

Mass Shootings Have Led to Mass Numbness

Half a million kids plan to wake us up.

Can we find solutions by seeking the interests of others?

Even in the painful aftermath of the February Parkland, Florida school shooting, the gun debate has gone nowhere. The reoccurring cries of proponents and opponents of gun control continue to rise again. Instead of seeking a policy solution, Americans seem numb. From Columbine to the present, we have failed to find meaningful solutions to reduce mass shootings at schools through gun control.

This weekend's March for Our Lives, with its expected turnout of at least 500,000, hopes to jolt Washington out of the cycle of rhetoric, soundbites, and inaction.

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2018 Mass Shooting Deaths, By the Numbers

According to the Gun Violence Archive, as of March 21, 2018, America has had 48 mass shootings. Those shooting led to 63 deaths and 189 injuries. The Archive defines mass shootings as four or more killed or injured, not including the perpetrator. The Parkland Shooting remains the most devastating mass shooting this year, 17 deaths and 17 injuries.

Known for its unyielding fight in the right to bear arms, The National Rifle Association (NRA) is a leader in firearms education training. The NRA website includes more than 125,000 certified instructors that train more than 1 million gun owners a year. The group began as a firearms training and education association for marksmanship. It has strengthened its focus to defend Second Amendment through the years. With the "right to bear arms" central to its cause, has the NRA become numb to its roots?

"Ineligible" Voters, but Eligible Voices

For nearly two decades, the NRA has fought challenges to gun control legislation at the federal and state level. The NRA faces its toughest test in the survivors of the Parkland Shooting. These survivors, the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, show no signs of letting up, though most of them are ineligible to vote. Through social media and mass protests across the nation, these survivors demand support in forcing national and state legislatures to pass meaningful laws to reduce gun violence.

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Although these survivors are ineligible to vote, they do have a window of opportunity to make change. According to the independent Quinnipiac University National Poll, American voters support stricter gun laws 66-31 percent. This represents the highest level of support conducted by this organization. In addition, the Quinnipiac University National Poll cited support for universal background checks as 97-3 percent among gun owners, 67-29 percent for a nationwide ban on the sale of assault weapons, and 75-17 percent that Congress needs to do something to reduce gun violence. Twenty-two years ago, Australia banned rapid-fire guns after 35 people were killed in Port Arthur. According to a 2016 Journal of American Medical Association article, Australia has not had a mass shooting incident, a single incident in which five or more people are killed, since. Could the United States reap the same benefits if we banned rapid-fire guns the way Australia did, or are we content remaining numb?

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Serve the Interests of the Vulnerable

In light of the Parkland Shooting, The Giffords Law Center To Prevent Gun Violence identified three policy solutions that relate to this incident: prevent access to guns by enacting laws for safe storage, raise the minimum age from 18 to 21 to buy semiautomatic weapons, and disarm dangerous people. From a biblical perspective, I found our motive and policy solution to reduce gun violence in Philippians 2:3-4, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interest of the others." In considering the victims family and the survivors, I support conducting universal background checks. We should require training for anyone who wants to purchase a gun, at age 21 years or older. I also support banning rapid-fire guns as they did in Australia, and enacting laws for safe storage. It's hard to be numb when you look out for the best interest for others, more than yourself.

Police Shootings: We're All Calling For Back-Up

Ready to do something constructive?

My complexion resembles that of Mike Brown, Freddie Gray, Alton Sterling, and Philando Castile. To a police officer who does not know me, I benefit—or suffer from—their experiences and/or lack of experiences in dealing with people who look like me.

The Castile tragedy raises serious concerns. How can an officer shoot someone who is complicit with his directions? Why, if the officer feared Castile because of his possession of a gun, did he not wait for backup? Why did the officer fail to immediately provide first aid to Castile after shooting him? From the continual tragic and untimely death of African-American males by police officers, I still hear the resounding echoes for calls to action, statements that express regret, protests that are carried out responsibly or

irresponsibly and then it all happens again. At this point, who does not know that Black lives, or even Human lives, matter?

The question really becomes: Who cares?

Angry? I am beyond angry.

Frustrated? I am beyond frustrated.

Safe? I don't know the police officers around whom I should feel safe.

Beyond Venting

I want solutions. I want answers. I want changes. Instead of a Congress seeking to find compromises in the best interest of Americans, we have partisan gridlock that makes it virtually impossible to provide solutions to the deaths of all people while under police custody and mass shootings.

According to the **Minnesota Star Tribune**, nearly 150 people have died while under police custody in Minnesota and not one police officer was charged in any of those deaths. Does this encourage or discourage Minnesota police officers from using excessive force? How comforting is this for the Castile family in seeking justice for their son? Should the federal government lead the investigation as they are doing in Baton Rouge?

I do not want to die like Castile at the hands of police. As **President Obama emphasized**, I know I am more vulnerable to these types of incidents. As a father, brother, uncle and son, I am not interested in anyone else losing their his or her life to a senseless act of excessive force. We need to do something now to change the culture of police-community relations and institutionalize it as a part of our local community for a national impact. We don't have any more time! We don't need any more victims! We can't tolerate any more populous messages or dismissive tones! It's time to do something now to prevent senseless acts of excessive force. It's time to do something now.

Do Something Now

1. Know the police leadership and officers serving your church. This requires an investment of time; make it a perpetual priority because personnel changes.
2. Present a Know Your Rights seminar on a semi-annual basis in relationship to local or national events involving misconduct by police and/or citizens. Make sure you get both sides and various perspectives for a mutually rewarding discussion.
3. Join and actively participate in the Neighborhood Block Club in your church neighborhood. There is no reason why church members should not participate in the crime watch efforts surrounding God's house, or host a meeting.
4. Assess and ensure the role of the Police Review Board in your municipality. They assess and review citizen complaints, as well as departmental policies and procedures. If you do not have one, advocate starting one. The timing could not be better.
5. Identify and recognize police officers annually who connect well with residents in your church neighborhood. At this annual community celebration event, you present awards to police officers and others who model appropriate behavior to reinforce it and institutionalize it.