunted by the gang violence all around us. The murder count will exceed 900 this year.

The wooden step I sit on could use a coat of paint. My five children sleep in the dark house behind me. I look at "our" tree. The front yard extends from the front of our house 15 feet to the five-foot-wide sidewalk. Between the sidewalk and the curb is maybe a six-foot-strip of grass we extravagantly call "the parkway." In that little space, the single tree in front of our house struggles to survive. My sad-looking grass strains toward greenness.

In the city, it seems everything dies.

Why does my eighth-grade daughter have to hear her friend has been shot in the chest, falling dead on the sidewalk in front of the Boys and Girls Club several hundred feet from our front door? Why does she have to go to the funeral of her classmate, dead, not of a

childhood disease, but gone because of street violence?

"Dear God," I whisper, "you've got me raising my kids in a death zone."

How many bright-eyed, fervent-hearted young men with devoted wives and maybe a baby on the hip have come to this city proclaiming God led them, God called them, God sent them. "Here to plant a church," they say. Only a few years later, sometimes only months later, I hear they left the city.

Visions die here. Dreams die here. Calls die here. Marriages die here. Struck by the velocity of everyday life. Ground down by the relentless spiritual warfare. Life drains away under the blazing heat of a corrupt, shallow, godless, commercialized, self-centered, postmodern culture.

As I run errands around the city, I pass new condos where Gospel church houses used to be. I see church buildings converted into grand residences. I pass other buildings formerly housing evangelical congregations now housing cults and other purveyors of doctrines of demons. Is there anything sadder than the death of a church?

Yes, I'm a bit overwhelmed by all of the decay, deterioration, and death. Some of it is slow and gradual. But those processes are often interrupted by shocking, violent, sudden episodes of death.

I'm reminded — it's not just my neighborhood. It's not just my city. It's my nation. It's my world. Our planet is dying ... and not because we haven't loved Mother Earth and been better stewards of our environment.

God warned Adam and Eve, "Don't eat of this tree. If you do, you will die."

Who could have known the eons of decay, the tomes of deterioration, the volumes of destruction, the libraries of death behind that single warning? If Adam and Eve could have seen bloody children in Syria, the starving of Sudan, bloody youth sprawled on urban

sidewalks, headless corpses in Mexican mass graves, millions of young men never coming home from battles they were sent to fight, 50 million babies slaughtered in America alone. If Adam and Eve could have seen the brokenness, the tragedy, the heartache, the tears. If they could have heard the weeping and wailing, the groaning. If they could have seen one day's death and devastation on this planet, what would they think?

The phone rings. The prisoners have been set free ... on bail. Other warriors not arrested have waited all day outside the police headquarters' door for the arrestees. With a sigh, I rise. The door clicks behind me. I wearily ascend the stairs. Georgia will be home soon. I crawl into bed.

The next morning the city simmers. Hundreds converge on a giant brown building squatting on a gritty corner facing Kedzie Boulevard. They represent 40 different nationalities and ethnicities. They fill the old former Masonic Temple ballroom now adorned by beat-up, yellow plastic folding chairs arrayed across a scarred dance floor that has seen thousands of feet.

The worship leaders strike up a song. Feet of former drug addicts tap. Hands of former gangbangers clap. Arms of former "religious but lost" are raised. The praise of the resurrected crescendos. In the middle of the madness, in the face of death and dying, we celebrate the Christ who conquers death, crushes death; Jesus who is alive and makes alive.

by Charles Lyons, Pastor  
Armitage Baptist Church,  
Chicago, Illinois  
[charles.lyons@armitagechurch.org](mailto:charles.lyons@armitagechurch.org)

