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JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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Arming Teachers

Simplistic solutions to complex problems

by Nicholas Mitchell, Ph.D.

JSRI Future Activities

April 4

Fr. Fred Kammer will lead a day of reflection on Catholic social thought for faculty and staff of Brother Martin High School.

April 6-7

JSRI board will meet on the Loyola campus.

April 18

Fr. Kammer will chair the meeting of the board of the Ignatian Solidarity Network in Los Angeles.

JSRI Recent Activities

March 15

Dr. Ali Bustmante testified in support of minimum wage to the Louisiana Senate Labor and Industrial Relations Committee.

March 15

Dr. Nicholas Mitchell testified against Senate Bill 303 on classroom punishment.

March 14

Dr. Sue Weishar participated in a rally in front of City Hall to end

On February 14, 2018, 17 people were murdered and 17 people were wounded at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.[1] None of the victims had walked into their school that day expecting to be the victim of a mass shooting. None of the family members of the victims said goodbye to their loved ones that morning expecting it to be the last time. Most people never will experience the horror that the students and faculty of Stoneman Douglas were confronted with; but, because of the availability of social media, the world got to witness the horror of those trapped in the school in real time.[2] The Parkland mass shooting has proven to be a catalyst for a new phase of the very public intergenerational discourse about gun control and school safety. A policy suggestion that has emerged on both the local and national levels is the arming of teachers to protect students from an attacker.



unlawful detentions at the Orleans Justice Center organized by the Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition.

March 14

Tom Reynolds, assistant to the Jesuit Provincial for higher education, visited JSRI staff.

March 9

Dr. Weishar and JSRI associate Mary Baudouin attended a meeting on human rights and corporate practices at the Center for Corporate Responsibility in New York.

March 8

Dr. Bustamante appeared on Café CNN to discuss Latino economic prosperity.

March 7

Dr. Weishar and other advocates accompanied two immigrants to their ICE check-ins in New Orleans.

March 6-8

Fr. Kammer moderated the Plenary Meeting of the Council of the International Catholic Migration Conference in Rome.

February 22

Dr. Weishar participated in a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Biloxi-based El Pueblo Legal Services.

February 22

Dr. Bustamante testified against Medicaid work requirements to the Louisiana House Health and Welfare Committee.

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Photo by Klye Encar. Loyola University New Orleans students, staff, and faculty participate in Action Against Gun Violence Rally.

There are a host of reasons why this is a terrible notion. First and foremost, shootouts are not like they appear in the movies. As Amanda Ripley wrote for Time Magazine after the Newtown mass shooting, “the research on actual gunfights, the kind that happen not in a politician’s head but in fluorescent-lit stairwells and strip-mall restaurants around America, reveals something surprising. Winning a gunfight without shooting innocent people typically requires realistic, expensive training and a special kind of person.”[3] Most people are not that special kind of person who can overcome their body’s instinctual reaction to being shot at and return fire.[4] Most people freeze, experience tunnel vision, and struggle with retaining basic motor skills under a sudden rush of adrenaline; and these are the trained ones.[5]

While arming teachers seems logical to those who are already in agreement that more guns make us safe, it won’t actually solve anything. No amount of time at the shooting range will prepare teachers to engage in a shootout in a school surrounded by students and confront an active shooter who may in fact be a student they know. This, of course, assumes that they are competent enough with the weapon and will not themselves pose a threat to the school. For example, on February 28 of this year, a teacher barricaded himself in his classroom with a gun at Dalton High School in Georgia.[6] Arming teachers also raises concerns about how implicit bias towards black and brown bodies will impact threat identification. How long will it be until an armed teacher, in a moment of fear toward a black or brown child, misidentifies this child as a threat and kills the student? Will this be covered under some ghoulish interpretation of “stand your ground” laws? What kind of education could black and brown students, or any students for that matter, get in schools where a teacher or administrator could in fact kill them?

Gun ownership is a complex topic with a lot to intellectually unpack. The need for school safety is not complex at all— students cannot learn in educational spaces that are not safe. However, arming teachers is not the answer and will never be the answer. Instead of wasting time and resources training teachers to be security guards, states should spend more money on direly needed school resources— like guidance counselors.

[1] Flesher, D. and Valys, P. *Named for the first time: All 17 who survived Nikolas Cruz’s bullets*. Retrieved from: <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/parkland/florida-school-shooting/florida-school-shooting-wounded-list-20180307-story.html>

[2] Ohlheiser, A. and Epstein, K. *Just Try to Keep Calm: How One Parkland Student’s Phone Became His Lifeline and His Voice*. Retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/lifestyle/parkland-shooting-in-social-media/?utm_term=.edb54789cf7d

[3] Ripley, A. *Your Brain in a Shootout: Guns, Fear and Flawed Instincts*. Retrieved from: <http://swampland.time.com/2013/01/16/your-brain-in-a-shootout-guns-fear-and-flawed-instincts/>

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Burnside, T. and Levenson, E. Georgia teacher arrested after firing gun in school, police say. Retrieved from: <https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/28/us/georgia-dalton-high-school-teacher-gunfire/index.html>