

March 9, 2018

These are indeed turbulent times, and as an educational association rooted in Gospel values, the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) stands in solidarity with those who would be agents of change and conversion in a culture of violence that is destroying innocent lives.

On March 24, thousands of young people are planning to gather in Washington D.C. to participate in a March for Our Lives that will advocate for stricter gun laws and more mental health resources in schools. The decisions to participate in this march are being made at the local or student level, and in the case of Catholic schools, such decisions are also made locally.¹ It is clear during this time there is urgent need for prayer, teaching, dialogue and action to bring about change in society so as to avoid any further senseless acts of violence such as was witnessed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida.

We need to [pray](#): we pray for those who lost their lives in Parkland, and all those who mourn for them. We pray for an end to all violence and senseless killing of young people in schools. We pray that politicians and leaders would work harder to put the safety and wellbeing of students first; the right to life, to live, before other rights.

We need to teach the truth to students in our schools, to their parents and to all people in society. Every person is created in the image and likeness of God, and is constantly being invited by God into a relationship with Jesus Christ. There is great dignity in being a human being and this dignity needs to be respected and protected by all institutions, including government. Sin, also, is real and all people need to take responsibility to combat sin and evil, especially as perpetrated against the young, the innocent and the needy.

We need to dialogue. Catholic schools are places where young people learn truth and how to [dialogue](#) about that truth with others. Catholic schools form students with values and a lived experience of how faith impacts life, and today more than ever there is need to solve differences and problems through dialogue and not through violence.

¹ Because some of the sponsors of the march are not sympathetic to the Church's teaching on the dignity of human life at all stages, some dioceses and schools have chosen to host their own prayer services or events.

We need to act. We need to speak up about the importance of school safety, not just in public schools but in all schools and make sure that federal safety measures such as funds for school security systems, rapid alert systems for local police, funds for guards or entrance security, teacher training, etc., are available to private schools on an opt-in basis. We need to review school safety plans, collaborate on better ways to keep students safe and put children first. We need to push leaders and politicians, both nationally and locally, to make laws and policy that prevent any further tragedies such as that in Parkland.

NCEA, in unity with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), will continue to encourage public debate on gun violence prevention. In a [backgrounder](#) on gun violence the USCCB, which does advocacy work to preserve human life and dignity on behalf of the Christian faithful of the United States, calls on all Catholics and all people of good will to urge their senators and representatives to support policy and legislative measures that: a) promote mercy and peacebuilding in our communities by implementing reasonable regulations on firearms such as require universal background checks for all gun purchases, limit civilian access to high-capacity weapons and ammunition magazines, make gun trafficking a federal crime, and improve access to mental health care for those who may be prone to violence; b) promote restorative justice by passing legislation to support important reentry programs that help people avoid re-offending; c) improve access to health care and treatment for those with addiction and mental health needs. By way of example, Sr. Dale McDonald, PBVM, Ph.D., NCEA's director of public policy and educational research, along with her counterparts from USCCB and the Council for American Private Education (CAPE), are monitoring bills in Congress that aim to provide resources for school violence prevention to assure that they include equitable services for Catholic and private school students and teachers. This includes the [STOP School Violence Act of 2018](#).

The [prayers](#) of NCEA are with those who lost their lives at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and all those who have suffered from senseless violence. Let us pray, teach, dialogue and act together to promote respect for life at all stages, protect students and keep them safe so they can learn and grow.

The following are resources available on the topics of gun violence, school violence, talking with students about gun violence and school safety:

American Academy of Pediatrics

Talking with children about disasters and the aftermath of violence -

<http://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/Children-and-Disasters/Pages/Talking-to-Children-About-Disasters.aspx>

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/aftermath.aspx>

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/all-around/Pages/Where-We-Stand-Gun-Safety.aspx>

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/all-around/Pages/Reduce-the-Risk-of-Gun-Injury.aspx>

American Psychological Association

Talking with children about recent gun violence -
<http://www.apa.org/topics/violence/school-shooting.aspx>

American School Counselor Association

<https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors/professional-development/learn-more/helping-kids-during-crisis>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

School violence explanation -
<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/schoolviolence/>
General safety tips for schools - <https://www.cdc.gov/features/safeschools/index.html>

Center for Mental Health (UCLA)

Threat assessment for schools - <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/shootings.pdf>

Congregation for Catholic Education, The Vatican

Guidelines for dialogue for building a “civilization of love” -
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20170416_educare-umanesimo-solidale_en.html

Department of Education

Facts related to gun violence in schools -
<https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=54>
<https://www.ed.gov/school-safety>

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Guidelines to develop a school safety plan - https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1922-25045-3850/rem_s_k_12_guide.pdf

Homeland Security

Resources for active shooter preparedness - <https://www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness>
Workshop information and opportunity - <https://www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-workshop-participant>

National Association of School Psychologists

Responding to school violence: tips for administrators -
<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/school-violence-prevention/responding-to-school-violence-tips-for-administrators>

National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities

Emergency response to crisis checklist -
http://www.ncef.org/pubs/emergency_response.pdf

National Institutes of Mental Health

General mental health information regarding children and adolescents -

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/child-and-adolescent-mental-health/children-and-violence.shtml>

The Children's Hospital, Los Angeles

Q-and-A about talking to children - <http://www.chla.org/blog/physicians-and-clinicians/talking-your-kids-about-violence-and-disaster>

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Talking with children about shootings -

http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/talking_to_children_about_the_shooting.pdf

National Catholic Partnership on Disability

Information on what parishes can do to help those with mental illnesses -

<http://www.ncpd.org/mental-illness-pastoral-response>

Notre Dame University, Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE)

Mental health and wellness survey incorporating -

https://www3.nd.edu/~jfrabutt/documents/MentalHealthandWellness_DiscussionandConclusion.pdf

USCCB

<http://www.usccb.org/news/2018/18-046.cfm>

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/criminal-justice-restorative-justice/upload/Backgrounder-on-Gun-Violence-March-2018.pdf>

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/violence/confronting-a-culture-of-violence-a-catholic-framework-for-action.cfm>

Contact your legislators - <https://www.votervoice.net/USCCB/home>