

## NEWS

# Oregon priest wins assault rifle in raffle, will transform it into art

By Jerry Hames

When he heard that teenage girls were raffling off an AR-15 rifle to raise \$6,000 to play in an out-of-state softball tournament, the Rev. Jeremy Lucas knew he had to take a stand. What he didn't know was that his actions would attract national attention, leading to his being hailed as a hero by many and vilified by others.

The 44-year-old rector of Christ Church, Lake Oswego, about 20 miles south of Portland, Ore., first approached the adult leaders of the girls' district softball team and offered to raise the money needed to send the team to California if they would shut down the raffle. But he soon learned that state law prevented a raffle from being canceled once sales have begun. So instead he decided to buy a large chunk of the raffle tickets with money from his discretionary fund.

Lucas purchased 150 tickets for \$3,000. Later, when he returned to buy more, he learned that all 499 of the tickets printed had been sold and that someone else had bought about \$1,700 worth. His chances of winning were 30 percent.

"I kept my fingers crossed and said a prayer," Lucas told Episcopal Journal, "and it just so happened that I did win."

Lucas plans to have the gun transformed into a work of art, which he will take to churches and groups that want to have an open conversation about gun laws and what can be done about violence.

Lucas spoke to Episcopal Journal in August, three weeks after he won the rifle and after the district team had won bronze in the California tournament for girls ages 14 to 18. He said he was astonished when he first read about the raffle. "I was pretty surprised that someone would think an AR-15 was a good



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— The Rev. Jeremy Lucas

thing to raffle off in the midst of the shootings in Dallas and Baton Rouge."

Lucas said he probably would not have had the same reaction if a sportsmen's club had been the sponsor. "There was something that struck me deeply about a girls' sports team taking this action. These are [girls] who are going through active-shooter drills in their schools, but at the same time they're raffling off an AR-15."

The AR-15, commonly called an "assault rifle," initially was designed with rapid-fire burst for use by the military. Civilian AR-15s support only semi-automatic fire, one shot per trigger pull, but their multiple magazine capacities can range from 10 to 30 rounds or more. The Federal Assault Weapons Ban, enacted in 1994, banned the weapon but the law expired in 2004. Subsequent attempts by legislators to renew this ban have failed, as have attempts to pass a new ban.

Lucas, active in the Episcopal Peace Fellowship since he founded a chapter at General Theological Seminary in New York years ago, said a few in his congregation were upset that he had used his discretionary fund to buy the tickets. "I tried to explain that all of that money actually went to a girls' softball team ... which I feel is perfectly appropriate for a discretionary account."

Since his action became widely known, he said, he has received donations from within his congregation and across the country that more than replenished the funds.

Adults managing the girls' district team defended the raffle and using the girls to sell tickets. "This is still America, where I believe we are free to pursue our own joy," Georgia Herr, district manager for the team, said in an e-mail to an Oregon newspaper. She said the raffle idea came from a team volunteer who works for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

After Lucas announced he would have the rifle transformed into a positive image, the backlash on social media became virulent with messages of hate and anger. One poster suggested he use the gun on himself.

On Aug. 3, Lucas met with a local artist, a member of Guns in the Hands of Artists, one of a growing number of groups across the country who "do trans-

formational work with guns," Lucas said. "I'm really excited to seeing what their thoughts are, how they can transform the gun into a symbol of change."

"This is a very small symbolic step, but sometimes you have to do what you can do with what you have, where you are," Lucas said.

Lucas took possession of the rifle at a licensed gun shop, where ownership was transferred from a softball team representative to the priest. Then Lucas took it to the home of a parishioner, "a responsible gun owner," where the rifle could be locked up until he was ready to destroy it, he said. Under recent Oregon law, that transfer of possession should have taken place after a background check of the parishioner at a licensed gun dealer, with the priest present. As a consequence, Lucas may have committed a Class A misdemeanor punishable by both a fine and jail time.

Gun organizations that had opposed the restrictive law last year took quick action, pointing out the priest's apparent violation of the law and demanding an investigation.

"If the pastor is prosecuted, it will demonstrate the idiocy of the law and the people who passed it," the executive director of the Oregon Firearms Federation told the Portland Tribune. "If the pastor is not prosecuted, it will demonstrate that anti-gun liberals are above the law and it was only intended to hurt the average gun owner, against whom it could be selectively enforced."

Oregon Bishop Michael J. Hanley was quick to defend the priest. On his blog Aug. 4, the bishop said that he admired Lucas's "leap into action," saying it filled him with some glee. "Probably more of us need to act in this way: jumping into the unknown consequences of doing good deeds.

"That he now stands in the middle of an investigation about the transfer of the rifle is testament to the convoluted nature of trying to corral a system of gun sales seemingly bereft of all sense and the efforts of those opposed trying to staunch the flow," he wrote.

"As the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Oregon, I stand squarely behind the Rev. Lucas and commend him for his actions. May we all be able to beat our swords into plowshares one day." ■

## Guns' killing power blunted as works of art

By Episcopal Journal

Guns in the Hands of Artists was the inspiration of artist Brian Borrello. When the murder rate in New Orleans spiked during the 1990s, and a young boy was killed by a stray bullet during a drive-by shooting, Borrello sought guns confiscated by police and transformed them into "constructive objects" for the community.

Over time, scores of artists have come together to attempt works in that vein. "We take something very base and crude, work our magic and put them back out in the world in a kind of alchemy," Borrello explained at the 2015 Aspen Ideas Festival.

Now, Guns in the Hands of Artists is a traveling art show, curated and produced by Jonathan Ferrara Gallery, New Orleans. Decommissioned guns taken off the city's streets through a gun-buyback program were given to 33 internationally known artists to be transformed into works of art that address the issue of guns and gun violence in America.

The current iteration of the show started at Jonathan Ferrara Gallery in October 2014 and has traveled to St. Louis, Miami, Minneapolis and The Aspen Institute. It will be presented in Washington, D.C., at the headquarters of the New America Foundation from Sept. 19-Oct. 7.

As the exhibition tours the country, the gallery works with each community to host panel discussions, do community outreach and facilitate gun buybacks in conjunction with the

project. The aim is to plant the seeds of change in each community so that artists can use guns taken off their streets to address the issue in their city.

Besides curating the traveling exhibition, Ferrara is publishing a book on the project with images of the artworks paired with essays by thought leaders from across the country such as Walter Isaacson, CEO of the Aspen Institute and former CNN chair; former Rep. Gabby Giffords (D-Ariz.), who was wounded by gunfire; and Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.) on the issue of guns and gun violence in the United States. ■



Photo/Courtesy of Jonathan Ferrara Gallery, New Orleans  
"Mourn," handgun, aluminum (found can), soot, steel, 11.75 x 6 x 4.5 inches, by Paul Villinski, 2014.