

Prevention of Gun Violence
A Statement of the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses
March 21, 2013

As Benedictine monastic women we stand united in a 1500 - year tradition, rooted in Gospel values of peace and non-violence. Our Benedictine way of life requires us not only to be people of peace but also “to foster peace in the society around us.”¹ That peace is based on right relationships and mutual respect. Any violation of the rights and integrity of people, of the land, and of the environment is an act of violence. A definite culture of violence is pervasive in our society in movies, television programming, video games, music and advertisements. The proliferation of guns, both legal and illegal, has contributed to a significant increase in violence in the United States and in the drug wars in Mexico .

In 2010, guns took the lives of 31,076 Americans in homicides, suicides and unintentional shootings. This is the equivalent of more than 85 deaths each day and more than 3 deaths each hour.² In Mexico, 15,273 died in drug war gun violence alone that same year.³ Over 68% of the traced guns used in crimes in Mexico between 2007 and 2010 came from the United States. ⁴ The United States has the highest rate of gun-related injuries among developed countries, as well as the highest rate of gun ownership. Besides the deaths and tragedies for families, friends and associates, gun violence also affects society in other ways, including higher medical costs, reductions in quality of life because of fear of gun violence and stresses on the criminal justice system.⁵

To help create healthier environments in families, schools and communities and to reduce the impact of gun-related violence, the American Psychological Association recommends multiple approaches, among which are education, training, access to mental health treatment, program funding and research.⁶ The Conference of Benedictine Prioresses endorses their recommendations.

In his holy rule, our founder St. Benedict states, “Your way of acting must be different from the world’s way.”⁷ We, the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses, are compelled to address the rampant culture of gun violence and disregard for human life. Therefore, in concert with statements issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops⁸ and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious⁹ we call on lawmakers to:

- ❖ Close loopholes and require every person who buys a gun to pass a criminal background check.
- ❖ Ban the sale of assault style weapons and high capacity ammunition magazines.
- ❖ Make gun trafficking a federal crime.
- ❖ Strengthen federal laws to stem the flow of American weapons that contribute to the drug trafficking violence in Mexico.¹⁰
- ❖ Fund robust care for those with mental illness, ensuring that health insurance plans, Medicare and Medicaid offer mental health benefits at parity.¹¹
- ❖ Provide for early identification and intervention for children and young adults in need of mental health treatment.
- ❖ Increase the number of well-trained mental health professionals available for school and community gun violence prevention, intervention, threat assessment, and crisis management.
- ❖ End the freeze on gun violence research.¹²
- ❖ Address the growing use of violence as a means of entertainment in films, television program, video games, music and advertisements.

Notes

1. Conference of Benedictine Prioresses "Of All Good Gifts", 1980
2. Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, Gun Violence Statistics November 18, 2012
<http://smartgunlaws.org/category/gun-studies-statistics/gun-violence-statistics> Retrieved March 5, 2013
3. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/12/mexico-drug-war-deaths-2010_n_808277.html retrieved 3/17/13
4. "Between 2007 and 2011, 68.5 percent of firearms recovered in Mexico and submitted to ATF for tracing came from the United States"
<http://www.feinstein.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2012/4/feinstein-new-atf-data-proves-overwhelming-majority-of-guns-recovered-in-mexico-come-from-u-s>
5. American Psychological Association <http://www.apa.org/topics/violence/gun-violence-prevention.aspx>. Retrieved February 8, 2013
6. American Psychological Association <http://www.apa.org/about/gr/issues/violence/gun-related.aspx> Retrieved February 8, 2013
7. The Rule of St. Benedict 4:20
8. Testimony submitted before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary "Proposals to Reduce Gun Violence: Protecting Our Communities While Respecting the Second Amendment" February 12, 2013 <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/criminal-justice-restorative-justice/upload/USCCB-Senate-Testimony-Proposals-to-Reduce-Gun-Violence-2013.pdf> Retrieved March 5, 2013
9. LCWR: A Response to the Newtown Tragedy December 20, 2012
<https://lcwr.org/media/news/lcwr-response-newtown-tragedy> Retrieved March 5, 2013
10. <http://www.feinstein.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2012/4/feinstein-new-atf-data-proves-overwhelming-majority-of-guns-recovered-in-mexico-come-from-u-s>. Retrieved March 17, 2013
11. The APA states, "Mental health and substance use parity means that coverage for mental health and substance use benefits must be at least equal to coverage for physical health benefits... In other words, all of the financial requirements and treatment limitations applied to mental health and substance use benefits may be no more restrictive than those applied to physical health benefits". A parity law became effective in 2010. Further information can be found at <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/federal-parity-law.aspx> Retrieved March 5, 2013
12. For 17 years there has been a ban on government research into the public health effects of gun violence. Information about this can be found on the web:
<http://vitals.nbcnews.com/news/2013/01/16/16532333-obama-plan-eases-freeze-on-cdc-gun-violence-research?lite> Retrieved March 5, 2013