News



Timothy P. Schmalz is pictured in an undated photo working on his life-sized clay sculpture titled "Thou Shalt Not Kill," which depicts Jesus kneeling over a victim of gun violence. Some 60 people gathered March 25 outside of St. Sabina Catholic Church in Chicago for a first look at the sculpture, which the artist donated to the parish. (OSV News/Timothy P. Schmalz)

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Ahead of Good Friday, a Chicago parish unveiled a statue of Jesus Christ commemorating that city's victims of gun violence.

Some 60 people gathered March 25 outside of St. Sabina Catholic Church for a first look at "Thou Shalt Not Kill," a life-sized sculpture by Canadian-based artist Timothy P. Schmalz.

Cast in bronze, the work depicts Christ weeping into his pierced hands over a slain, prostrate figure whose back is riddled with three bullet holes.

The sculpture, which the artist donated to the parish, was installed in partnership with Purpose Over Pain, a local support group for parents who have lost children to gun violence.

A "huge turnout" of bereaved parents were on hand as the piece was installed in front of a memorial wall featuring photos of "all these young people who have lost their lives" to gun violence over the past several years, St. Sabina pastor Fr. Michael Pfleger told OSV News.

"This statue is so strong," he said. "When we unveiled it, a whole bunch of the mothers just started crying, because all they could picture was their child laying there."

The timing of the debut was intentional, he said.

"We wanted to do this during Holy Week when we remember ... the murder of Jesus," said Pfleger. "He didn't [just] die. He was killed."

The statue's impact is intensified by the memorial wall, where "children and parents come by ... all the time and look and ... and say a prayer," said Pfleger.

"We keep changing the pictures, because we have about another 70 or 80 that we can't even put up" due to lack of room on the wall, said Pfleger. "We switch them in

and out. We'll be [putting in] new ones in May for Mother's Day."

The wall and statue are intended to "remind you that all those people whose pictures are up on that board — they didn't just die; they were murdered, they were killed," Pfleger said.

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According to a 2023 year-end analysis from the University of Chicago Crime Lab, homicides in the city decreased 12%, with shootings down 14% — but the report notes there is "still much work to do ahead."

Despite an overall downturn, the homicide rate is still 20 times higher for Black residents than white residents, and particularly concentrated in certain neighborhoods, which are still racially segregated, the crime lab found.

In addition, the age of homicide victims in the city has been rising, said the report — declining among persons between the ages of 20 and 29, but jumping from 41% to 53% since 2019 among victims over age 30.

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Pfleger said that community and law enforcement efforts have helped counter the violence — but ultimately, "saying [statistics] are down doesn't mean anything to the mother who lost their child yesterday," he said.

"A week ago, I had a funeral of a 19-year-old killed not too far from here," he said. "Tomorrow, there's a funeral of a kid that graduated from our school in 2022. A 15-year-old who got shot and killed last week … her and her brother together.

"So the murder and the violence continue," he said. "And we never want it to become normalized. We want to continue to expose it … until we as a society, you know, turn away from this gun madness and at the same time decide that we're not going to become comfortable with violence."

The newly installed statue now joins the memorial wall in that mission, he said.

"My prayer and my hope is that when people see it, they'll do something," Pfleger said. "If seeing this does not convict you in some way, then you're already dead. Because you can't look at it and not be touched by the horrible sight of a young

person laying on the ground with bullets in his back."

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