

Interfaith group speaks out in wake of Santa Barbara shooting spree

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LOS ANGELES (RNS) An interfaith group representing 15 organizations spoke out against gun violence Thursday (May 29) in the wake of last week's deadly shooting spree in Santa Barbara.

Religious organizations have lobbied for stricter gun control in the wake of mass shootings, and this latest effort was no exception.

"We are here this morning to stand with the multitude of groups across the United States who are advocating for sensible, common sense laws to limit the effects of gun violence," said Steve Wiebe, co-chair of the Abrahamic Faiths Peacemaking Initiative. "Our faith traditions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—spur us to peaceful solutions as we recognize the inherent worth of each individual life."

Elliot Rodger killed six and injured 13 others in Santa Barbara last Friday (May 23) before dying by an apparently self-inflicted gun wound. The Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office reported that deputies found three semi-automatic handguns in his car. All three were bought legally.

Rodger was under the treatment of therapists, but he had not been institutionalized or committed involuntarily, the two mental health triggers that would have prevented him from buying a gun, Sheriff Bill Brown told Face the Nation.

"It breaks my heart," said the Rev. Sandie Richards, a United Methodist pastor. "We say not one more," she added, echoing the call of Richard Martinez, father of victim Christopher Michaels-Martinez. Since the shooting, Martinez has been vocal in his demands for stronger gun control regulations and asked people to tweet with the hashtag #NotOneMore.

Though it has long worked on war and peace issues, the Abrahamic Faiths Peacemaking Initiative has directed its attention to gun violence in recent years, Wiebe said. In addition to holding vigils after the Sandy Hook school shooting in 2012, the initiative has hosted workshops for religious leaders on how to address gun violence within their congregations.

“We call on those with whom we may disagree,” said Rabbi Joshua Levine Grater, the group’s co-chair with Wiebe. “Let us sit together; let us find ways to bridge this gap, so that we can have a better tomorrow, a more peaceful United States of America.”