Blog



A makeshift memorial is seen in Lewiston, Maine, on Oct. 28, 2023, near Schemengees Bar & Grille Restaurant, one of the locations of Oct. 25 mass shootings. Robert Card died by suicide after killing 18 people and injuring 13 at a bowling alley and a bar, authorities said. (OSV News/Reuters/Kevin Lamarque)



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***Editor's note**: Global Sisters Report's Monday Starter is a feature from GSR staff writers that rounds up news from or about women religious that you may otherwise have missed.*



A group of women religious is calling on other sisters, men religious and their friends to fast this Lent as a means to call attention to gun violence in the U.S.

The sisters' organization Nuns Against Gun Violence, in a press release, said that in fasting, those who participate are offering "a small sacrifice in solidarity with all those suffering from gun violence." They began their fast on Ash Wednesday with a noon online prayer, Scripture reading, silence and a reflection.

The Gun Violence Archive, a nonprofit that tracks incidents of gun violence in the U.S., reported 43,069 gun-related deaths in 2023 compared to 47,452 the previous year. However, mass shooting incidents increased from 644 in 2022 to 656 for 2023, Gun Violence Archive figures show.

Fasting is "a public prayer that purifies not only the one fasting but the entire community, preparing us to stand our ground against the powers and principalities," Nuns Against Gun Violence said in the press release.

Founded in 2023, Nuns Against Gun Violence, is made up of 40 congregations of women religious. In late November, the coalition hosted the webinar "Beating Guns: Hope for People Weary of Violence." Sisters meet online twice a month to share information.

Their Lenten fast, extended to students, colleagues or anyone who wants to support the sisters, means not eating a meal, abstaining from meat or sweets or making a "somewhat demanding act of kindness" or other form of sacrifice, the sisters say in the press release.

"Such sacrifice focuses the mind, providing clarity at the same time it feels deprivation," they said. "As Catholics, our faith calls us to protect life. And yet, our country continues to be plagued with an epidemic of gun violence."

They ask those participating to "reflect on this reality and the devastating effect of gun violence on our nation. The loss of life and continuous toll of grief and trauma on individuals, families, and communities compel us to take action to change our society to protect life. Our fast will be a prayer to God and an opportunity to publicly appeal to our civic communities for action to reduce gun violence."



An Israeli tank reenters Israel from Gaza near the Israel-Gaza border in southern Israel Jan. 11, 2024, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas. (OSV News/Reuters/Tyrone Siu)

Sisters participate in cease-fire event on Ash Wednesday

Various congregations of women religious co-sponsored and participated in a Lenten event in front of the White House on Ash Wednesday calling on the Biden administration to push for a cease-fire in Gaza. Franciscan sisters, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Mercy Sisters and lay leaders from the Maryknoll Office of Global Affairs in Washington joined other Christian leaders for a Mass launching the Lenten Ceasefire Campaign "to call attention to and in mourning for the tens of thousands of lives that have been destroyed in Gaza and Israel since October 7, 2023," said a Feb. 14 press release on the event.

Organizers said that, for those who participate, this "annual time of reflection, repentance, and renewal, in commemoration of the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert before his crucifixion and resurrection" will include events calling on President

Joe Biden and other Christian congress members "to abide by Jesus' way of courageous love." They urge the administration to push for a bilateral cease-fire, to support demilitarization instead of additional military aid or arms to Israel, focus on the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners and support robust humanitarian assistance.

"The organizations involved with this Lenten campaign believe that the focus must shift to diplomacy, accountability mechanisms, and strategic peacebuilding, and that neither war nor retribution is sustainable. We believe urgent action is needed to stop the mass slaughter, destruction, and generational trauma," the press release said.



Polish president, Andrzej Duda and his wife, Agata Kornhauser-Duda, visited the Educational Institute for the Blind Children in Kibeho during a recent visit to Rwanda. The Franciscan Sisters Servants of the Cross congregation run the school, founded in 2006 by Sr. Rafaela Nalecz, a missionary from Poland who was also blind. (Courtesy of Franciscan Sisters Servants of the Cross)

Franciscan sisters in Rwanda receive support from Polish president

Polish President Andrzej Duda on his first visit to Rwanda earlier this month pledged support to the Franciscan Sisters Servants of the Cross congregation in their ongoing efforts in helping Rwandan blind children embrace a better education.

The school, located in Kibeho, a mountainous village nestled in southern Rwanda was founded in 2006 by Sr. Rafaela Nalecz, a missionary from Poland who was also blind. The Educational Institute for the Blind Children in Kibeho was officially inaugurated in September 2009.

"All equipment needed to train these children are provided by Poland, including food, healthcare services and other basic needs at school," Sr. Nicholas, the school's principal, told Global Sisters Report in an interview. (Congregational members do not use last names.)

With more than 190 students, the school runs a primary school, a junior high and introduced a secondary school in September 2023. Six Franciscan Sisters Servants of the Cross from Poland and about 80 employees are also part of the school's administration.

The school provides training for students in information computer technology using assistive devices embedded with technology, aiding braille literacy education for blind or visually impaired children.

Most students are very receptive and enthusiastic, and hope to be competitive in the IT job market, the school manager said.

Poland currently supports four major projects in Rwanda with a value of $73.3 million, including the school for visually impaired children.

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Alice Nirere, one of the female students, said the skills and knowledge acquired was a life-changing moment after living with blindness for many years and without any other options to go to school.

"My family didn't have enough money to take me to existing schools for disabled children which are sometimes expensive, and when I heard that the Franciscan Sisters Servants of the Cross are giving a chance to blind children, I'm elated and

have joined the classes," Nirere said.

The congregation, from Laski, Poland, was founded by Elisabeth Rosa Czacka, who was also blind, in 1918. The congregation's charism is service for the physically blind, and spiritually blind, meaning those who are far from God, and expiation for spiritual blindness of the world.

The president commended the sisters for their "great work done" in the country and in Poland, especially in supporting the education of blind children as well as being good ambassadors.