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San Francisco parish leads efforts to expose and combat violence

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NCR Today

Corpus Christi Parish in San Francisco's ethnically rich Excelsior District is spearheading community solidarity efforts to expose and combat the neighborhood's ongoing violence.

Largely with the guidance of associate pastor Salesian Fr. Jose Lucero and with the cooperation of the San Francisco Organizing Project, a communitywide gathering will be held at 11 a.m. June 16 as a follow-up to a May 9 interfaith prayer vigil for healing and peace in the parish hall that drew more than 70 participants, the priest told *NCR* on Monday.

"We should not have to walk in our streets paranoid. We are not going to stand for this violence. We are going to do something about it," Lucero told *Catholic San Francisco*, the archdiocese's weekly, in a May 18 article.

He said the meetings are opportunities "for us to speak, to not live in fear" and that "prayer is the most important way we can get rid of violence."

"This neighborhood in general has been affected by violence in different ways," Lucero told vigil participants, *Catholic San Francisco* reports.

The story reported that last year, a music studio set up for Lucero by a volunteer "was destroyed and furniture wrecked in the parish hall meeting rooms. The inside of the hall was defaced with graffiti and eggs. ... Musical instruments were stolen. No one has been charged in the crime."

At the May 9 meeting, 15-year-old parishioner Estephania Cortes shared how she had been attacked,

stabbed and robbed by three girls two blocks from her home in broad daylight.

The Immaculate Conception Academy sophomore told *Catholic San Francisco*, "Wrong time, wrong place for me. ... Once I crossed the street, they turned me around and hit me. I was scared and didn't know what to do. They stabbed me. It was hot and bleeding." Fortunately, her wound was minimal.

Others also shared their experiences with violence in the Excelsior and broader Bay Area.

"A teacher from KIPP Bayview Academy attended with two teens. ... 'I've buried two of my (former) students this year,' said Tiffani Johnson, who teaches at the K-8 school located in the former St Paul of the Shipwreck School building," the newspaper reports. Both former students were 18.

The San Francisco Organizing Project describes itself as a "grassroots coalition of congregations and schools working to create innovative solutions to the economic and racial injustices facing residents of our city."

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The Excelsior District is well known for various events held there, including Jerry Day, which celebrates Jerry Garcia, the founder of the rock group Grateful Dead.

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