

It's time to talk about gun violence

The bad news: We might break the record. The worse news is that even if we don't, we will come close. The record of 353 murders in the City of Baltimore came in 1993, when it had about 100,000 more residents. In 2015, 344 homicides were recorded.

The city is on a pace for 355 this year, nearly a murder a day. That's nothing of which we should be proud.

As a nation, we are dismayed by mass shootings such as those in Las Vegas or Sutherland Springs, Texas. But we are no longer shocked. The New York Times recently tracked mass shootings – in which four or more people were injured or killed in a single event at the same time and location. Between the shooting of 49 people at the Orlando nightclub in June 2016, and 26 dead at a church in Sutherland Springs Nov. 6, the newspaper tracked 555 mass shootings in 511 days.

And yet, we take no action. Ineffective limits on automatic rifles. No closing the gun show loopholes.

If we are not distressed by the mass shootings occurring all too frequently around our country, is it any wonder that we are not shocked and distressed by individual killings on the streets of Baltimore? Do we consider these drops in a bucket in an ocean of death? Are the deaths only noteworthy when it is a Navy veteran and policeman, Detective Sean Suiter, who was shot to death?

Let's look at some of the reasons Congress and others say we cannot act to end this national disgrace:

- In the immediate aftermath of a mass shooting, it's too soon to talk about gun control; we have to wait until everyone has calmed down from initial "irrational" reactions. It has been more than 1,800 days since the school shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Conn. How can it be "too soon"? The reality is, it can never be soon enough to talk about reasonable limits on violent weapons.
- It's not a gun problem, it's a mental health problem. That was President

Donald Trump's response to Sutherland Springs. If that's the case, we look forward to proposals from the White House and Congress for a major investment in mental health care across the country. We won't hold our breath. Domestic violence often weighs into these occasions, as the recent cases in Texas and California suggest. The fight against domestic violence needs a lot more resources, too.

- In Maryland, gun crimes can often be blamed on systemic poverty or the opioid epidemic. Drugs and poverty often go hand in hand, but we cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the violent effects that come with them. This is why social service agencies that help lift people from poverty are needed alongside effective drug treatment programs.

If we claim to support life – all human life, from conception to natural death – then we ought to be outraged by the scourge of guns in our country and the lack of political will to change the situation.

In 2000, the U.S. bishops issued a pastoral statement, "Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice." In it, they wrote, "We support measures that control the sale and use of firearms and make them safer (especially efforts that prevent their unsupervised use by children or anyone other than the owner), and we reiterate our call for sensible regulation of handguns."

Whether it's one gun death on the streets of our cities or multiple deaths by a madman on a rampage, we need to take seriously the combination of issues that result in so many gun deaths every day, every year.

It's not too soon at all. In fact, for those who have been killed and injured and whose families have been disrupted by gun violence, it's already too late.

Also see:

Letter to the Editor: False statement made in December article