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Jesuit priest: Address actual issues in wake of Newtown shooting

Porsia Tunzi | Jan. 3, 2013

Jesuit Fr. Greg Boyle cautions against looking at the tragedy of the Sandy Hook School from too distant a perspective.

Looking at this from "an aerial view of nonviolence oddly keeps us from solutions," Boyle, who has worked with gang members in Los Angeles since 1988, told *NCR* Dec. 20.

"In the same way the [Connecticut] governor said, 'A great evil visited this community today,' well, actually, armed mental illness visited your community that day. Or Mike Huckabee talked about how this is a problem of 'sin' or Newt Gingrich said yesterday, it's a problem of God being taken out of schools -- all these things are nonsense. This is what keeps us from addressing actual issues," he said.

"When we take our views lower, we know we need to address guns and we need to address mental illness."

Boyle is the founder of Homeboy Industries, the largest gang intervention, rehabilitation and re-entry program in the U.S.

"The elephant in the room is mental health, which is something I see more and more with the gang population with whom I work," Boyle said.

The nation's mental health care system is in desperate need of rehabilitation, he said. Because of national, state and local government budget cuts made in recent years, today's health care system is essentially the same as it was in 1850, Boyle said. He fears even more cuts are coming.

He says mental health facilities have one bed for every 7,000 patients. As a result the nation's prisons, skid rows and homeless shelters are filled with the mentally ill.

"The largest mental health facility in the world is the Los Angeles county jail," he said. "These are examples that show we are not actually dealing with the real issues."

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