News



Some 100 Students from Cleveland Catholic schools including St. Ignatius, St Joseph Academy, Beaumont, Clevelsnd Central Catholic, Walsh Jesuit (in Akron), and Magnificat march against gun violence March 24 in Cleveland. (Christine Schenk)

by NCR Staff

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March 24, 2018
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Editor's note: *This blog will be updated throughout the day.*

The March for Our Lives, predicted to draw as many as 500,000 people to Washington D.C. today, March 24, and thousands more to over 800 sister marches worldwide, is the latest in a youth-led movement for gun reform that has arisen in the wake of the Parkland, Florida school shooting that killed 17.

Our reporters will be bringing you news from around the nation about Catholic participation in these marches; visit this page for updates throughout the day.

— NCR staff, 10:32 a.m. CDT Saturday, March 24

Reporter Julie Bourbon is on the ground in Washington covering the March for Our Lives protests. Follow her on Twitter at @bourbon_julie.

> Just started my day covering @AMarch4OurLives for @NCRonline in DC. Met Ethan Shavelson from @StonemanDouglas middle school. Kids like him are the future. pic.twitter.com/kMohnVZ8eD
>
> — Julie Bourbon (@bourbon_julie) March 24, 2018

— NCR staff, 10:42 a.m. CDT Saturday, March 24

Catholic students march in Cleveland

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Two Students from St. Joseph Academy prepare signs for the march against gun violence in Cleveland. (Christine Schenk)

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At least 100 Students from Cleveland Catholic schools, including St. Ignatius, St. Joseph Academy, Beaumont, Cleveland Central Catholic, Walsh Jesuit (in Akron), and Magnificat march against gun violence. (Christine Schenk)

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At least 100 Students from Cleveland Catholic schools, including St. Ignatius, St. Joseph Academy, Beaumont, Cleveland Central Catholic, Walsh Jesuit (in Akron), and Magnificat march against gun violence. (Christine Schenk)

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Protesters march in Cleveland, Ohio (Christine Schenk)

St. Joseph Sr. Christine Schenk, NCR's Simply Spirit columnist, shares photos of students from Catholic schools participating in today's march.

— Christine Schenk and NCR staff, 11:10 a.m. CDT, March 24

Catholic high school students attend Mass before marching in DC

Just a few hours before March for Our Lives began in Washington, students from Catholic high schools gathered in St. Patrick's Catholic Church for a dialogue and mass sponsored by Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington.

> We are all interconnected. Today's gospel tells us that the oppressed will go free. Mass at St. Patrick's DC. @CCADW @AMarch4OurLives

@NCRonline pic.twitter.com/rDE6dma0VO

— Julie Bourbon (@bourbon_julie) March 24, 2018

Catholic high schools represented at the march included at least 14 students from St. John's Jesuit High School and Academy in Toledo, Ohio; 27 students from Mercyhurst Preparatory School in Erie, Pennsylvania, about a dozen students from Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart in Bethesda, Maryland; and over 150 students from Scranton Preparatory School, a Jesuit high school in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

More than 150 @scrantonprep students are participating in today's #MarchForOurLives in DC. They explain why: https://t.co/EsfJXVSwkM pic.twitter.com/EYxOpJMYqK

— Jesuit News (@jesuitnews) March 24, 2018

Matthew Ochalek @mpslakers @SistersofMercy is reminded of the prophet Isaiah: and a child shall lead them. #MarchForOurLives @NCRonline pic.twitter.com/bwpRsFinga

— Julie Bourbon (@bourbon_julie) March 24, 2018

27 students from @mpslakers in Erie are marching. Designed and sold "Enough" sweatshirts, rented a bus. Many will be voting in November. @AMarch4OurLives @NCRonline pic.twitter.com/GPxeUWQNh5

— Julie Bourbon (@bourbon_julie) March 24, 2018

Students from @StJohnsJesuit Toledo drove to DC for @AMarch4OurLives. Follow the march @NCRonline pic.twitter.com/yQzW6tMY2t

— Julie Bourbon (@bourbon_julie) March 24, 2018

Students speak out at St. Patrick's Church DC. Teens from @GatorsSR in Bethesda MD are marching. Follow @AMarch4OurLives @NCRonline pic.twitter.com/xPSFNd3pxM

— Julie Bourbon (@bourbon_julie) March 24, 2018

Fifty young people from the Brighton Park and Back of the Yards neighborhoods in Chicago, led by Fr. Manuel Dorantes, also joined the march, along with a group of college students from St. Bonaventure University.

> Catholic high school students have had enough. @AMarch4OurLives @CCADW @NCRonline pic.twitter.com/kBXizU7FOU
>
> — Julie Bourbon (@bourbon_julie) March 24, 2018

> Hey @SzZeif @Emma4Change @davidhogg111 @cameron_kasky we are on our way to DC to join you in #MarchForOurLives 50 young people from Brighton Park and Back of the Yards in Chicago say with you "No more silence, end gun violence"! #NeverAgain @MariaESalinas @katie pic.twitter.com/fVOUaeiYZt
>
> — Fr. Manuel Dorantes (@TweetingPriest) March 24, 2018

Other prominent Catholic groups also weighed in ahead of the March for Our Lives, which began at noon March 24. Pax Christi USA called on people to join the march in person or on social media while Network, the Catholic social justice lobby, connected the march to a call for peace from Blessed Oscar Romero, who was assassinated March 24, 1980.

> Today, as communities around the country join the #MarchForOurLives to say NO to gun violence, let us remember the words of Archbishop Óscar Romero, assassinated on this day in 1980. pic.twitter.com/56kna1SfhX
>
> — NETWORK (@NETWORKLobby) March 24, 2018

> Retweet!
>
> Join us in person or on social media and support the #MarchforOurLives. @AMarch4OurLives @Everytown pic.twitter.com/oCkUKD8EXg
>
> — Pax Christi USA (@PaxChristiUSA) March 23, 2018

In Monroe, Michigan, Immaculate Heart of Heart sisters attend the March for Our Lives rally.

> IHM Sisters, Associates and staff were well-represented in Monroe's #MarchForOurLives rally, organized by students from St. Mary Catholic Central and Monroe High Schools. #NeverAgain pic.twitter.com/F7D67rFuKi
>
> — IHM Sisters (@ihmsisters) March 24, 2018

— Maria Benevento and James Dearie, 12:24 p.m. CDT, March 24



From left: Loretto Community Co-member Mary Lou Pierron, Loretto Sr. Kathy Wright, co-members Mary Bundy, Beth Blissman and Sally Dunne, co-member in process Molly Kammien, and Loretto Sr. Mary Ann McGivern. (Paulette Peterson,

Loretto Community co-member/Courtesy of the Loretto Community)



From left: Loretto Community co-members Mary Bundy and Sally Dunne, Loretto Sr. Mary Ann McGivern, co-members Beth Blissman and Mary Lou Pierron, and Loretto Sr. Kathy Wright attend the rally for gun control March 24 in Huntington, New York. (Paulette Peterson, Loretto Community co-member/Courtesy of the Loretto Community)

— Dan Stockman, 1 p.m. CDT, March 24

> Many of our Catholics young and old turned out for the #Chicago #MarchForOurLives today in Union Park. We join them in praying for peace and an end to gun violence. pic.twitter.com/l8TAEB05Dw
>
> — Chicago Catholic (@chicagocatholic) March 24, 2018

.@CCADW sponsored Mass this morning at St. Patrick's Catholic Church so marchers could pray before #MarchForOurLives pic.twitter.com/kjwp2EfUXq

— Julie Asher (@jlasher) March 24, 2018

Taking a break at St. Patrick's DC with Franciscan postulants and fellow marchers Loren Moreno and Steven Young and Fr. Jacek Orzechowski, who is "inspired" by today's events. #MarchForOurLives @NCRonline pic.twitter.com/w0vFlTCBJe

— Julie Bourbon (@bourbon_julie) March 24, 2018

— NCR staff, 1:45 p.m. CDT, March 24

Related: March for Our Lives heralds God's presence on our streets

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Students bring Catholic presence to march in Parkland



Students from several Parkland, Florida-area Catholic schools join the March for Our Lives on March 25 in Parkland, Florida, where 17 people were killed Feb. 14 by a gunman at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. (Madeline Tolerico)

In Parkland, Florida, thousands of people walked the two miles from Pine Trails Park to Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, the route for the grieving community's March for Our Lives.

The experience and scene was "really powerful," Madeline Tolerico, a senior at St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Fort Lauderdale.

"Everyone had signs and chants were started as we were walking," she told NCR.

A group of friends and classmates met at her house in the morning not only to carpool but to bring a Catholic presence to the march.

"My Catholic faith values I think are really relevant to the issue," Tolerico said, referencing the value of life. "Our laws right now are not protecting lives."

The night before, she and friends made signs, including extras to hand out to people. The signs bore slogans, like "Never Again" and "Enough Is Enough," that have become synonymous with the stand against gun violence that was launched by students of Stoneman Douglas a month ago, after a former student terrorized their school and killed 17 people.



Aquinas students make posters the night before the March for Our Lives in Parkland, Florida. (Madeline Tolerico)

At the rally that preceded the march, students and parents spoke about their own experiences since the shooting in their community, and called those in attendance to take action to bring about change in the government. One proposed idea asked parents, grandparents and even people without children to sign a contract pledging to vote on behalf of children for candidates who will protect children in schools.

The shooting touched close for her and her family, who live just minutes from Stoneman Douglas. Their home parish, Mary Help of Christians Catholic Church in Parkland, held the funeral service for Gina Montalto.

The day of the shooting, Tolerico was in a college interview when she heard the news. Afterward, she touched base with friends at Stoneman Douglas as quickly as she could, not hearing until 9 p.m. that night from one family friend, who said he was OK.

"That was really scary for all of us," she said.

Even without the personal connections, Tolerico, who joined walkouts and a memorial service held at Aquinas, said she'd be at the march anyway, driven by her faith and views that no one should have access to assault weapons like the one used at Stoneman Douglas and in other mass shootings across the country.

"For one person to have that power that an assault rifle will give them to take so many lives so quickly, I feel that our faith doesn't support that," she said.

The sight of so many people at the Parkland march — estimates were as many as 20,000 people — showed Tolerico how strongly her community felt about the issue of gun violence, and that this wasn't just something that happened a month ago. A resounding theme throughout the speakers at the March for Our Lives reiterated that their efforts to bring about sensible gun reform had just started.

"This march marks the beginning; it's not the end. That everything before this was just a warmup and now the marathon starts," she said.

—Brian Roewe, 3 p.m. CDT, March 24



Stephon Wheaton, Roxanna Villalta and Gabi Barrera, students at Don Bosco Cristo Rey High School in Takoma Park, Maryland, pray during a March 24 Mass at St. Patrick Catholic Church in Washington. The Mass, sponsored by Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington, was celebrated to give students an opportunity to pray before participating in the March for Our Lives. (CNS/Catholic Standard/Jaclyn Lippelmann)



Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration gather at the downtown March for Our Lives in La Crosse, Wisconsin, while another group of the sisters march in solidarity with the students at St. Rose Convent, the congregational motherhouse across town. (Provided photo)



Sr. Julia Walsh, a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration, and Kate Parker, an affiliate with the congregation, join the March for Our Lives in La Crosse, Wisconsin. (Provided photo)

—NCR Staff, 3:40 p.m. CDT, March 24

Priest, fifth-generation Texan, understands the landscape

On the steps of the Tom Green County Courthouse, Fr. Charles Greenwell spoke Saturday on a topic "near and dear to my heart."

As a priest in San Angelo in central Texas, though, he does not always find it easy to speak about guns.

Still, Greenwell told the crowd of approximately 200 people assembled before him for the local March for Our Lives rally that many of the positions staked by high school students in recent weeks on addressing gun violence in America — banning assault weapons and instituting universal background checks, among them — are ones the U.S. bishops have advocated for years.

He also echoed recent comments from former Vice President Joe Biden that the young people speaking out will change the way America thinks about gun violence.

"I certainly hope he's right. I think this is the only way we're ever going to be able to make any changes. ... These kids, if they turn out, they can do it," Greenwell said.

The student-organized rally included student speakers, a retired three-star general-turned-Baptist pastor and a man who survived the October mass shooting at an outdoor country concert in Las Vegas, where he and his wife were celebrating his 50th birthday. A student who served as emcee identified himself as a Republican and urged for everyone to respect each other's point of views and to share and discuss the issue without demonizing one another.

A petition circulated calling for sane gun laws, which was to be delivered to Rep. Mike Conaway later in the day.

When San Angelo Bishop Michael Sis sought a substitute for him at the rally, Greenwell answered quickly. "I have pretty strong feelings about this," he told NCR on Thursday.

A fifth-generation Texan, the priest understands the landscape. For many, hunting and guns are a natural, and normal, part of their lives. Greenwell's father was a hunter, though he died while Greenwell was 6 and never passed along the tradition. When Greenwell was a teacher in Texas hill country before becoming a priest, deer hunting was common, and he said he developed an addiction for chicken-fried venison.

But never for hunting.

"The only time I ever went out deer hunting was not with a gun but with a camera," he said, referring to one outing where he joined several of his students.

While he never inherited the hunting bug, he understands why others enjoy it.

"Like fishing and so on, it's a sport. And I'm not the kind of person that says no one should have guns. I just think we ought to try to keep them out of the hands of people who are dangerous, or in whose hands they're dangerous," the priest said.

As it turns out, while not a hunter, Greenwell does own a gun. "It's kind of an heirloom," he said of his grandfather's 1920s-era Colt 380 that he received after his

grandmother passed away.

"I was expecting to get a six-shooter, I don't know why I thought my grandfather's gun was a six-shooter," he said.

He's never used it, or had the desire to. For now, it just rests in a drawer.

—Brian Roewe, 4:09 p.m. CDT, March 24



Catholics sisters joined the March for Our Lives in Washington, D.C. (left), including St. Joseph Sr. Erin McDonald (right). (Provided photos)

—NCR Staff, 6:05 p.m. CDT, March 24

Vignettes from Catholic sisters

• In La Crosse, Wisconsin, Sr. Julia Walsh said more than 1,000 marched to a rally.

"I believe it's leading to something. … I think the paradigm is shifting," Walsh said. "It's inspiring to see."



Loretto Sr. Buffy Boesen, right, stands with Jess Becerra before the March For Our Lives March 24 in El Paso, Texas. (Courtesy of Loretto Sr. Buffy Boesen)

Walsh is a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration and a columnist for Global Sisters Report. She said the crowd in La Crosse had a huge diversity of ages, including grandparents, young people and small children.

• Sr. Irene Skeehan said about a dozen Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Kansas, joined the thousands marching in Kansas City, Missouri.

"We had a sign that said, 'Nuns for gun control,' and people really appreciated that sisters were there," Skeehan said. "It was cold and windy, but people were there by the thousands."

Skeehan said the large turnout makes her optimistic, but she understands change might not happen quickly.

"It gives us hope that our voices might be heard, but change comes slow," Skeehan said. "The young people were amazing. They planned the whole event and were most of the speakers."

• Five sisters and one associate of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, along with one Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, joined the march in Seattle, said Sr. Susan Dewitt, a Sister of St. Joseph of Peace.

Dewitt said the sisters were in the march for a while, then moved to the sidewalk to watch the marchers go by — which took an hour because there were so many.



The lead demonstrators in Seattle's March for Our Lives on March 24 (St. Joseph of Peace Sr. Susan DeWitt)



Participants join the March for Our Lives in Seattle March 24. (St. Joseph of Peace Sr. Susan DeWitt)

"It was astonishing," Dewitt wrote in an email. "We were there for an hour as an endless stream of people — students, teachers, families, seniors, organizations — walked toward the rally at Seattle Center."

• Sr. Connie Tomyl, of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Felix of Cantalice, said six Felician sisters took part in the march in Pittsburgh, where they met three Sisters of Divine Providence.

Tomyl said city officials estimated 30,000 people took part in the march.

"A particularly poignant sign read: 'Approximately 30 days of school until I graduate. Can I beat the odds?' " Tomyl wrote in an email. "I was especially touched by the ages of several of the speakers during the really in Market Square — several … punctuated their speeches with 'I am just 17 years old.' "

—Dan Stockman, 6:30 p.m. CDT, March 24

Atlanta students do 'test run' of March for Our Lives while Vice President Pence in town

The day before the March for Our Lives in Atlanta, students at Cristo Rey Atlanta Jesuit High School gathered in the cafeteria after school to make posters.

"Tweets & Prayers Don't Lead To Change, Policy & Actions Do."

"Protect Kids, Not Guns."

"I should feel lucky to go to school … not lucky that I come home alive!"

They even had a chance to give them a pre-march test run.

As it turns out, Vice President Mike Pence was in town to speak with Georgia Republicans, and his hotel, the Hilton Atlanta, was across the street from Cristo Rey. Signs in tow, the students joined others in time as the vice president's motorcade passed by.



Students at Cristo Rey Atlanta Jesuit High School show the posters they made for March for Our Lives. (Elizabeth Rodriguez)

On Saturday, they carried their signs again among an estimated 30,000 people through downtown Atlanta. The route took the marchers from the Center of Civil and Human Rights to Liberty Plaza near the state capitol building. U.S. Rep. John Lewis, who had marched with Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma, Alabama, in 1965 was among the day's speakers.

Elizabeth Rodriguez, a junior at Cristo Rey and the student government vice president, said the sight of the crowd in solemn march left her "honestly in shock."

"To see the waves of people who cared for **our** lives and **our** safety was powerful," she told NCR. "It showed us that we aren't alone."

For Rodriguez, the March for Our Lives was the first political rally she's attended. As she saw friends post on social media about past events — such as when friends from other high schools headed to Atlanta's airport to protest President Donald Trump's travel ban — she remembered wishing she had learned about it earlier so she could take part.

To make sure no one felt like they were alone at Saturday's march, she helped arrange a student group to attend. About 25 students, along with some teachers, joined in all.



Students from Cristo Rey Atlanta Jesuit High School on March for Our Lives day, March 24, in downtown Atlanta, Georgia, including Elizabeth Rodriguez, second from right (Provided photo)

The students pushed their school to allow them to participate in the recent nationwide walkouts, with Rodriguez saying, “It was a really big deal for us to be able to have time out of class to be able to speak up and raise our voice about this issue and stand in solidarity with other people."

A member of Students for Life, the pro-life club at Cristo Rey, she said she sees their stand against gun violence within that scope, which at times people initially just limit to abortion.

"[Gun violence is] a really big part of being pro-life now that really impacts being Catholic," she said.

While she'd like to see the age raised for buying a gun along with increased background checks, Rodriguez said more than anything she wants to see attention away from how to prepare for future shootings, be it clear backpacks or bulletproofing classroom items, toward preventing them and addressing the root causes of the problem.



Students of Cristo Rey Atlanta Jesuit High School, who were among an estimated 30,000 people marching in downtown Atlanta, Georgia, March 24 (Elizabeth Rodriguez)

By the end of the march, the Cristo Rey students had begun to start and lead chants rather than just join them, an experience Rodriguez said that sent them home with "sore throats and happy hearts." She hopes the March for Our Lives will inspire people " to continue to speak up not only about gun violence but also about any other social issues."

"We may not be involved politically a lot as high school students, but this is a time that we can, and hopefully it inspires people to continue to speak up and speak out," she said.

—Brian Roewe, 6:50 p.m. CDT, March 24

People are the priority, guns are not religion, say Kansas City, Mo., marchers

As protesters supporting gun reform at the Kansas City, Missouri branch of the March for Our Lives criticized America's quasi-religious attachment to weapons, Catholics and other people of faith scattered throughout the crowd used their beliefs as inspiration to push for stricter gun laws.

"We call ourselves a Christian country but we don’t follow Christ," said Mimi Harman, a parishioner and formation director at St. James Catholic Church who attended the march with her children. "His message was all about nonviolence, love, and forgiveness."

Harman’s sign read "My ONE Defense" and pictured a cross x-ing out a gun. She said she hoped the march would inspire politicians to listen to the people instead of lobbyists or the NRA and pass common sense gun laws.



Mimi Harman, right, is a parishioner and formation director at St. James Catholic Church. (NCR photo/Maria Benevento)

About 5,000 to 6,000 people attended the event, according to The Kansas City Star. Participants mingled for nearly three hours in Frank A. Theis Park, many carrying protest signs, while they listened to a long string of speeches and performances from high school students, teachers, parents, politicians and members of organizations such as Moms Demand Action and the Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council before marching to the Plaza.

Most speeches emphasized the extreme fear students feel about gun violence in schools and the need for action, such as voting, to push politicians to make changes. Students in the crowd echoed these concerns.

"We're sick of people not getting stuff done," said Isabelle Mohr, a student at St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Olathe, Kansas, as Morgan Ramsey, another Thomas Aquinas student, nodded and chimed in, "We don't want to be scared to go to school."

"You should be able to worry about school at school and not worry about your safety," Mohr added.

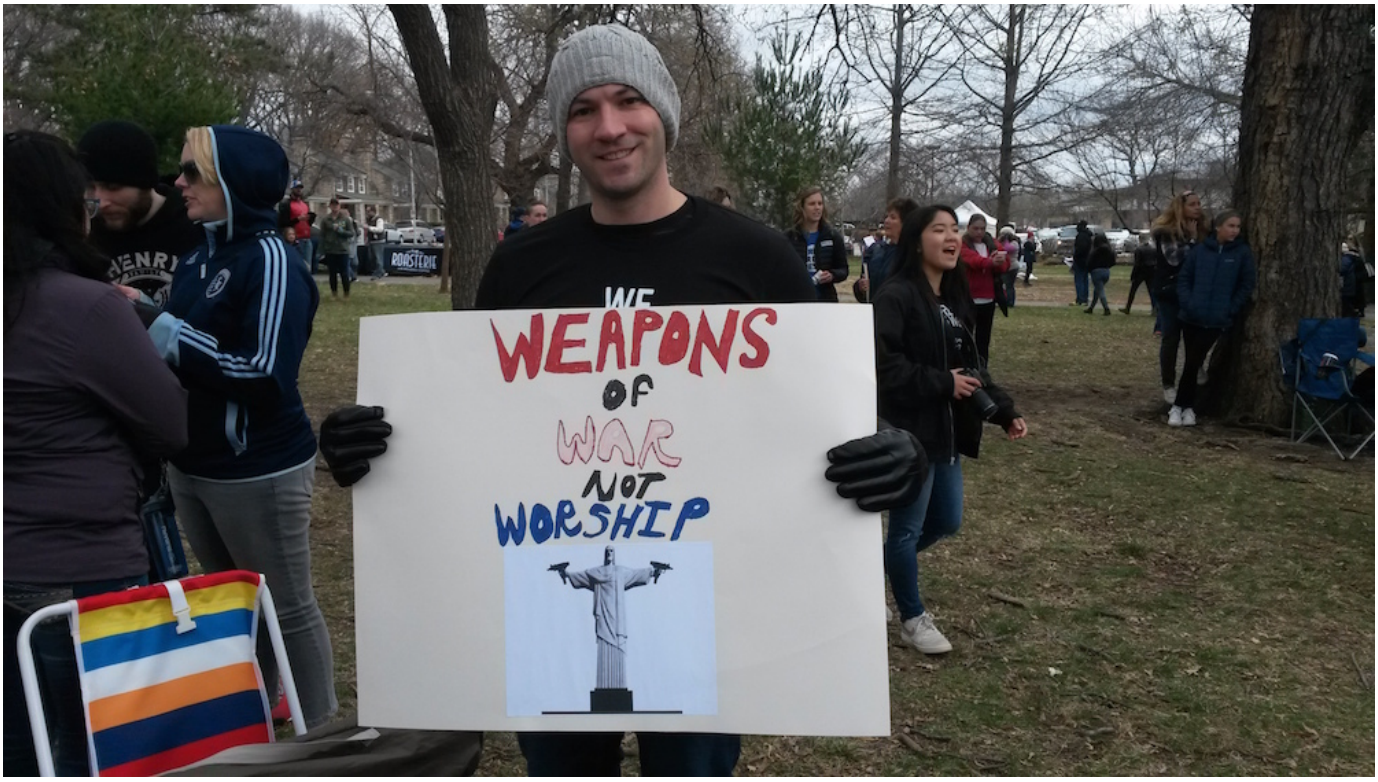


Crosses memorializing victims of gun violence at the March for Our Lives in Kansas City March 24 (NCR photo/Maria Benevento)

"As a student, it's really disheartening to see things like this continue to happen and then think that could have been me," said Sydney Pezold, a member of the Rockhurst University Voices for Justice group. "We are called to be active and to be peacemakers and to work for change."

Another common theme in speeches and protest signs seemed to be the religious hypocrisy of some gun supporters and Americans' almost reverent attitude towards guns.

Signs referencing the trend of politicians offering "thoughts and prayers" instead of gun reform were common, and Rev. Kelly Isola, chair of the Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council, drew cheers when she declared, "there are moments when I’m a little tired of thoughts and prayers. It's thoughts and prayers and putting them into action."



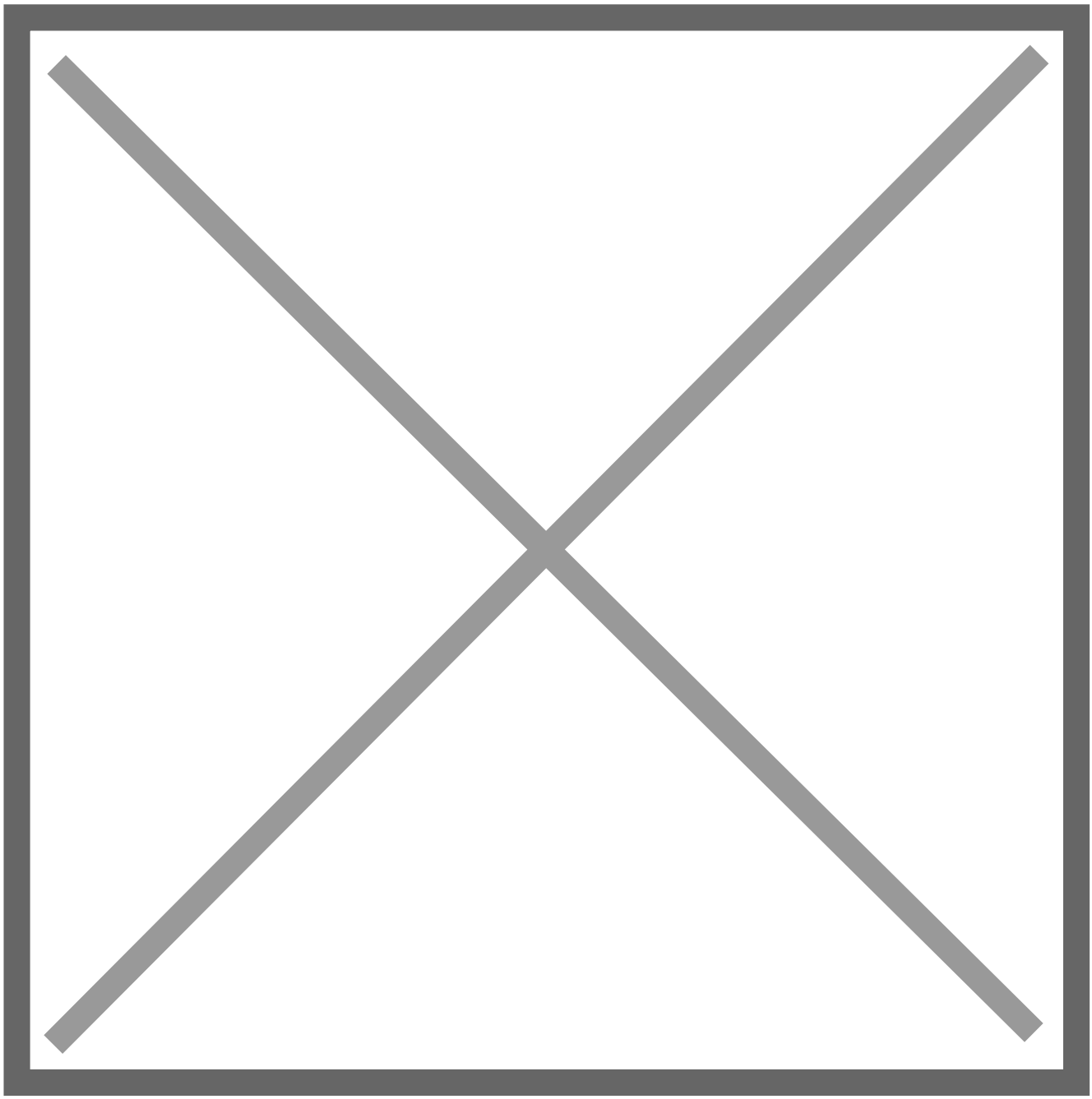
Justin Willis holds a protest sign during the March for Our Lives in Kansas City March 24. (NCR photo/Maria Benevento)

Another speaker referred to victims being "sacrificed on the altar" of the second amendment, while one protester, Justin Willis, held a sign that read "Weapons of War Not Worship" and featured an image of a gun-toting statue of Jesus.

Willis, who traveled from Merriam, Kansas to attend the protest, explained that although guns are "for violence" they "tend to be worshipped" in a way that is "based on faith more than facts."

In contrast, faith leaders and others at the march emphasized that people should be the priority.

"People's lives are more important than guns," said Rev. Kristin Aardema Faigh, a pastor at the Zion United Church of Christ in Mayview. "I'm so proud of the Parkland kids for stepping out. They are our present and our future and they need to be protected."



An estimated 5,000 to 6,000 people attended the March for Our Lives event March 24 in Kansas City, Missouri. (NCR photo/Brian Roewe)

Sr. Irene Skeehan, a member of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, attended the protest as part of a group of 14 sisters, some of whom held signs that read "Nuns for Gun Control."

As a member of a religious community that has included many teachers, Skeehan said it was part of the group's

obligations and ministry and mission to care for children and speak out about a situation that is unacceptable."

Fr. Garry Richmeier, weekend associate pastor at St. James Catholic Church, also attended the march and said he wanted to speak out in favor of "sensible legislation" because he believes gun control is a "moral issue."

"The right to life is a pretty down-to-earth right," Richmeier explained. "Gun legislation does not protect that right as well as it could."

—Maria Benevento, with additional reporting by Brian Roewe, 7:20 p.m. CDT, March 24

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This article was funded in part by a generous gift from Tom Bertelsen as a means to support the search for a solution to gun violence in our culture.

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This story appears in the **Gun Violence** feature series. View the full series.
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