

WORLD & NATION

Shootings shock students at public, Catholic schools

WASHINGTON (CNS) — School shootings took place just two days apart on opposite sides of the country and spectrum: at a large public high school in California and at a small Catholic high school in Pennsylvania.

The March 5 shooting at Santana High School in Santee, Calif., injured 13 and killed two students. During a March 11 memorial service for the students, California Gov. Gray Davis said, "The young boys were taken from us in an act of unspeakable evil."

A March 7 shooting at Bishop Neumann High School in Williamsport, Pa., injured one student, who was recovering March 11 with the bullet still lodged in her shoulder.

Both schools immediately implemented their emergency crisis plans and had counselors on hand to talk with students about the tragedy.

Father Michael Cunneane, pastor at Guardian Angels Church in Santee, said it was "very traumatic" to talk to many students he had known for years who ran up to him immediately after the California shooting.

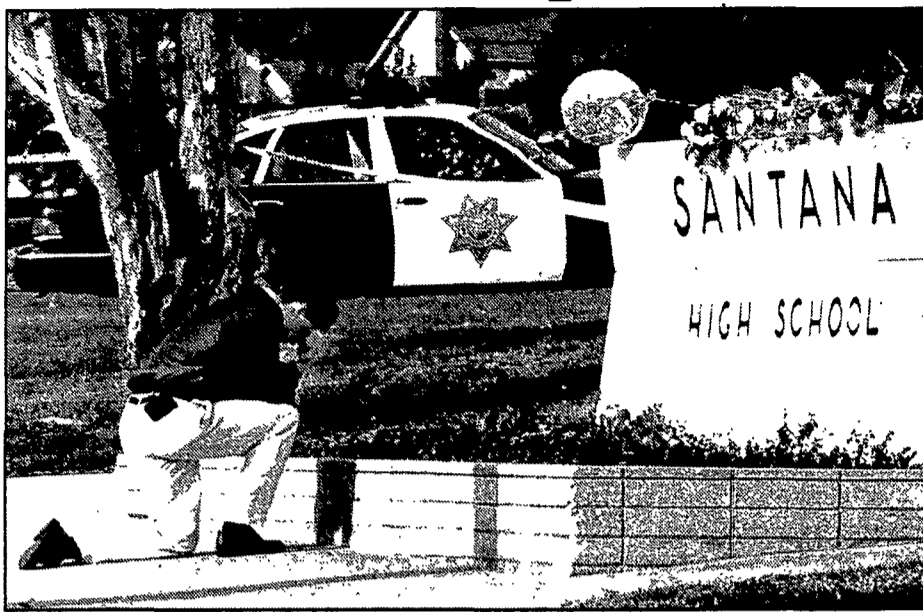
"One young fellow, a senior from our parish, the shooter put the gun to his head. But the kid didn't shoot him. 'Thank God I'm alive,' he told me."

Several of the wounded teens are members of local Catholic parishes.

In nearby Lakeside, Msgr. Neal Dolan, pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, gathered with more than 85 students and a dozen parents from neighboring high schools, including about 12 from Santana High School, for a prayer service.

The students began by reciting St. Francis prayer for peace, and then broke into groups of five or six.

"Within 20 seconds they got into deep conversation," said Father Dolan. Through their tears and hugs, expressions of fear, anger, numbness and compassion, the gathering was an opportunity for them to



Brian Kays prays in front of Santana High School, where two students were killed and several injured in a shooting March 5, in the San Diego suburb of Santee, Calif. A 15-year-old student was arrested at the scene in connection with the crime.

raise their questions and to "do it in faith and in Catholic teaching," he added.

During one discussion, students debated who was at fault — the alleged shooter, 15-year-old Charles Andrew Williams; his parents; the students who picked on Williams; or the media for its continuous portrayals of violence. But they concluded it was "a combination of all those things," Father Dolan said.

In the days following the Santee shooting, several schools across the country experienced threats of violence. And on March 7, an eighth-grade girl from Bishop Neumann High School in Williamsport allegedly opened fire and wounded another student during the school's first lunch hour.

Immediately after the shooting, Bishop James C. Timlin of Scranton, Pa., who is a



Students at Bishop Neumann Catholic High School in Williamsport, Pa., leave campus following a shooting.

pilot, flew to Williamsport to visit the shooting victim, Kimberly Marchese, in the hospital.

The bishop had planned to fly to Williamsport that evening for a confirmation service that Marchese was unable to attend.

"To say that it was shocking was the understatement of the year," the bishop said of the situation when he spoke with reporters after the confirmation.

He called Elizabeth Bush, whom police identified as the shooter, a "troubled girl," and said his "heart goes out to her and her family. She's only a child."

The shooting occurred during the school's first lunch hour, serving students in grades 7-9.

Bush reportedly pulled out a .22 caliber pistol and fired a shot toward the ceiling, then brought the gun down and shot once more. There were conflicting reports whether the second shot hit Marchese directly or ricocheted off the floor into her shoulder.

Some students ducked under tables or fled to neighboring classrooms and others, including Marchese, ran out of the school to a nearby beauty parlor or Burger King.

Some witnesses said Bush then threatened to kill herself. Ninth-grader Brent Paucke, 14, was credited with talking Bush into putting the gun down and then kicking it away as a school official distracted the girl.

The Lycoming County district attorney's office said it would have to evaluate Bush before deciding whether to charge her as an adult.

At a press conference the next day Marchese's father, retired firefighter Michael Marchese, said, "What she (the alleged shooter) did was wrong," but she is still a child.

"I don't think she should be tried as an adult," he said.

South African bishops slam bid to block generic drugs

By Bronwen Dachs
Catholic News Service

CAPE TOWN, South Africa — The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference criticized a bid by pharmaceutical companies to stop the South African government from making cheaper generic drugs available to people with the AIDS virus.

It is "indefensible to prevent the provision of cheap or free anti-retroviral treatment and treatment for opportunistic diseases related to AIDS by insisting on patent rights," Cardinal Wilfrid F. Napier of Durban, president of the conference, said in a statement.

South Africa's medicines legislation came under the spotlight in the Pretoria High Court March 6 as about 40 pharmaceutical companies challenged the court to uphold drug patents and ban the use of cheaper alternatives by the government.

"For the pharmaceuticals to prevent cheaper AIDS treatment to the poor and those most severely affected by HIV/AIDS verges on the criminal," said Cardinal Napier, noting that "we cannot go on with business as usual when HIV/AIDS is wreaking havoc in our communities, especially among the young."

The Pharmaceutical Manufacturers' Association of South Africa is challenging the

Medicines and Related Substances Control Amendment Act in a bid to stop the government from making cheaper generic drugs available.

The main bone of contention is a section of the act that gives powers to Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang to ensure access to cheaper medicines, and specifically relates to parallel importing of drugs.

Parallel importation allows for the transport of drugs from countries where they are available less expensively without the authorization of the patent holders in those countries. The patent holders have made the drugs available in those countries under license.

The act requires that patients are informed of cheaper generic equivalents of

prescribed brand-name medicines.

The bishops' conference "explores the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers' Association not to put profit above human life," Cardinal Napier said, noting that, of the nearly 5 million South Africans living with the human immunodeficiency virus that causes AIDS, "only a tiny minority can afford the drugs that enable their counterparts in rich countries to survive longer."

The bishops also urge "the revision of agreements governing international patents," he said.

The legal challenge has been put on hold until late April by Pretoria High Court Judge Bernard Ngoepe, who postponed the case to give the pharmaceutical companies the opportunity to respond to

arguments of an AIDS lobby group, the Treatment Action Campaign.

The start of the case was accompanied by a wave of marches in solidarity with the government by AIDS activists in South Africa and other countries.

The case is being closely watched worldwide by multinational companies as well as AIDS activists, who are involved in an increasingly heated debate.

International pharmaceutical companies argue that they spend vast amounts of money on researching and developing new drugs, and that the patent laws are there to protect their intellectual property rights.

Critics argue that little of this research and development benefits the poor in developing countries.

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