

# The ADVOCATE

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**Editor's Note:** *As we were finishing production of the The Advocate on gun violence, the Las Vegas massacre occurred. The Catholic Church has been "a consistent voice for the promotion of peace at home and in the world and a strong advocate for the reasonable regulation of firearms," according to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. An estimated 33,000 people die from gunshot wounds in the United States each year. The Fall issue of The Advocate focuses on gun violence and the moral dimensions behind the shocking statistics. As Pope Francis stated, "Give up the way of arms and go out to meet the other in dialogue, pardon and reconciliation, in order to rebuild justice, trust and hope around you."*

—Paula Cruickshank  
Editor, The Advocate

## Opposing Gun Violence: Where to Start?

By Kathy Desmond

Rev. Jim Atwood is a friend, Presbyterian minister, and long-time faith activist leading the struggle against gun violence. When I told him about a new committee forming at OLQP on Gun Violence, he said one of the best things we can do as a church to prevent gun violence is to start by learning about how this violence has impacted American culture, our communities and our churches. Gun violence is a deeply rooted, multifaceted problem, and if we are serious about doing something effectively, we need to delve into it.

His new book, *Gundamentalism and Where It Is Taking America* (James E Atwood, Cascade Books, Eugene, OR, 2017), makes a persuasive moral argument for action and contains solid social analysis and scientific data. Each of the 20 chapters concludes with questions for group discussion. Atwood calls gun violence a national epidemic.

Some sobering facts highlight the magnitude of the problem:

- 33,000 people die in the US each year "at the barrels of guns, through murder, suicide and accidents. This translates into approximately 90 families every day who grieve" for a loved one, for a lifetime (p ix).
- "In the seven and one half years of war in Iraq, 4,500 service men and women were killed, while 220,500 civilians were killed at the barrels of guns" in the US. (p 7)
- We are "swimming in guns" (Chapter 3). According to the FBI's best estimate, there are some 350 million guns in the US.

Virginia, Atwood's state, reports more gun deaths than deaths from automobile accidents. Many studies are conducted about auto safety and laws and regulations mandate safety practices based on the research. But such is not the case with gun deaths.

I asked Jim how he first got involved in this issue, one that became a lifelong passion. He describes the day in 1975 when he received a call from the ICU in Alexandria Hospital and rushed to

Atwood, continued on page 2

Atwood, continued from page 1

the bedside of a leading member of his church, who was dying from a gunshot wound—shot by a startled teen during a robbery. The year before, he returned home from Tokyo after nine years serving with his wife as missionaries of the United Church of Christ. He recalled reading in 1974 that Tokyo, then the largest city in the world, had one death by firearms among a handful in the nation. In contrast, the U.S. had 35,000 deaths by guns that year. The reason for the disparity, he realized, was “Japan’s commonsense laws” and their strict enforcement. “It was as easy to get a Saturday night special as a Big Mac.” (See *American and Its Guns: A Theological Expose*, same publisher, 2012, p 1-3) The same prevails today with more gun dealers than McDonalds, Starbucks, and Supermarkets combined.” (Gundamentalism, p 83)

The day after he buried his friend, Jim drove to the Coalition to Ban Handgun Violence, now called the Coalition to End Gun Violence, in Washington DC. He has been a leader with the Coalition ever since, serving as chairperson of the national Board, giving speeches, lobbying, demonstrating, raising funds and embracing those whose loved ones were shot and killed. (*American and Its Guns*, p 4)

Both books are based on this 30-year experience. The underlying theme is a description and rejection of America’s religious idolatry that claims God’s blessings on guns and endorses self-defense and violence as a Christian or religious value. This heresy changes the great commandment to love our neighbor to “defend ourselves against our neighbor.”

We hear much about the Second Amendment, but Atwood stresses another Constitutional right -- to live in domestic tranquility, which is included in the first paragraph of the Constitution. He rejects the gun industry’s false claim that firearms actually protect us and cites solid research that a defensive gun puts the owner and his/her family at greater risk. (Gundamentalism, Chapter 5, p 55.)

Atwood also describes the gun industry’s escalating

promotion of ever more deadly killing weapons and the NRA’s efforts to block any restriction on new weapons, sale and purchase of guns and bullets, and concealed carrying of guns. In Chapter 15 he describes “The Ridiculous State of America’s Gun Laws”—laws now on the books that worsen the problem of gun violence. He looks at the change in NRA leadership in 1977 and the sources of its current power.

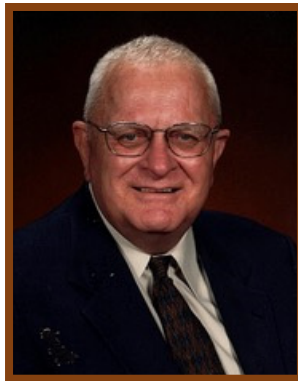
Atwood promotes the faith community’s long struggle for reasonable gun laws. Chapter 19 of *Gundamentalism*, “Good Gun Laws Work,” provides an agenda for advocacy to prevent gun violence. A lifelong hunter from North Carolina, Atwood cites research that the vast majority of hunters oppose the leadership of the NRA in its opposition to any restrictions on guns. For example, he shares research

that 90 percent of the general public and 85 percent of gun owners support universal background checks, including those for sale at gun shows and online sales. Gun shows and sales over the internet account for 40% of the guns used in violence. (Chapter 12)

He also counters a common obstacle to churches’ taking action against gun violence: the argument that churches should stick to religious and spiritual matters and not get involved in political issues.

So, what can OLQP do to prevent gun violence? His book contains many practical suggestions. In all humility, Jim answered, “Well, one thing you can do is read and discuss my book and invite me to come speak to your church.”

OLQP did just that. On September 15, Jim was the first guest in the annual Fr. Ed Kelly, C.S.Sp. (ED Talk) lecture series. He shared his insights on why faith communities have a moral responsibility to take action against gun violence and put commonsense gun laws on the books. ♦



Rev. Jim Atwood

## Race, Drugs, Guns, Perception & Misdirection

By Veronica Dabney

It's clear that an opinion essay on gun violence could go in several directions. But in the end, I chose my route because I know what you may be thinking. It's what nearly everybody reflexively thinks when approaching this subject: "If we could just stop the gun violence in those "urban" neighborhoods, the gun crisis would be pretty much over."

Really? Is that IT? Reliable polls show that of groups studied, black and other urban households are among the LEAST likely to own guns.<sup>1/</sup> Despite the indisputable fact that the vast majority of black people killed with guns (by the police or others) are unarmed, there is an enduring perception that black communities are awash with guns.

I used as my guide that perception and an article I read in the Washington Post just prior to heading south to the National Black Catholic Congress. (The Congress convened in Orlando, Florida, July 5–9, 2017.) The article unsettled me so much that I sent a rebuttal before I left town. In Florida many of the Congressional seminars and presentations reinforced my initial feeling that the article was a knee-jerk response that minimized the experiences of black people in typical fashion.

Titled, "True crime? Not quite," the article was written by Hank Stuever

and appeared in the July 5 Post Style section. It was a review of a TV series titled "Snowfall," a show I have yet to view. Stuever wrote that the show is about the gun and drug epidemic of the 1980s. He started by questioning the memories of the show's creators, Dave Andron and Boyz N The Hood Director EP Eric Amadio, and its executive producer, John Singleton. Stuever challenged the recollection of their neighborhood before it was devastated by the crack epidemic.

I was struck by Mr. Stuever's certainty, because he was born in Kansas in 1968, so I'm pretty sure he knows very little about Singleton's memories of his LA neighborhood in the early 1980s. He went on to castigate Singleton and the others for portraying their childhoods as; (in Mr. Stuever's words) "blissful", "technicolor", "tranquil," "filled with boundless sunshine, good neighbors and ice cream trucks." In response I wrote:

"I was a kid growing up in a segregated neighborhood, before the Civil Rights Act was passed . . . guess what my childhood friends and I talk about when we get together now: the dances we taught each other; playing jacks on the sidewalk; catching fireflies in jars; jumping Double Dutch; which boy was the "cutest"; old Mr. Simmons who threatened to cut off our ears if we picked his flowers; the ice cream man; the basement dances; the neighbors who "told on us" when we did something wrong; the Motown sound and James Brown at the Howard; the best and worst

teachers; which dress/pants/shoes were the "style" at the time; and on and on. AND, those memories inside our community are always in technicolor.

"Though just about everybody then was "churched" (there were few other places we could go), there were those who drank, but VERY FEW, as far as we knew, who used illegal drugs. The VAST majority of us stayed away from those kinds of things. We also knew not to walk out of our neighborhood because white people put their dogs on us or they called the police even though we were just walking. And, you didn't have to do much for the police to harass you for NO reason whatsoever.

"My friends and I [who grew up right here in the Arlington Nauck community], would prefer to remember the INSIDE of the neighborhood, which COULD be beautiful—a caring and beloved community. Our parents loved us and wanted to protect us, even though they knew they might not be able to do that."

Though "Snowfall" is typical reality-based fiction, Stuever also questioned the creators "conspiracy theory" that guns and drugs may have been imported into the neighborhoods with the possible help of the government—maybe the FBI or CIA. Knowing that gun ownership or violence was not widespread and manufacture of guns was non-existent, I wrote:

"That is why it is NOT farfetched to wonder if in the 1980s, SOMEBODY

Race, Drugs, Guns, continued on page 4

inundated black communities, especially urban communities, with carloads of drugs and guns which led to the most destructive decade and a half in those communities since the Civil War, the nightriders and lynchings of the early 20th century.

SOMEBODY might have surmised that if they provided a cheap, easy way for struggling communities to make money, they would destroy themselves from within . . ." Considering the history, why WOULDN'T black people assume that the successors of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover might supply drugs and guns for that purpose?

"[Mr. Stuever] . . . there are those of us who remember well the spiraling rate of drug addiction and the out of control gun deaths in once tranquil urban and suburban neighborhoods. Deaths during the drug wars of the 1980s went up into the high 100s even in small cities like Washington, D.C. The crack epidemic was the cause, AND, the government's solution, rather than treating the CAUSE, was to lock up not only crack dealers, but also the addicts—with no treatment. AND, they went about making the sentences for those offenses TRIPLE that of those for cocaine and other drugs that were used by the majority community. This left many communities with fewer men, fewer fathers, and a Lot Less HOPE.

"President Reagan did absolutely NOTHING about this epidemic—just as he ignored for a long time the burgeoning HIV epidemic. President Clinton's response was to beef up police forces, which actually brought the murder rates down, but also allowed for the recruitment of almost ANYBODY to police forces nationwide. We are still suffering the consequences of those decisions because of the number of police forces that hire men who should NEVER wear a badge or carry a gun. . . . Is there any wonder there is great suspicion and anger in many black communities?"

In Orlando, all the workshops, seminars and keynote speeches were based on Catholic orthodoxy as a path to a meaningful Christian life. But, many presentations also spoke to the realities of being black and Catholic in a country that sometimes looks askance at both. Just as Mr. Stuever believed there

was No Way a black kid could experience a happy childhood, there are too many like him who want to believe that ALL of the evil in this country emanates from the "bad" neighborhoods on the edges of their own idyllic communities. (I wasn't aware that I lived in a "bad" neighborhood until I overheard it being said at my integrated high school.)

The gun problem does not begin (or end) in the black community. Yes, the problem affects that community disproportionately. I am not naïve. I know there are neighborhoods that are plagued by crime. But it's due most often to poverty, neglect, lack of employment, poor schools, etc. But aren't those the exceptions, and Not the rule for All communities? Shouldn't those intransigent social problems be prioritized simultaneously?

So, where else to look? What about illegal gun sales at gun shows and lax gun control laws that allow felons to buy guns? Half of the gun deaths in this country are suicides. What about improving mental health interventions? What about the 10% of gun deaths that are accidental? The TV News reported in July that in the first six months of this year (2017), a record number of guns were confiscated at the nation's airports. Were all of those guns in the hands of black passengers?

Here's what I'M thinking. This problem must not continue to be compartmentalized and isolated mostly to one community just so everybody else can go on with their lives. If this nation could have the honest and UNBIASED conversations that were had by congregants in Orlando, we could be on a path to solving this gun violence problem.

But, that won't happen because the congregants at the National Black Catholic Congress, especially the young people, are ALWAYS perceived as the PROBLEM, never the Key to finding solutions. So, unless the stereotyping stops and the focus is turned to the complicated and diverse causes of the gun epidemic and resurgent drug use, this crisis may never end. It probably will get worse. ♦

1/ <https://www.thoughtco.com/who-really-owns-guns-3026230>



## A Shooting and a Life Changed Forever

By Jack Sullivan

When I think of gun violence, my mind inevitably is drawn to March 30, 1981, the day when a mentally ill young man trying to impress a female movie star, shot President Reagan and two others. Among the victims was White House Press Secretary Jim Brady.

Jim and I shared an apartment with others in 1963 while we both were working on Capitol Hill, he for Senator Everett Dirksen and I for a Democratic congressman from Wisconsin. Although we were poles apart politically, we socialized during that summer. Thus, it was with great interest that I followed Jim's progress up the political ladder to his selection by Reagan as his presidential spokesman where he became known for his rapport with the press, intelligence, and wit.



Caption

All that changed in an instant because of a demented individual with a gun. Close to death after the shooting, Jim lived, but he never walked again. Through friends who set up meetings, I was able to spend some time with him. The

change was shocking. Although there were flashes of his former wit, the wound had left Jim with slurred speech and difficulty controlling his emotions when speaking. He is shown here with his wife, Sarah, several years after the shooting.



Caption

With the assistance of Sarah, Jim became a fervent lobbyist for stricter gun control and assault weapons restrictions. Their efforts resulted in the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act, passed by Congress in November 1993. Known as "the Brady Bill," the gun control law mandated federal background checks on firearm purchasers and imposed a five-day waiting period on purchases. The Brady's believed that if the law had been in place in 1981, the young man who shot Jim would not have been able to buy a gun.

In intervening years, the National Rifle Association has lobbied strongly to weaken the Brady Bill and strongly opposed any new gun control legislation. By contrast, Pope Francis in his 2014 New Year's message to the world implored: "Give up the way of arms." The U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in its 1994 pastoral message, *Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action*,

called on Catholics and others to support gun control measures. Those include: 1) Requiring universal background checks on gun purchases; 2) Limiting civilian access to high-capacity weapons and ammunition magazines; 3) Making gun trafficking a Federal crime; and 4) Improving access to mental health care for those who may be prone to violence.

In 2000, the bishops followed with a message on domestic violence that included this statement on guns: "We support measures that control the sale and use of firearms and make them safer (especially efforts that prevent their unsupervised use by children or anyone other than the owner), and we reiterate our call for sensible regulation of handguns." Most recently in 2016, the bishops have reconfirmed their own commitment to gun control and, taking a cue from Pope Francis, stated: "More than ever, the Church and all people of good will must work together to confront the pervasive culture of violence."

Jim Brady was given the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Nation's highest civilian award, by President Clinton in 1996. In the White House press briefing room four years later, President George W. Bush presided over a ceremony renaming it the "James S. Brady Press Briefing Room." On August 4, 2014, thirty-three years after his shooting, Jim died at his home in Alexandria at the age of 73. The medical examiner declared him the victim of a homicide. ♦

## OLQP Gun Violence Committee

By Sally Harrs

“It is time to heed the words of Pope Francis and take meaningful and swift action to address violence in our society. We must band together to call for gun-control legislation. We must act in ways that promote the dignity and value of human life. And we must do it now.”  
—Archbishop Blasé Cupich, Chicago Archdiocese

The OLQP Gun Violence Committee is chaired by Gerry Laporte and meets the first Wednesday of every second month.

Members of the committee recently reviewed opportunities to bring gun violence issues to the attention of the parishioners. A Stone Soup Supper in early 2017 focused on the importance of listening to one another to increase understanding and diminish domestic disagreements.

Gerry circulated some statistics reflecting a ten-year average on gun-related deaths:

- 2 caused by Islamic immigrants; 5 by far right-wing terrorists; 9 by Islamic terrorists.
- 21 by armed toddlers.
- 11,737 shot by another American.

To put this in perspective, deaths also occurred

- by lightning (13)
- from lawnmowers (69)
- by falling out of bed (737)

Two documentaries that were recommended and are available from the production companies:

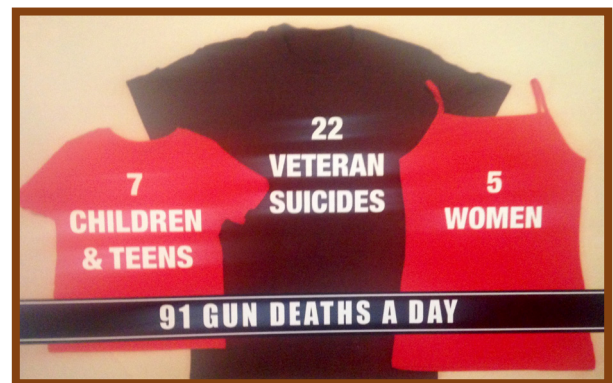
Under the Gun (2016—EPIX) and Making a Killing, Guns, Greed, and the NRA (Brave New Films). Check the Internet for viewing opportunities.

Gerry provided Prayers of the Faithful created by Paula Corbett of OLQP to be used to commemorate special occasions and to focus on the parish’s aspirations for gun control issues:

### PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

- For those who have lost a loved one to gun violence. (Replace “loved one” with specific “father, mother, brother, sister, etc.”)

- For those who have lost their lives to gun violence and for their families and friends who mourn them.
- Dear God, guide us to help those who think a gun will solve their problems.
- Bless those in Congress who stand up to the gun lobby, for they are the peacemakers of today.
- That our Members of Congress will heed their conscience instead of the gun lobby.
- For those communities that are particular targets of gun violence, that we share their pain and grief and recognize our common humanity.
- That Members of Congress find the strength to withstand the temptations of the gun lobby. (Substitute “courage” or similar for “strength.”)
- For all those who trust in the false shield of a gun, that they will put their trust in God.
- Dear God, help us to heal the hurts caused by guns in the wrong hands at the wrong times.
- Help us to remember the forgotten wounded, and the lasting after effects of gun violence, both physical and psychological (Substitute “in body and soul”).



Caption

Suggestions for future activities of the OLQP Gun Violence Committee:

- Calls and letters to elected officials to express concern about Gun Violence Prevention.
- Commemoration of December 14th Anniversary of Newtown.
- A memorial with a paper dinner plate to represent each one of those who are no longer with us.
- National Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath Weekend (circa December 14).
- Light tealights representing how many gun deaths since Newtown.

Committee, continued on page 7

Committee, continued from page 6

- A gun violence prevention Sabbath sermon.
- Perform a specific number of acts of kindness to honor the number lost to gun violence in your community since Newtown.
- Join demonstrations on the 14th of each month at the NRA in commemoration of the Newtown massacre.
- Wear orange in memory of 15-year old student who was shot and killed in Chicago on June 2, National Gun Violence Awareness Day. Orange is what hunters wear in the woods to protect themselves and others from harm. Orange is a bright, bold color that demands to be seen. Orange expresses our collective hope as a nation—a hope for a future free from gun violence.
- Promotional signs are available which say: WE CAN END GUN VIOLENCE! and EVERY TOWN FOR GUN SAFETY.
- Support positive mental health by working for the enforcement and creation of commonsense gun laws that provide treatment for mentally ill individuals and prevent gun violence before it happens.
- Plan a presentation in the Father Kelly series on gun violence.
- Insert selected prayers during the Prayers of the Faithful dedicated to gun violence. ♦

## OLQP Helps Families of St. Joseph Parish Rebuild after Hurricane Matthew

By Sue Carlson, M.D.

October 4, 2017, marks the one-year anniversary of the day when Hurricane Matthew hit Haiti. The powerful hurricane killed over 1,000; flattened entire towns; destroyed over 80% of the crops in certain areas and led to an increase in cholera due to contaminated water and lack of hygiene.

Shortly after Hurricane Matthew Pere Luckson wrote:

*Dear Parishioners of Our Lady Queen of Peace,*

*A big thank you for your spiritual and moral support in this time of great pain and suffering experienced by my people. Thank you for the sincere love and friendship that OLQP has shown to my country and to me. This warms my heart.*

*There was no loss of human life in Medor from Hurricane Matthew, but the roofs of many families' homes were lost. The crops, such as bananas and pigeon peas and beans, were destroyed. Many animals died because of the heavy rains and strong winds. This situation is dire. Haiti was already vulnerable; Hurricane Matthew just knocked us to our knees.*

*Can you help us find financial aid so that people can purchase metal sheets, nails, and boards to repair their homes? Also funds for seeds and animals would be very helpful.*

*Again many thanks for your CUSTOMARY understanding.*

*Union of fraternal prayers!*

*God bless you!*

*Love,  
Fr. Luckson*

Shortly after the hurricane both St. Joseph parish and OLQP sprang into action. The day after the storm, members of St. Joseph's Parish Council and the Caritas Committee began surveying the vast 74-square-mile parish to assess the damage and identify locations and families hit hardest. Besides destruction to homes, and loss of crops and livestock, they discovered that the kindergarten building at the La Source chapel school was damaged, forcing the children to attend class in a building with a missing wall. Encouragingly, they found that the areas least affected by the storm were those where the most trees had been planted, validating the work being done by Medor's agro-forestry program.

While the Medor groups were assessing the storm's destruction, parishioners of OLQP took action on behalf of their Medor family. Within

St. Joseph, continued on page 8





Home destroyed by Hurricane Matthew

several weeks OLQP had donated nearly \$52,000 to help enable the most vulnerable families to begin the arduous process of rebuilding.

We recently received Pere Luckson's final report on how the OLQP rebuilding funds were used.

The funds provided:

- Construction materials so that 154 families could repair or rebuild their homes.
- Agricultural tools for 100 families.
- Bean seeds for 250 families and a banana plant for 120 families, enabling them to replant their crops.
- A female baby goat to 50 families to replace lost livestock.
- Funding to construct a new school building for the kindergarten class at the La Source chapel school.
- Funding to establish a new tree nursery in the Altary chapel area.

We recently received the following thank you note from Pere Luckson:

*To the Attention of the Parishioners of OLQP Following Your Consideration for the People of the Parish of St. Joseph of Medor after Hurricane Matthew:*

*Glory be to God!*

*As pastor and spokesperson of the people who have benefited from the help of the valiant and devoted faithful of the parish of Our Lady Queen of Peace, I write with a sense of joy and satisfaction. I witnessed your kindness and generosity of heart when you*

*learned that the poor and vulnerable people lost in the mountains of St. Joseph's parish of Medor were victims of Hurricane Matthew in October 2016.*

*Your hand stretched out to the poor of Medor to help them repair or rebuild some homes completely destroyed or damaged by Hurricane Matthew. We express our deepest thanks to you. Your heart opened because you so generously understood the cry of the poor by providing them pigeon pea and bean seeds as well as banana plants. Since Hurricane Matthew ravaged everything in its path, many crops were destroyed. Thanks to you, we were able to buy the seeds and plants. We are very grateful for that.*

*Because of you we were able to buy agricultural tools and materials for rebuilding destroyed or damaged houses. We replaced goats that had been carried away by Hurricane Matthew. We provided seeds so people could replant lost crops. We constructed a new school building to replace the one lost in the storm. A thousand thanks for having listened to our cry of silence. We implore the blessing of the Lord on each of our benefactors: all those who have helped us financially, morally and spiritually.*

*Congratulations and Congratulations!*

*May the Virgin Mary, the Star of the World, fill you with joy and cover you with her cloak of grace.*

*Again, Thank You for your kindness to us!*

*God Bless You!*

*Love,*

*Fr.Luckson, Parish St. Joseph of Medor*

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