

## Statement of the Missouri Catholic Conference Regarding Gun Violence

We, the Catholic bishops of Missouri, wish to address the senseless gun violence that is occurring in our schools, on our streets, and in our inner cities. The disturbing frequency of these events is making us numb to the profound impact on those directly affected and it calls for serious reflection on why people are carrying out senseless acts of violence. It is also appropriate to consider the use of guns in society.

Our nation needs to have an honest discussion about the toll violent images and experiences are having upon us, especially our youth. We must work toward peace in our communities through restorative justice policies and practices, and through ongoing discussions about the presence of so much violence in our entertainment and neighborhoods.

We acknowledge that there is a right to self-defense. Many Catholics and people of good will are gun owners and law-abiding citizens who would never consider the use of lethal force unless it was necessary to preserve human life.

As we issue this statement, bills are currently being debated in the Missouri General Assembly that would further loosen gun regulations. One such bill, for example, would eliminate the need for Missourians who are carrying a concealed weapon to obtain permission from their pastor before bringing a concealed weapon to church.

If this bill were to pass, churches wishing to remain gun free would have to post signage in their sacred spaces prohibiting guns. This is highly offensive to us and would violate our First Amendment rights to religious liberty. As the leaders of the Catholic Church in Missouri, we vigorously object to this change in Missouri law!

Law-abiding gun owners know that guns must be used in a safe and responsible manner. This is taught in every gun safety course, and these courses are a means of promoting the common good. Our reflection on the proper place of guns in our society leads us to seriously consider reasonable and sensible gun regulations in order to protect human life from the kind of gun violence we are currently experiencing in our country.

We do not think, for example, that there is any reasonable justification for civilians to purchase and own so-called “bump stocks” that transform already potent semi-automatic weapons into weapons of war. We support universal background checks for gun purchases, and reasonable limitations on civilian access to high-capacity ammunition magazines, like the ten-round limit imposed for hunters in Missouri (*Missouri Wildlife Code* 3 CSR 10-7.431). We see no purpose or justification for civilians to carry large capacity magazines that permit the kind of sustained firepower that can result in multiple casualties. We further support improving access to and increased resources for mental healthcare and earlier interventions.

We ask our fellow Catholics and people of good will to work toward this end by discussing these matters in their local communities and by contacting their local, state, and federal representatives to address these issues through policy and legislative measures that uphold the safety and wellbeing of all persons in our communities.

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