

April 2018

And a Child Shall Lead Them

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Today (March 14), as I sit and write this, thousands of students are leaving their classrooms for 17 minutes, one for every victim of the Parkland, Fla., school shooting. Ever since the horrific massacre at Stoneman-Douglas high school last month, talk of gun control has controlled the ever shortening news cycle. But this is one issue with legs. People are beginning to say, “Enough! Enough with letting the mass murderers who are the NRA hierarchy continue to spew their demagoguery and fear so others can commit their atrocities by proxy across this country.”

But what’s different this time is that it is the young people who are most affected by school shootings who are the ones leading the charge. They are sick and tired of going to friends’ funerals rather than graduation parties. They are sick and tired of hearing the same old tripe about “our hopes and prayers go out to the victims,” vomiting forth from our elected officials and other adults, their supposed role models. They are sick and tired of feeling unsafe in their own classrooms.

The day after the shooting they began their campaign and it seems to be only gaining in momentum rather than lessening. These “kids” are passionate and articulate. They know that they’re the future and they are putting the powers that be on notice. Here’s just a few of their comments:

“More prayer, Jesus, god, and compassion won’t bring back the victims that sadly lost their lives. It won’t bring back the sense of security that my fellow peers and I lost. The only way to get that back is through gun control starting now.”—Jose Iglesias, Senior

“The children will become leaders as the leaders have become children.”—Madison Leal, Junior

“On March 24th, #IWillMarch so no child ever has to worry about texting their parents a final “I love you.”—Alex Wind, Junior

This is no late winter lark. These are young people who are committed to changing the status quo. In the thirty-seven years since the assassination attempt on President Reagan and his press secretary James Brady, we have been talking about doing something about the gun violence in this country, yet nothing changes. Maybe this time things will be different.

Maybe, just maybe, the passion of the young can be channeled into changing a status quo that is in dire need of changing. We adults have been letting our children down ever since the massacre at Columbine, almost twenty years ago. Isn’t about time that something changes?

I keep hearing from adults that children couldn’t have organized this on their own. They must be pawns of the “liberal anti-gun lobby.” Puhlease—give me a break. These are kids who are completely at home with using social media to spread their message. And they are using this facility with a speed and a savviness that I find amazing. I don’t know of any adult, no matter how facile in using the internet, who can hold a candle to today’s young people in navigating the brave new world created by the internet—a real game changer. It seems like today’s young people were born with a computer mouse or cell phone in their hands.

It's time we supposedly wiser adults jump on the train started by these young people, but we need to ride as passengers, the kids themselves are far more effective engineers than adults could ever be. Our complete impotence in changing the gun laws in this country over the past thirty-seven years, in the face of dozens of massacres: Columbine, Sandy Hook, Stoneman-Douglas etc, just shows how compromised we adults really are.

As physicians, we are in the unique position to ally ourselves with "The Children's Crusade." Just because the spineless do-nothings in Congress have forbidden the CDC to even *study* the ramifications of gun violence, doesn't mean that we physicians have to abdicate our responsibilities to our patients and their parents as to the devastating potential of assault rifles. We are still among the most trusted professionals in the country, so let us capitalize on that trust and work with our children to change the climate of violence that pervades this country.

Back in 2000, Tate Minckler and I got into a three article debate over gun control in these pages (*The Bulletin* July-Sept 2000). I wrote at that time:

"We, in the United States, are living with a pornography of violence. My European friends and relatives are appalled by the amount of firearm violence perpetrated, by both good guys and bad guys, in this country. In the last year and a half we have witnessed the massacre at Columbine High School, and the shootings in at least five other high schools. Although the inner city killings have tapered off with the ebbing of the crack cocaine epidemic, we're still sending Army surgeons to inner city ER's for gunshot wound training. We make many of the anarchic countries in the Third World appear positively serene."

In the intervening eighteen years, the situation has only worsened as the roll-call of dead children continues to lengthen. Isn't it about time that the situation changes? On March 24, there

will be a “March for Our Lives” starting at noon at the Arcata Playhouse and then a march to the Arcata Plaza. I urge us all to be out there and support our kids, even though this editorial will be published after the scheduled march.

For those of us who claim inspiration from the Bible, it is time we heed the words of Isaiah (11:6): “and a child shall lead them,” and join our children in stopping the slaughter.