Blog



Flowers and a message of hope sit on the steps of the Old National Bank in Louisville, Kentucky, on April 11, the day after a shooting at the bank killed several people and wounded others. (AP Photo/Timothy D. Easley)



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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.*

Monday Starter

Four religious communities with ministries in Kentucky have issued a joint statement following the April 10 mass shooting in Louisville calling for tougher enforcement of gun regulations and the passage of "sensible gun regulations."

The April 11 statement by the sister groups said they are "devastated by the loss of five more lives in Monday's mass shooting in Louisville." The statement noted that the shooting was "the 146th mass shooting of 2023, with 209 people dead and more than 550 injured."

"Let each of us lift those affected by Monday's tragedy and countless other tragedies in love and prayer," the statement said. "At the same time, let each of us reach out to our elected representatives, demanding that they put aside party and power to protect those under their care."

The statement was issued by the Dominican Sisters of Peace; the Sisters of Loretto and the Loretto Community; the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team; and the leadership team of the Ursuline Sisters of Louisville.

Though the sisters' statement said they "draw strength and solace from our prayer for an end to this senseless violence," it added: "we demand more."

In the statement, the congregations call on "all branches of government, from the White House to the smallest city council, to take immediate and decisive action to reduce gun violence by enforcing existing gun regulations and passing sensible gun regulations such as safe storage and 'red flag laws' to prevent firearms from falling into the wrong hands."



Sr. Gemma Doll, Justice Promoter for the Dominican Sisters of Peace, meets with Ohio State Rep. Elliot Forhan during a recent Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America Legislative Action Day in Columbus, Ohio. (Courtesy of the Dominican Sisters of Peace)

At the same time, the congregations said they want elected leaders "to more fully fund efforts that will prevent such tragedies at the source — including mental health services, school counseling, neighborhood improvements, community outreach and mediation — in the 2024 federal budget and beyond.

"A multi-pronged approach that manages the destructive potential of guns and offers alternatives to violence is our best hope of saving the nearly 50,000 Americans who die from gun violence every year," the statement continued.

In an interview with Global Sisters Report, Sr. Gemma Doll, justice promoter with the Dominican Sisters of Peace, said the congregations, which have worked together on other initiatives, ''couldn't stay silent" in the wake of the Louisville shootings. "It rips at our souls."

Doll said any immediate solution to gun violence in the United States is not likely, but she believes it can happen eventually.

"I am not pessimistic," she said, noting that most Americans want tougher regulations. Doll said she believes just as there was a cultural shift on smoking, something similar can happen with firearms.

"The culture changed," she said about smoking. "In time, I think we'll come to our senses. I'm optimistic. It may take time, but I'm hopeful."



The original St. Catharine motherhouse was built in Siena Vale on a property inherited by blood sisters and congregational Srs. Angela and Benven Sansbury. After the motherhouse and school were destroyed by fire in 1904, the congregation rebuilt on Siena Heights. This historical site will be preserved under the new easement through the Bluegrass Land Conservancy. (Courtesy of the Dominican Sisters of Peace)

Dominicans announce protective easement for campus

The Dominican Sisters of Peace have permanently protected their 600-acre motherhouse campus in St. Catharine, Kentucky.

The congregation announced March 31 it had donated the development rights of the 605-acre St. Catharine Farm to a protective easement held by the Bluegrass Land Conservancy. The land has been home to Dominican sisters for more than 200 years; it is the site of the first congregation of Dominican women religious in the United States, who founded their order there in 1822. St. Catharine is about an hour southeast of Louisville and about an hour southwest of Lexington.

St. Catharine Farm includes 120 acres of forests with large stands of old-growth trees; the site of the original St. Catharine convent and school, which burned in 1904; and a farm that has used sustainable land management practices since the 1980s, including erosion reduction, forest improvements, and preserving wildlife habitat. The campus includes the motherhouse, care center and cemetery.

"We rejoice heartily that the sacred land where the Dominican Sisterhood began in the United States 200 years ago has become a gift to the future — the future of Springfield, of Washington County, of Kentucky, indeed of the world," Sr. Claire McGowan said in a statement announcing the donation. McGowan founded New Pioneers for a Sustainable Future, a local nonprofit working to build a sustainability movement in rural central Kentucky.

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"By donating the development rights, we have ensured that the 605 acres known as St. Catharine Farm will never be suffocated by concrete, poisoned by toxic

chemicals, or stripped naked by clear-cutting. Its 120 acres of forests will continue to gift the region with oxygen and protect wildlife, its pastures will nourish healthy livestock, its bottomlands will provide vibrant crops of food for humans whose food supply may be diminished by climate change."

The conservation easement will preserve the view of the farm — officials say the land's rolling hills, ponds, fruit trees and cross atop the motherhouse are among the most recognizable sights in the county — while allowing the sisters to use the land and run a working farm. The congregation is currently creating a 1-acre wetland for educational purposes on the site.

"We are grateful to the Bluegrass Land Conservancy for helping us create an easement arrangement that lets us enjoy St. Catharine Farm for the blessing that it is," Sr. Pat Twohill, prioress of the Dominican Sisters of Peace, said in the announcement. "Our sisters can continue to live at the Motherhouse and our Sansbury Care center, we can continue to provide food to the local community and service to our neighbors — all the while knowing that this land that we treasure will be protected long beyond our own lifetimes."



Mexican authorities and firefighters remove injured migrants, mostly Venezuelans, from inside the National Migration Institute building during a fire in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, on March 27. (OSV News/Reuters/Jose Luis Gonzalez)

Good Shepherd sisters: Immigration center fire shows need for reform

The National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd says the March 27 fire that killed dozens of migrants in a Mexican immigration facility shows the need for massive reform in U.S. immigration policy.

"We pray for those lost in the horrific fire in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. We pray also for the survivors and desperate family members who have given and survived so much," said Fran Eskin-Royer, executive director of the National Advocacy Center, in a written statement. "And while we pray, our thoughts turn to the ghastly circumstances of the fire. How could it be that officials and employees refused to unlock the cell doors of the Mexican government migration detention facility? This international incident requires a prompt and thorough investigation and appropriate, swift action."

Eskin-Royer said the need for detention facilities at the border shows current policies are not working.

"Increasing numbers of migrants are risking their lives to find safety in the United States. Our policies are inadequate and out-of-date," the statement said. "Our faith teaches us that we are all created equal, all endowed with human dignity, and that each and every one of us has value and purpose. Yet, time and again, we demonstrate our inhumanity to one another. And we grieve."

3 women religious among candidates for sainthood

Three vowed religious women are among the five women and one priest who are the newest candidates for sainthood priest.

On March 23, Pope Francis signed decrees recognizing that each of the six candidates heroically lived the Christian virtues, Catholic News Service reported, which also noted that beatification requires a miracle attributed to the candidate's intercession. Canonization, a full declaration of sainthood, requires an additional miracle.

The three religious, CNS reported, are:

- Mother Catherine Flanagan, who was born in London in 1892 and died in Stockholm in 1941. She was a member of the first Bridgettine community in Rome and later served as mother superior of communities in Switzerland, England and Sweden.
- Sr. Leonilde di San Giovanni Battista, born Amelia Rossi, was an Italian. She was born in 1890 and died in 1945; she was a member of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. She was known for an intense prayer life.
- Portuguese Sr. María do Monte Pereira, was born Eliza de Jesús in 1897 and died in 1963; she was a member of the Congregation of Sisters Hospitallers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and spent her life assisting those in need.

The two non-vowed women are Maria Domenica Lazzeri of Italy (1815-1848) and Teresa Enríquez de Alvarado of Spain (circa 1456-1529). The priest was Italian Salesian Fr. Carlo Crespi Croci (1891-1982).