

Letters: Gun control and mental illness

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RE: [Voices: Elevating our conversation on gun control](#)

I was so relieved to read John Whitten's even-handed, redemptive response to guns. It's so hard to find a middle voice, and I think he accomplished that quite well.

However, one item that keeps popping up in a whole lot of discussions, including Whitten's, about gun violence is mental illness. Depending on how mental illness is defined, only 1 - 4 percent of this population ever commits *any* kind violent crime. But 25 percent of people with mental illness are victims of violent crimes.

Past behavior is a far more accurate predictor of who might commit violent acts. Other factors include "poverty and social disadvantage, unemployment, residential instability, substance use problems, history of violent victimization, exposure to neighborhood violence, or involvement with the criminal justice system." And, I would add, disengaged young men who have no positive, significant people in their lives and no reason to live. (How can the church engage these young men?)

A whole lot of that list overlaps with a whole lot of other items on the list.

I am one of "those people" who has wrestled with mental illness my entire adult life. My husband and I have been married 29 years. We have two sons whose love of God, people, and learning has opened amazing doors for

them — they are a grace gift to me. I go to work, meet up with friends, and handle finances. Managing any disease requires an enormous amount of energy and sheer willpower, and absolutely, there are days when I melt down and cry and sleep excessively.

In all honesty, the worst part of my illness is the church's inability (or unwillingness) to acknowledge that on any given Sunday morning, about 20 percent of people in the pews are experiencing depression, anxiety, and/or other mental illnesses to varying degrees. That is where I deeply, deeply grieve and weep. The Body of Christ is the one reliable place of hope, but we don't always put that gift to work very well. We have infinite resources in Christ Himself to walk with so many people who are living life on the edge. That's where all of us find grace.

As Whitten discusses in his article, gun violence is a very, very complex issue, and reducing it to one reason, one answer, or one group makes things worse. Complex issues require complex answers. No scapegoating.

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