Blog



In this image taken from body camera video released by Illinois State Police on July 22, former Sangamon County Sheriff's Deputy Sean Grayson, left, points his gun at Sonya Massey, who called 911 for help, before shooting and killing her inside her home in Springfield, Ill., July 6. (Illinois State Police via AP)



by Chris Herlinger

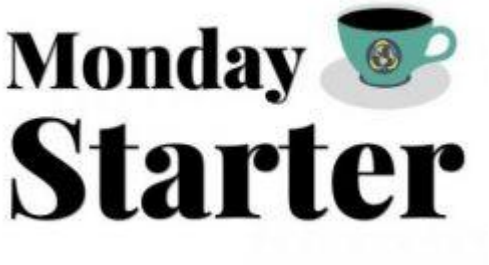
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Editor's note: *Global Sisters Report's Monday Starter is a feature from GSR staff writers that rounds up news from or about women religious that you may otherwise have missed.*



The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas have condemned the police shooting of an unarmed Black woman in Springfield, Illinois, last month.

Sonya Massey was killed July 6 after calling authorities about fears of a prowler at her home. Sangamon County Sheriff's Deputy Sean Grayson has been charged with first-degree murder in Massey's death.

In a July 30 statement, leaders of the Silver Spring, Maryland-based congregation said it condemns "yet another senseless act of violence, perpetrated against an unarmed victim," noting that bodycam footage released by the Sangamon County Sheriff's Department shows that the officer shot Massey three times in an apparent unprovoked killing.

"We grieve the death of Sonya, and our hearts are broken for her children, family, friends, and community. We denounce the taking of human life and the widespread acceptance of violence in our society," the Mercy Sisters said in their statement.

"This is just the latest in a list that is far too long of innocent people — most often people of color, people made poor — killed by police. Even their own homes provide no safety.

"The systemic issues of racism, violence and the many incidents of law enforcement officials not being held accountable for their actions are among the root causes of the death of Sonya Massey. Our current federal legislation fails to protect society, and advocacy efforts to change this continue to fall on deaf ears."

In the statement, the Mercy Sisters said the United States needs "alternative policies to policing that include community input, accountability, and, most importantly, the recognition of the dignity of all human lives, including and especially the lives of

people of color and those made poor."

The statement added: "We hope and act for a time when all will be treated as children of God and be safe in their own homes."

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Meanwhile, the Dominican Sisters of Springfield, Illinois, initially did not plan to issue a statement on Massey's death, saying "We've learned that people don't need more nice words. They need systemic change," wrote Sr. Marcelline Koch, the congregation's justice promoter and co-coordinator of the Springfield Dominican Antiracism Team.

Massey's death comes about 18 months after Springfield was rocked by the death of Earl Moore Jr., who allegedly died at the hands of two white emergency medical technicians responding to his medical emergency in December 2022. The EMTs were charged with murder; police body camera footage shows the EMTs strapped Moore face down on a stretcher.

So rather than issuing statements, Koch wrote to GSR, saying the congregation wants to take action.

"We show up at events. The Department of Justice Community Relations Service, at the invitation of a local Black church, facilitated a Community Healing and Listening Session (July 29). It was not easy to hold the pain and the rage of our neighbors but it is very necessary," she wrote.

"For 20 years we've been involved in the challenges of racism in our civic community. We stand ready to follow the lead of organizers in the Black community and will be active in supporting next steps once those have been discerned."



A demonstrator reacts when Molotov cocktails hit the ground in front of security forces during protests in Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela, July 29 against election results after President Nicolas Maduro and his opposition rival Edmundo Gonzalez both claimed victory in the July 28 presidential election. (OSV News/Reuters/Samir Aponte)

CLAR says it stands with Venezuelans in election crisis

In the face of controversy over the disputed results of the July 28 presidential election in Venezuela, the Confederation of Latin American and Caribbean Religious, or CLAR, said in a July 30 statement that it stands with the Venezuelan people and religious life in the country during "this moment of crisis. May peace and justice embrace the search for the common good of the citizens."

The incumbent president, Nicolás Maduro, declared an electoral victory, prompting large protests in Venezuela. Pre-voting polling gave an edge to opposition candidate Edmundo González, the BBC reported, and opposition groups said their tallies showed they had won the election.

Last week, the presidents of Brazil, Mexico and Colombia called on Venezuelan authorities to release full details of voting, while U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken declared there was "overwhelming evidence" that González had won the most votes, the BBC said.

LCWR seeks participation in upcoming assembly reflection

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious, or LCWR, is inviting public participation in an hourlong reflection that will be livestreamed on YouTube during the final day of its upcoming Aug 13-16 assembly in Orlando, Florida.

The reflection, planned for 2-3 p.m. Eastern on Aug. 16, will explore the question, "Who Then Shall We Be?" in light "of the many critical issues facing the nation and the world today." The link for the reflection will be available here.

This livestreamed event will utilize the arts and experiences of contemplation, LCWR said. Public participation is welcome, in which those not attending the assembly in person can join the expected 700 participants at the Orlando event. LCWR said it hopes "that as many people as possible will choose to participate, thus increasing the power of our collective prayer, presence, and response."

"It is hoped that all participants will engage in a contemplative experience created to be in solidarity with the fragility of the world while reflecting on our call to respond to that fragility as bearers of the gospel message," an LCWR statement said, adding that the prayer experience "is based on the belief that lament and grief over the pain of the global community must take place before we can embrace new realities and receive them as gift."

It added: "Through the use of the arts, brief readings, and reflective questions, participants will engage in a process of lamenting the suffering of the world — particularly the realities of climate change, racism, migration, and polarization and their intersection."

LCWR is suggesting that participants can best engage in the reflection period "when experienced with others.

More information on the reflection period and other assembly events can be found here.

New Orleans House of Charity ministry closes

The Sisters of Charity Federation has said farewell to its House of Charity in New Orleans, Louisiana, a collaborative hospitality and service ministry established in 2010, partly in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

In a recent announcement, the ministry — which GSR profiled in an April 2022 story — said it had lived out its intended purposes of "modeling collaboration among member congregations of the Charity Federation; witnessing religious life to a new generation of young adults; serving persons in their rebuilding efforts in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina and other natural disasters; and "offering opportunities for vocational discernment and volunteer service, especially to young adults."

Twenty-six sisters celebrated the ministry's accomplishments during a weekend May 16-19 celebration, and a video captured a bit of the farewell events.

[Global Sisters Report national correspondent Dan Stockman and Latin America regional correspondent Rhina Guidos contributed to this report.]