



# FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



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## End campus shootings by changing public opinion, school leader says

By CAROL ZIMMERMANN  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Franciscan Sister Margaret Carney, president of St. Bonaventure University in Allegany, New York, wanted to believe a victim's father's outrage could make a difference after the May 23 shooting rampage near the University of California at Santa Barbara.

The day after a 22-year-old's revenge-motivated killing spree, Sister Carney stood glued to her living room television watching Richard Martinez — father of one of the six victims — speak with raw anger and sadness about the need for stricter gun control laws.

His son, 20-year-old Christopher Michaels-Martinez, was walking into a deli that Friday evening in the Isla Vista neighborhood when he was fatally shot by Elliot Rodger, who also shot two others, stabbed and killed three university students and wounded 13 others before dying of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.

"When will this insanity stop? When will enough people say, 'Stop this madness; we don't have to live like this?' Too many have died. We should say to ourselves: Not one more," the distraught father told reporters.

Sister Carney said if she had heard this heartfelt plea three years ago, she would have been convinced something would change.

But that was before the school shooting two years ago at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, where a 20-year-old gunman killed 20 students and six educators before killing himself.

"If Sandy Hook wasn't enough for people to march to their senators and say, 'We need a new (gun control) law tomorrow,'" she said she doesn't know what will make the difference.

That's not to say people didn't speak up after the Newtown tragedy. Five days later, 160 college presidents signed an open letter to policymakers urging tougher gun control legislation. Since then more than 400 have signed it, including a number of Catholic college presidents.

The letter's author, Lawrence Schall, president of Oglethorpe University in Atlanta, revisited the issue in a May 27 column in *Inside Higher Ed*, an online publication, where he chided college and university presidents for being "largely silent since Newtown on the issue of gun regulation."

He said the school shooting initially sparked a lot of discussion about college presidents' role in gun control debate but not enough action. He quoted Holy Cross Father Theodore Hesburgh, former president of the University of Notre Dame, who said: "How can we encourage students to speak out unless we have the courage to do so ourselves?"

Sister Carney, a Sister of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities, feels the gun control issue is one for college leaders to take on, especially since shootings have taken place on college campuses. That's why she suggested the need for, and moderated, a panel discussion on the role of college presidents in the gun control debate at the

annual conference of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities earlier this year.

She told Catholic News Service May 29 she knows the issue is not a simple one.

"Of course college presidents are against gun violence; no one is in favor of that. But where do you stand on Second Amendment rights? That's where conversation starts to fall apart," she said.

She also noted that college presidents all have boards of trustees that are as "divided as the nation on the best approach" to gun control, which is why she thinks the best way forward is to commit to changing attitudes through education.

She also knows such a process will take years to make an impact, so it needs to be something college leaders are committed to for the long haul. But she believes it can happen, just as public views on cigarette smoking have changed over time.

As she put it: "Legal action will fail" without public support.

Currently, public support of gun restrictions is not strong. According to Pew Research Center studies, Americans briefly showed support for gun restrictions after the Sandy Hook shooting but then soon returned to stronger support for gun rights, particularly after a background check gun bill failed in the Senate.

A lack of gun control legislation in recent years at the federal level has not been due to a lack of effort. A New York Times report last December found that 1,500 gun bills had been introduced in the U.S. since the 2012 Newtown shooting but only 109 bills became law.

Since the May 23 shooting in California, the state's lawmakers have been busy re-examining the state's gun control laws. A new bill was introduced May 28 in the state Legislature that would allow friends or family members concerned that someone may commit a violent act to notify law enforcement officials. The bill also would allow police to investigate the threat and request a restraining order from a judge preventing the person from purchasing a firearm or keeping one they already own.

St. Bonaventure University has a somewhat similar procedure in place for dealing with "students of concern."

If a student is in emotional distress, exhibiting behaviors that could be destructive, members of the university's mental health staff, residence staff, campus ministry and faculty "come together almost instantaneously" to coordinate a plan to help the student, Sister Carney said.

The university also has been conducting yearly emergency safety drills since the 2007 shooting at the Virginia Tech campus in Blacksburg, Virginia, when a 23-year-old student shot and killed 32 people and wounded 17 others before committing suicide.

Sister Carney, the university's president for the past 10 years, said the practice drill is one of the "most sobering" things she does.

"It wasn't in the job description," she added.



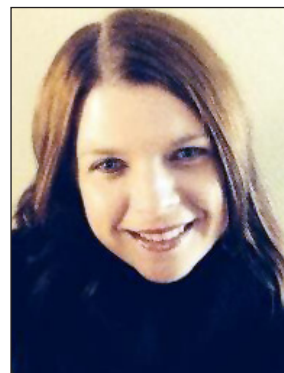
CNS/LUCY NICHOLSON, Reuters

**THE VIOLENCE CONTINUES:** A woman lights a candle May 26 at a makeshift shrine for 20-year-old Christopher Michael-Martinez, a student at the University of California at Santa

Barbara who was killed in a drive-by shooting May 23. The rampage left six people dead and 13 injured in the Santa Barbara neighborhood of Isla Vista.

## Hold the Plan and Live the Dream

I've always been a dreamer and a planner. I remember spending my days and nights in elementary school



plotting out my career, my plans to perform on stage in front of thousands of people, and of course, marrying the most popular Cardinal baseball player at the time.

When I was in college, not a week went by when I didn't review my degree checklist, plot out the classes I would take and update my resume like it was going out of style each day.

But, my plans weren't perfect and inevitably, the plans changed. I didn't sing on stage in front of thousands of screaming fans and I certainly didn't marry a professional baseball player.

Instead, I worked my way through college, found a fulfilling career as a writer and teacher and raised two children who are now teenagers. I quickly learned that even the best-laid plans are never set in stone. However, when you let go of the urge to plan out every single detail, something even better comes along.

Parenting has been, and still is, my most important job. Even more so, it was the best dream come true. I have had the pleasure of watching both of my children take their first steps, say their first words and accomplish 'firsts' they never dreamed of throughout their life so far. I've witnessed them make their First Communion, select their Confirmation names and ponder their faith.

I never dreamed I would experience

so much joy watching my children plan and dream — something I can't control, nor would I ever want to. I see a little bit of me in them when they plan out the classes they want to take, colleges they want to visit and even lay out the clothes they want to wear the next day.

They see the importance of planning but more importantly, they have the desire to dream.

As I watch my children dream, succeed, fail, pick up the pieces and plan again, I can't help but feel they have more guidance than they realize. They have a faith community guiding them, grandparents and family friends who pray for them and a mother who prays that they will never give up on their dreams.

Through all those years of planning as a child and eventually an adult, I learned that you can never stop dreaming. Our dreams are what keep us moving upward, keep our faith in the future and help us accomplish the small steps that lead to each big goal.

Even though I love my career and wouldn't trade parenting for anything else in the world, I can't help but plan for the next phase in my life. How will I spend my retirement? Who can I help or assist when my children are grown and building lives of their own? How can I continue to enrich my faith and instill dreams and plans in others?

I'm not old enough to know the answers to these questions, but until then, I will continue to plan, knowing that the course may change and the dreams may get bigger. And, you can bet that my faith will be along for the ride.

— Shannon Philpott

*Shannon Philpott is a freelance writer and college journalism instructor, but most of all a mother of two teens. You can see her work at [www.shannonphilpott.com](http://www.shannonphilpott.com).*

### Fresh Take: a way to look at faith from a different perspective

This is an online-only page dedicated to young adult Catholics, their interests, their needs, their challenges and their faith.

We want to give young adults something to "chew on," to think about when they're looking for something more than an on-line horoscope or the

latest star news.

This page offers columns we believe will interest our young adults. Let us know.

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