In late August of last year, I attended my first protest at the Michigan State Capitol. We were there to make state legislators aware of the many people killed due to gun violence. There were supposed to be 91 of us to represent the 91 people on average that are killed due to gun violence every day. However, this was before the November election, so only about 20 of us were present.

I attended this protest with two IHMs who have attended many protests over the years. At one point during our demonstration, I looked back to see one sister with her eyes closed. It was apparent to me that she was deep into prayer. It never occurred to me that one could pray at a protest.

For days after the protest, I thought a lot about that moment and how protests could be a prayer. Sadly, given the current situation in our country I have participated in several more protests. For me, as a white woman, protesting is a way to use my privilege to speak out on the many injustices in our world. It is a way to bring a voice to the voiceless. It is a way to put my body on the line when others cannot.

When at a protest, I feel connected to those on the margins. I feel the hurt, anger and fear that led so many give of their time and take to the streets. I see black, brown and white people come together for something bigger than themselves. We grieve the injustice that brought us together. We join our voices together as a chorus of citizens who will never stop fighting for the most vulnerable.

When at a protest, I bring all this to my Creator. I ask for the grace to use my gifts to help stop the injustices. I also pray for the populations that are affected the most by the injustice. Protests are a starting point, not a photo opportunity. Protests bring people together to show that we are not alone in the fight. The real work happens in the murkiness when everyone disperses. Protest is the spark that ignites us to do the hard and slow work of social justice. Protest is to gather God’s people together to hope and pray for a better day for everyone.

Audra Turnbull, IHM