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Let's begin with prayer to end gun violence

Statement by
The Most Reverend Michael C. Barber, SJ
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Gun violence and homicide have risen at an alarming rate this year in Oakland.

We know we are brought into this world to love: Our Catholic faith teaches of a God who is all-loving, merciful and intent on bringing each of us to our salvation.

Sadly, our human nature is not always true to God's intent for us. Violence is due to sin, and it seems to be escalating again in Oakland, fueled by a proliferation of guns in our homes and on our streets.

Issues quickly escalate when a gun is part of the situation: when another driver's behavior angers a gun-carrying individual, when there's a perceived insult at a bar or in the street, when there is a difference of opinion with a fellow employee or a store clerk. Instead of resolving these issues by peaceful, civil actions, guns reduce us to a "wild West" mentality of every individual for himself. The result is so often death and a terrible disrespect for the dignity of human life.

In the last year, the city of Oakland has seen reports of gunshots rise by 137% - that is more than double in just twelve months! And the city is averaging 10 deaths a month due to homicide.

There are many solutions being offered to this crisis, but I believe we will only be successful if we begin from a place of prayer and reliance on God.

Violence begins in the heart. It can also end when hearts are reconciled with Christ.

I hope you can join our pastors, myself and other people of faith and good will on the fourth Sunday of each month to pray for an end to gun violence in our neighborhoods and communities. The prayer vigils are ecumenical and not political. This month's prayer vigil is May 23, 5-6 pm. For more information, including a reminder when the location is set, email terrimcwilliams@att.net.

Also, on May 14 at 6:30 pm people will gather at St. Benedict Catholic Church, the corner of 82nd and Bancroft Ave., to participate in a Night Walk for peace.

Without our hearts and minds focused on God's loving guidance, any work we do toward peace and justice will fail. Let's start this movement by standing together, in prayer.

For the greater glory of God