



Sisters speak out again about gun violence, legislation

by Dan Stockman



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The mass shootings in Gilroy, California; El Paso, Texas; and Dayton, Ohio, have prompted women religious across the country to demand specific action to curb gun violence.

The three shootings, which killed 34 people and wounded scores of others in a span of seven days, sparked many religious communities to pray for the victims and for an end to violence, which is not unusual. But the rash of shootings in a short period of time — the El Paso and Dayton shootings occurred within 24 hours of each other and left 31 dead — drove many to call for legislation.

“Let us demand that, at a minimum, our legislators enact gun safety laws like H.R. 8, a bipartisan measure that calls for strict background checks for those purchasing guns,” the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas said in a statement. “Such a measure is overwhelmingly favored by voters of all political backgrounds and would help protect us all.”

The failure to address the issue represents a complete failure by lawmakers, the Mercy statement said.

“The answer is clear: legislative change that will make it harder to buy automatic and semi-automatic weapons and high-capacity magazines will save lives,” the statement said. “Lawmakers who have refused, time and again, to take any action on responsible gun safety laws and address this tragic national public safety threat have failed us entirely. ... We demand, we require, we deserve better — as a nation, and as children of God.”

On the evening of Aug. 4 in Dayton, Ohio, Gov. Mike DeWine attended a vigil for the victims only to be shouted down by the crowd of hundreds chanting, “Do something.” Among those in the crowd were members of the Sisters of the Precious Blood, based in Dayton.

“It was just spontaneous in the crowd,” Sr. Jeanette Buehler told *Global Sisters Report*. “They just kept chanting, ‘Do something, do something.’”

Those chants worked: On Aug. 6, DeWine proposed a host of measures, including background checks, aimed at reducing gun violence.

Since 2006, the Sisters of the Precious Blood have led an interfaith homicide vigil group that prays at the site of every homicide in Dayton. This vigil, however, was like no other, as they mourned the nine killed and 27 wounded outside a bar.

“We just think the witness is very important to be here because all of us care for these people, even if we didn’t know them,” Sr. Jeanette Buehler told WBNS-TV. “Nobody deserves to have their lives snuffed out by violence.”

Buehler said the vigils are often emotional, but this was among the most powerful.

“This was just the sense of shock and the sense of support by being there with so many people,” she told *Global Sisters Report*.

But while the number of people killed in one shooting is an anomaly, Buehler said, we need to realize shooting deaths are all too common: The Aug. 4 vigil was the 527th the group has held since 2006.

And the carnage continues: Two more vigils are already planned for two other homicides, she said.

The National Advocacy Center, the social justice advocacy arm of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, said the U.S. Senate must pass bills the House already approved. H.R. 8 would require a background check for every firearm sale and H.R. 1112 would strengthen the background check before a federal firearms license holder can transfer a gun to an unlicensed person.

“The National Advocacy Center and the Sisters of the Good Shepherd urgently call on the United States Senate to act and pass two bills passed by the House of Representatives that they have been sitting on since early March,” the center said in a statement. “We may always have bad people and we may always have gun violence, but we can easily reduce gun violence by strengthening common sense background check laws.”

The Adrian Dominicans called for a ban on assault rifles.

“We insist on common sense gun control,” the community said in a statement. “There is no place in our streets, our schools, our homes for AK-47 assault rifles; gun owners, like vehicle owners, should be licensed; gun safety measures should be implemented and regulated.”

They also called for white nationalism to be addressed.

“We insist on concrete measures to expunge the scourge of white nationalism that poses such a real and present threat to our brothers and sisters of color and is so toxic to our nation, assaulting the very fabric of our union,” the statement said. “White supremacy is a lie that has infected our national identity since its inception. We must root it out in word and deed and in every form it takes — passive or aggressive — in our personal and national lives.”

Taking concrete steps against gun violence is nothing new for sisters: They played a key role in Dick’s Sporting Goods’ 2018 announcement that it would stop selling assault rifles and raise the minimum purchase age for firearms to 21 and were behind the successful shareholder push to require Sturm Ruger to report on its efforts to improve gun safety.

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious pointed out that freedom — the principle many gun-rights activists cite in fighting gun control measures — also includes the freedom from being shot or a target of racial hatred.

“We are a nation that promises a life free from fear, and yet we seem unable to stop the epidemic of hate that has overwhelmed us,” the group said in a statement. “We call for the passage of laws that ban assault weapons, require universal background checks for all gun sales, provide funding for gun violence prevention research, and makes the trafficking in weapons a federal crime.”

The group also pointed out that gun violence is far more widespread than the horror of mass shootings.

“Most major cities see shooting deaths regularly, and suicides, domestic violence, and accidents caused by guns are pervasive in all parts of the country,” the statement said. “According to the Gun Violence Archives, so far this year more than 8,734 people were shot to death and more than 17,300 people were injured in more than 33,000 incidents. Those numbers do not include firearm suicides.”

The shooting in El Paso deeply resonated with many communities because they have sent sisters to volunteer at the border helping asylum-seekers. Hundreds of sisters have volunteered at Annunciation House there; some congregations have ministered in El Paso for decades.

“We are especially saddened that El Paso, a peace-loving and welcoming city that has been part of Loretto’s life for so many years, was the target of such hatred,” the Loretto Community said in a statement. “We need to require President Trump, national and local legislators to take action on reducing gun violence in our country.”

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, Kansas, who have ministered in El Paso since 1927, asked lawmakers what they are afraid of.

“We believe our nation needs stronger gun control legislation. Why the fears of a background check?” they asked in a statement. “We also believe that assault type weapons do not belong on the streets of a civilized society.”

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Members of the Sisters of the Precious Blood in Dayton, Ohio, attend an Aug. 4 vigil for victims of the mass shooting that took place there early that morning. (Courtesy of the Sisters of the Precious Blood)