Blog
Religious Life



From left: Bon Secours Srs. Pat Dowling, Elaine Davia and Nancy Glynn stand beside an ad reading, "Put the Guns Down. Let Peace Begin with Us," inside a Baltimore city bus. The ad campaign runs through June on the outside and inside of city buses, and on Baltimore's subway. (Courtesy of Sisters of Bon Secours)



by Chris Herlinger

View Author Profile
cherlinger@ncronline.org

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Monday Starter

Eight sister congregations in the Baltimore area are launching a citywide advertising campaign to highlight Gun Violence Awareness Month.

In a May 27 announcement of the campaign, one of the congregations, the Sisters of Bon Secours, USA, said the "Put the Guns Down" campaign aims to "raise awareness about gun violence, engage people in advocacy and promote peace in the community."

The centerpieces of the initiative are visual public service ads displayed both inside and outside of city buses, and on Baltimore-area Metro Subway transit lines.

The ads, said the announcement, "are designed to reach thousands of residents daily with a simple, urgent plea: choose peace, protect lives and end the cycle of gun violence."

"The Catholic sisters have long stood for the dignity of every human life," said Sr. Elaine Davia, the area leader of the Sisters of Bon Secours, USA. "Through this campaign, we hope to be a visible and vocal presence in the city, calling for an end to the senseless violence that takes so many lives, especially young lives."

In an interview with Global Sisters Report, Simone Blanchard, director of Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation for the Sisters of Bon Secours, and Sr. Pat Dowling, the congregation's vocations director, said if the campaign results in even one gun being turned in, it will be a success.

Blanchard said opting for a campaign based on mobile transportation like buses and subway cars rather than billboards was due to both cost and to the likelihood that more people will see the announcements. "You get more impressions [on buses and subways] than you do with stationary billboards," she said.

Advertisement

Dowling said it was important for the eight congregations to work together on the campaign. "Working collaboratively brings a greater voice to the public, a greater voice to the table."

"We can sit there and not do anything or be a voice for change," Dowling said. "We have to start somewhere."

As a Baltimore resident, she and other sisters are not strangers to the realities of gun violence.

"Hearing gun shots is part of my life," she said, noting the toll gun violence has exacted on Baltimore families and neighborhoods.

The coalition of sister congregations is supporting the campaign, the announcement said, "as part of their broader commitments to social justice, public safety and nonviolence. This collaborative effort underscores a shared concern for the well-being of Baltimore residents and a unified belief that faith must act in times of crisis."

Dowling told GSR that in the case of her congregation, the campaign expresses a charism of "compassion, healing and liberation."

Earlier this year, Baltimore city officials said 2024 was the second consecutive year of historic decreases in gun violence since the 1970s, the Baltimore Banner reported .



Baltimore-area Catholic congregations join the Sisters of Bon Secours, who organized an ad campaign, "Put the Guns Down. Let Peace Begin with Us." From left: Br. Ryan Roberts, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas; Sr. Judy Waldt and Sr. Marilyn Dunphy, Mission Helpers of the Sacred Heart; Kathryn Yanik, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur; Sr. Nancy Glynn, Sisters of Bon Secours; Sr. Mary Jo Stein, Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Province of St. Louise; Sr. Pat Dowling, Sisters of Bon Secours; Sr. Patricia Kirk and Sr. Jo-El McLaughlin, Benedictine Sisters of Baltimore Emmanuel Monastery; Sr. Elaine Davia, Sisters of Bon Secours; Sr. Patricia Phillips and Sr. Jacinta Fernandes, Benedictine Sisters of Baltimore Emmanuel Monastery; Simone Blanchard, director of Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation director, Sisters of Bon Secours. (Courtesy of Sisters of Bon Secours)

But gun violence still remains a problem, and the sisters' coalition said recent changes by the federal government, including loss of federal grants, are putting progress on gun violence prevention in Baltimore at risk. Also worrisome, the announcement said, is a bill being advanced by Congress to allow concealed carrying of firearms without permits across state lines.

The monthlong campaign will run in June for Gun Violence Awareness Month in the United States.

In addition to the Sisters of Bon Secours, USA, the other congregations participating in the "Put the Guns Down" campaign are:

- Benedictine Sisters of Baltimore Emmanuel Monastery;
- Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Province of St. Louise;
- Mission Helpers of the Sacred Heart;
- Oblate Sisters of Providence;
- School Sisters of Notre Dame, Atlantic Midwest Province;
- Sisters of Mercy of the Americas;
- Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, U.S. East-West Province.

Two pilgrimages will commemorate Seton's canonization

June will see two pilgrimages ending at the National Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg, Maryland, both part of the shrine's yearlong celebration of the 50th anniversary of the canonization of Seton.

Seton, the first U.S.-born saint, founded the first community of religious sisters in the U.S., the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's, and one of the nation's first Catholic schools for girls.

The first journey, the four-day Footsteps of Mother Seton, retraces her original path from Baltimore to Emmitsburg, which is about 60 miles northwest of Baltimore. The pilgrimage begins June 19 with Mass at the Basilica of the Assumption and stretches over four days, the shrine said in an announcement.

Planners say that pilgrims will visit three Vatican-designated Jubilee sites, and stop at four local parishes. They will also participate in two eucharistic processions, including one through downtown Westminster, Maryland, and one on June 22, the feast of Corpus Christi.

The second pilgrimage, a two-week event, is called the "Camino of Maryland," and is modeled after the Camino de Santiago in Spain. It begins June 9 in Point Lookout and spans 218 miles over 14 days, organizers said. It will end at Seton's tomb.

"It's fitting that the theme of the 2025 Jubilee is 'Pilgrims of Hope,' as Mother Seton was a pilgrim, first to the Catholic Church and then to Baltimore and eventually to rural Maryland, where she built a community devoted to Christ and then sent her followers to points across the globe," Rob Judge, the shrine's executive director, said in an announcement.

Salesians mark UN day for children in conflict

Salesian Missions, the U.S.-based development arm of the Salesians of Don Bosco, is joining efforts to promote the United Nations' annual International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression, marked on June 4.

The day, which received the U.N. designation in 1982, "acknowledges the pain suffered by children throughout the world who are the victims of physical, mental and emotional abuse," the Salesian Missions said in an announcement. It also noted the commitment by the U.N. and bodies like the Salesians to protect the rights of children.



Boarding students in Myanmar had housing and nutrition through donor funding from Salesian Missions. (Courtesy of Salesian Missions)

The work to protect children in areas of conflict and instability is guided by the international Convention on the Rights of the Child, which UNICEF says is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty in global history.

Among the countries where Salesian mission work is assisting children in need include the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Myanmar and Niger.

In Myanmar, Salesian missionaries have provided housing and food to 350 boys who are living in Salesian communities, funded by Salesian Missions. Most of the youths

are from war-afflicted areas. The Salesian communities supported include Nazareth, Thibaw, Hlaing Thar Yar and Mandalay.

Even before an earthquake in March, Myanmar faced enormous political and social challenges, stemming from conflict.

Other recent or upcoming international days also being marked by Salesians include Global Day of Parents, supporting parents facing vulnerable situations on June 1; World Environment Day on June 5; and World Day Against Child Labor, marked on June 12.