

# Is it possible to go on a fast from violent media?

WASHINGTON – If you're looking for a movement that really flew under the radar, consider the Media Violence Fast that took place for a week in mid-October.

Didn't hear much about it, did you? As it turns out, fewer than 700 people signed up online to participate in the fast – which wasn't a fast from food or drink, but a self-deprivation from violence in media.

According to the fast's sponsor, the United Church of Christ's Office of Communication, our children will see an estimated 100,000 acts of screen violence in the next 10 years. That's 10,000 acts a year, or more than 27 a day, every day. The violence can come from movies, TV shows, video games, or the computer – anything with a screen.

We can choose to be mired in T- and M-rated video games (for teen and mature audiences), listen to misogynistic rap, or watch the endless stream of TV shows and movies that you just know are going to be laced with weapons, explosions and people who are wounded or killed. We can also choose not to.

"As I'm clicking my way through 78 cable channels, I expect to be amazed at the number of rapes, fistfights, stabbings, explosions, car smashes, murder mysteries, wrestling matches, etc., that I'll have to maneuver away from," said the Rev. James Bennett Guess, director of the Office of Communication in the first of a series of e-mail reflections issued during the fasting week.

"For centuries, 'fasting' has been a religious discipline that's been broadly misunderstood. It's not that chocolate, or coffee, or even TV is inherently bad, wrong or harmful. Instead, when we consciously practice self-denial behaviors, the goal is to become more aware of how our cozy relationship to certain things can affect, impact or even control our lives," he said.

"Our Media Violence Fast, therefore, is an opportunity to learn and grow as peacemakers, to deepen our understanding of how the saturation of violence in our

culture impacts our own view of the world around us. Perhaps we will learn a thing or two about television, but it's even more important that we come to a deeper understanding of ourselves," he said.

The Rev. Gregg Brekke, editor of the United Church News, wrote: "A quick scan of the channels shows a forensic science law enforcement show, a mixed martial-arts cage match, a murder mystery drama, a show about women who relish their ability to deceive, and two separate shows investigating unsolved murders. My basic cable subscription has just 12 channels so fully half of them are currently dedicated to distributing violence tonight.

"How easy it is to have our attention pulled in to these stories, often well told and expertly produced. I admit to having my personal favorites, especially the various forensic investigation shows," Rev. Brekke added. "Yet, on another level I understand how these stories may slowly lead me to dehumanize the real bloodshed happening in my community and desensitize me to the cruelty carried out against God's most vulnerable children."

The Rev. Loey Powell, a team leader for the denomination's Justice and Witness Ministries program staff, said she was disturbed at how frequently demeaning words directed at women - some that would bring censure if they saw print - "are heard on prime-time and family-hour television shows with great regularity."

"Other belittling names and words characterize women as stupid or obsessed only with their looks or weight or with getting a date," she said. "Such names and words fill the airwaves on the radio and even appear on public advertising bulletin boards. Video games are filled with distorted images of women who become objects of conquest for the player."

Another United Church of Christ minister, the Rev. Felix Cannon, said, "In the 21st century will another 100 million people be sacrificed to the gods of war? For a growing number of people, the Media Violence Fast is one way to say, 'Not if I can help it; not if I do my part.' 'Blessed are the peacemakers for theirs is the kingdom of God,' spoke Jesus.

"Peace as practice is an aim of the Media Violence Fast," Rev. Cannon said. "It may

even prove to be a practice of spiritual, economic, political and social power. The Media Violence Fast project knows it to be so.”

The fast may be over, but the denomination has established an online forum to discuss topics related to violence in media. To join, go to [www.uccforums.com/viewforum.php?f=21](http://www.uccforums.com/viewforum.php?f=21).

Pattison is media editor for Catholic News Service.