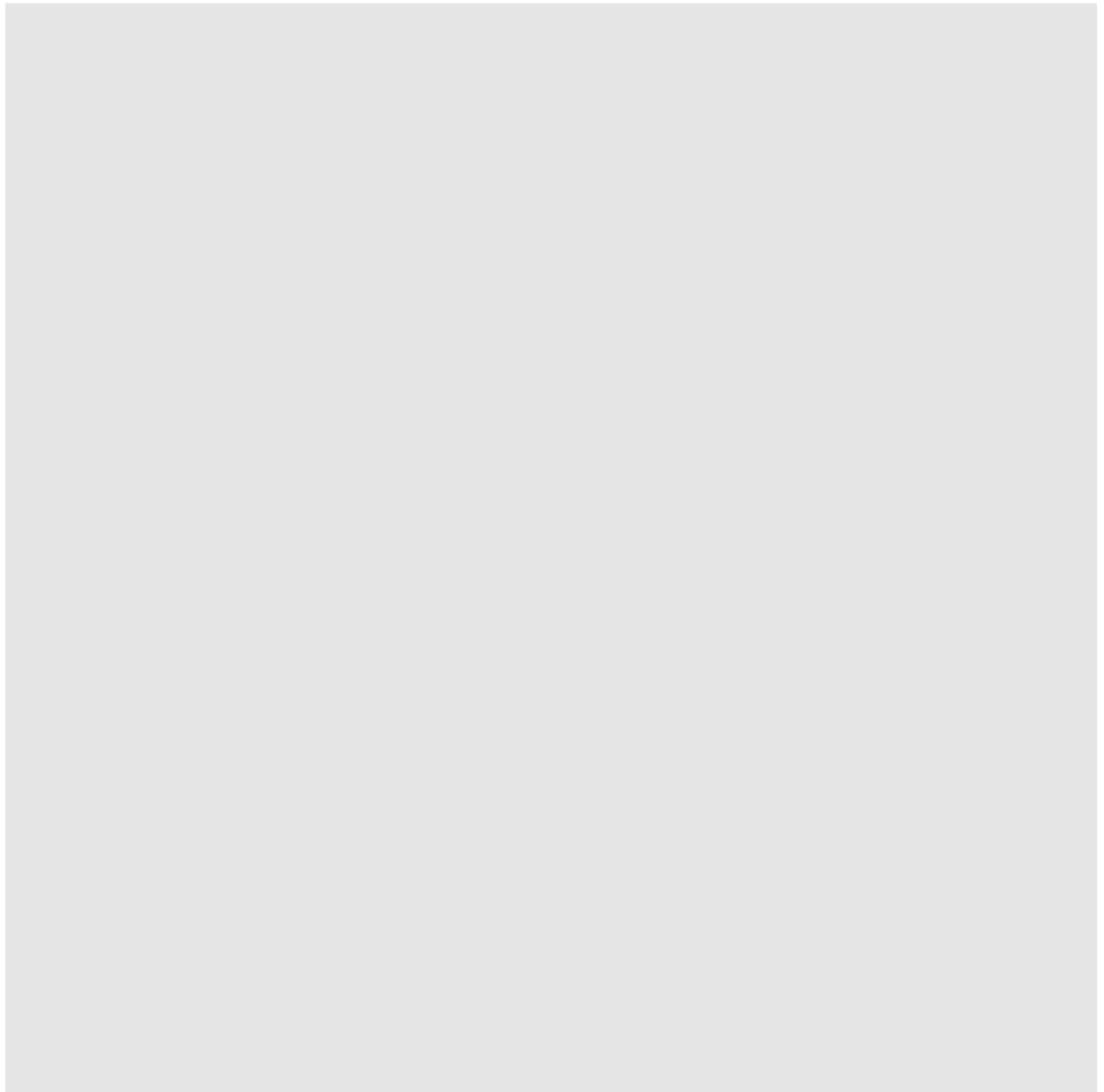


FAITH PERSPECTIVES

http://www.stltoday.com/lifestyles/faith-and-values/civil-religion/faith-perspectives-ending-gun-culture/article_00101f34-8b09-574a-b3e1-ae30c063cf92.html

Faith Perspectives: Ending gun culture

By James Croft Mar 2, 2018





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Last week we looked at active shooter training at work. What would we do, we wondered, if a person with a gun came into our congregation and started killing people?

How would we notify our members, if someone went on a rampage? How would we get people out of the building? What's the best way to provide care for those shot and dying? What is our responsibility, as clergy, to confront an active shooter? Is it my job to take a bullet for a child in our Sunday School?

Conversation such as these are increasingly common in U.S. congregations, schools, colleges, offices and anywhere where many people gather — but it was highly unusual and disturbing for me.

As an Englishman, I come from a country where guns are rare. In the UK, personal ownership of almost all handguns has been banned since a school shooting in 1996, and hardly anyone (less than 2 percent of the population) owns a gun. Even the police in England, Wales and Scotland do not routinely carry firearms, with their use restricted to specially trained officers who make up a very small portion of the force. Even air guns are regulated and restricted, depending on their power.

Thanks in part to this carefully controlled environment, the UK enjoys one of the lowest rates of gun homicide in the entire world. While metal detectors are becoming more common in UK schools, this is due to fear of knives, not guns — and knives are a lot less likely to result in an attack leaving multiple children dead than are assault rifles.

It is difficult to explain to most Americans the sense of revulsion I feel on seeing a firearm. I find them horrifying. When I catch sight of a gun — including a gun carried by a police officer — I have a visceral feeling of fear and disgust. I physically recoil from them, so disturbing they are to me.

Guns are tools designed explicitly to end life, to maim and to kill. Guns take tens of thousands of American lives every year, and are particularly deadly to some of the most vulnerable populations in our society (women who suffer domestic violence, people of color). Guns kill far more people than terrorism does, and you are much more likely to be killed in a mass shooting than by a foreign-born terrorist.

The Centers for Disease Control recognizes firearms as a leading cause of death. In states where more households own guns, more people are killed by guns. Gun-owning households are less safe than gun-free ones, with a higher chance of accidental death, suicide and homicide.

The evidence is clear and unequivocal: A society in which more people own guns is a society in which more people are in danger of being shot and killed by guns. So why do so many Americans cherish guns and gun ownership?

In the United States, guns have become a cherished symbol of cultural identity, valued far beyond their dubious utility as tools and their mythical role in self-defense (it is extremely rare, statistically speaking, that anyone successfully uses a gun in self-defense).

Owning a gun demonstrates that the owner is in a particular political and social club: They are a “strong,” “real American,” not one of those “snowflake liberals.” Guns are essentially a political fashion statement, like a lawn sign or a bumper sticker — a bumper sticker that can kill.

The United States has been bewitched by a culture of guns almost as dangerous as guns themselves. This is a culture that lauds violence and aggression and despises discussion and democracy.

The website of the National Rifle Association (the most enthusiastic proponent of this culture), days after the atrocious attack on schoolchildren in Parkland, Fla., features a video suggesting that school classrooms should be “fortified” and protected with armed guards, and that schools should be built with only one entrance and exit, as if the only way to protect children from gun violence is to trap them in buildings with more guns.

Closer to home, the Missouri Firearms Coalition website has nothing to say about the latest massacre of children in school, but its Facebook page includes a recently posted video of a young child shooting at a humanoid target, with the comment, “This girl is being raised right!”

Apparently, training young children to shoot and kill people is “right” in the eyes of these fanatics — for that is what gun culture is, a fanaticism that admits no reason, cares not for evidence and trumpets the cause of death at every turn.

These are particularly extreme examples of gun culture, for sure, but it is an extension of the same deadly logic that says that the only answer to gun violence is more gun violence. That route can only lead to misery and death, as gun companies manipulate our fears to make more money.

Gun culture is a culture of fear. It feeds upon our fear of violent crime to sell us guns, which will not keep us safe.

Gun culture is a culture of death. It celebrates killing, promoting a twisted “logic” that suggests that the answer to violence is more violence.

Gun culture is a culture of greed. It feeds politicians endless filthy lucre, money reaped from countless corpses, corrupting them to do their bidding.

We must end gun culture, and we must start today.

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