

Staying at home with guns too often leads to deaths

By Rabbi David Lyon, Rev. Dr. Rhanel Johnson and Fr. Simon Bautista



Monica Rhor / Staff

A Kingwood Guns employee leads an education session on gun locks for Moms Demand Action.

Just last week in Houston, a father allegedly threatened his adult son with a gun for taking too long a shower. Thankfully, he escaped unharmed and his father was arrested.

Just last month in Houston, a 19-year-old accidentally shot her 10-year old nephew with a gun left unsecured in the home. Thankfully, that child didn't die, but

2,800 children did die in 2015 from gunfire and another 14,000 children and teens were treated for nonfatal firearm injuries.

Hundreds of thousands of children in the metro Houston area are currently staying home day and night because their schools are shuttered as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Houston children are among the 4.6 million nationally who live in homes where there are unsecured firearms. While we are protecting lives from this virus with social distancing, we are making children more vulnerable to

injury and death because they live in homes with unsecured guns.

Houston congregations are now receiving calls from members and the public who are suffering terrible stress and anxiety as they are faced with loss of income, looming rent payments and bills — all while their children are home day and night. This is a highly stressful situation.

According to the National Shooting Sports Foundation, a gun sales trade group, FBI gun purchase background checks were up over 300 percent over a week in March compared to the same time in 2019. More children at home plus more guns at home is troubling because:

- There are already reports of increasing domestic violence due to more time spent in stressful home situations.
- Mental health pressures will increase for many people, which can lead to increased suicide and abuse. We know the presence of a gun in a home increases the likelihood of suicide and abuse.
- With an increase in first-time gun owners, we need to improve our gun safety strategies and do everything possible to be sure guns are safely stored at home and in automobiles — to reduce accidental shootings, crimes of passion, and suicide.

Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo and ATF Special Agent-in-Charge Fred Milanowski recently reported that over 7,000 guns were stolen from Houston cars over the past 3.5 years. It's reasonable to assume that many of those improperly secured guns were used for criminal activity by the criminals who stole them from cars. This is just more evidence we need to safely store all guns.

As clergy working with The Metropolitan Organization, we are doing all we can to prevent sickness and death from COVID-19. We believe we must also prevent injury and death from firearms during this time of crisis and in the future by adopting these strategies:

- Mayor Sylvester Turner and Houston City Council must develop a safe gun storage campaign, as recommended by the Mayor's Commission Against Gun Violence.
- Harris County constables must develop a campaign to widely distribute free

gun locks to everyone who needs to secure their guns.

- Gov. Greg Abbott and the state of Texas must quickly take advantage of new federal legislation to provide enhanced unemployment insurance benefits to all who have lost their income due to COVID-19, improve access to mental health care by expanding Medicaid and declare a 60-day moratorium on evictions in the state of Texas.

During this crisis we can save lives by reducing family stress and by increasing our commitment to safely storing guns.

Lyon, Johnson and Bautista are members of the Metropolitan Organization, a 40-year-old coalition of institutions (congregations, schools and nonprofits) that teaches people how to work together across lines of difference to improve the quality of life in their communities.

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