



Addressing Gun Violence

“Miles Davis is in the building.” The message—a code identifying an active shooter—came over the intercom of the Central Visual and Performing Arts High School in St. Louis, just after 9 am on October 24, 2022. Within minutes, 19-year-old Orlando Harris had killed a student, Alexandria Bell, and a teacher, Jean Kuczka, and shot four other students.

Four months later, survivors of the shooting visited the Missouri Capitol to share their art and a message. Around 60 students traveled to the Capitol to advocate for legislation to prevent future tragedies. Specifically, the students called on legislators to pass red flag laws, which would allow a person to petition a judge for the temporary removal of a person’s guns if they appear to be a risk to themselves or others. Days before the school shooting, the gunman’s mother had asked the police for help removing his gun but they lacked the authority to do so.

Students from the school also presented an art display at the Capitol, much of it related to the school shooting. Bryanna Love, 17, said that she will carry the memories of that day forever. “You can’t hear certain noises without being taken back to that moment, hunched in the corner of your classroom comforting your classmates that are crying so it doesn’t get too loud,” she said.

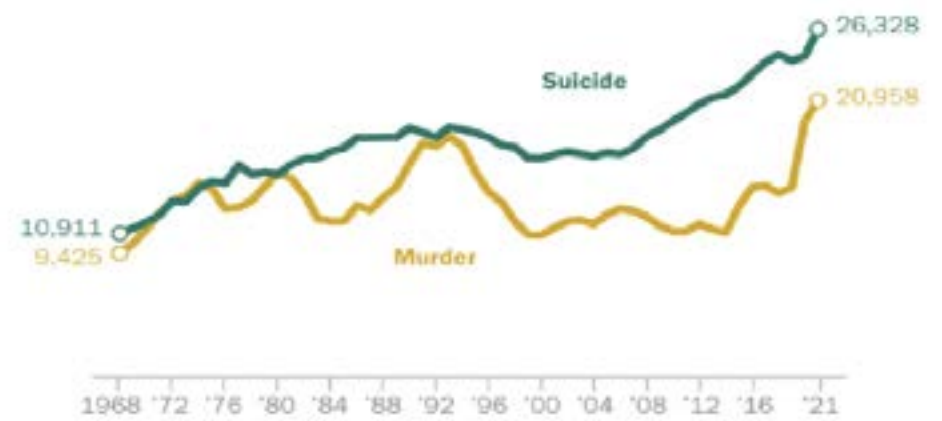
The attack on the St. Louis high school followed a string of shootings in Uvalde, Texas; Parkland, Florida; and Newtown, Connecticut. In March, a former student shot and killed three children and three staff members at a private Christian school in Nashville, Tennessee. While each tragedy brings a renewed call for legislative action, there is little agreement as to a policy solution. In this issue of *Messenger*, we examine the data on gun-related deaths and discuss what the Church says about gun violence.





U.S. saw record numbers of gun suicides and gun murders in 2021

Gun suicides and gun murders in U.S.



Note: Gun murders and suicides between 1968 and 1978 are classified by the CDC as involving firearms and explosives; those between 1979 and 2021 include firearms only.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

How frequent is gun violence?

Pew Research Center recently conducted an analysis of data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the FBI, and other sources related to gun deaths. More Americans died of gun-related injuries in 2021--the most recent year for which complete data is available--than in any other year on record. 48,830 people died from gun-related injuries, with the vast majority of those resulting from murders and suicides (the number also includes less common types of gun-related death: accidental deaths, those involving law enforcement, and those whose circumstances could not be determined)¹. Suicides accounted for 54% of gun-related deaths while 43% were murders.²

While the overall number of gun deaths in the U.S. is at its high, the *rate* of gun deaths is still below its historical peak, although the number has increased sharply in the last few years. There were 14.6 gun deaths per 100,000 people in 2021 (6.7 murders and 7.5 suicides), down from 16.3 gun deaths per 100,000 in 1974.³

1 <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/26/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/>

2 Id.

3 Id.

One major area of concern is the increasing number of gun deaths among children and teens. In 2019, there were 1,732 gun deaths among U.S. children and teens under the age of 18. By 2021, that figure had increased to 2,590. The gun death rate also increased during that time period, going from 2.4 fatalities per 100,000 minor residents in 2019 to 3.5 per 100,000 two years later, a 46% increase.⁴ Both the number and rate of deaths of children and teens in 2021 were at their highest rate since the CDC began tracking such numbers in 1999. While the majority of gun deaths among adults were the result of suicide, 60% of gun deaths among children and teens were the result of murders.⁵

Gun violence is also closely tied to instances of domestic violence. Research indicates that 19% of domestic violence involves a weapon of some type.⁶ However, the presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation has been found to increase the risk of homicide by 500%.⁷ In 2020 in Missouri, 67 women were murdered by men. In those instances in which a weapon was identified, 78% of female victims were shot and killed by guns.

4 <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/06/gun-deaths-among-us-kids-rose-50-percent-in-two-years/>

5 Id.

6 <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/ndv0312.pdf>

7 Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results From a Multisite Case Control Study <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1447915/>

More Americans died of gun-related injuries in 2021 than in any other year on record -CDC

About 8 in 10 U.S. murders in 2021 involved a firearm -CDC

Gun deaths among America's children rose 50% from 2019 to 2021 -Pew Research Center



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Mass Shootings

One aspect of gun violence that is difficult to track is the prevalence of mass shootings, because there is not one agreed-upon definition of such an event. The FBI defines an “active shooter incident” as one where one or more individuals actively engage in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area. Using that definition, there were 61 active shooter incidents in 2021, up from 40 in 2020, and nearly double the number in 2017.¹ The 61 incidents resulted in 103 individuals killed and 140 wounded.² Twelve incidents met the federal definition of a “mass killing”, meaning they resulted in three or more deaths.³ While such incidents account for a small portion of overall gun deaths, they have been steadily increasing over the last few years.

¹ Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2021, <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-incidents-in-the-us-2021-052422.pdf/view>

² Id.

³ Id.

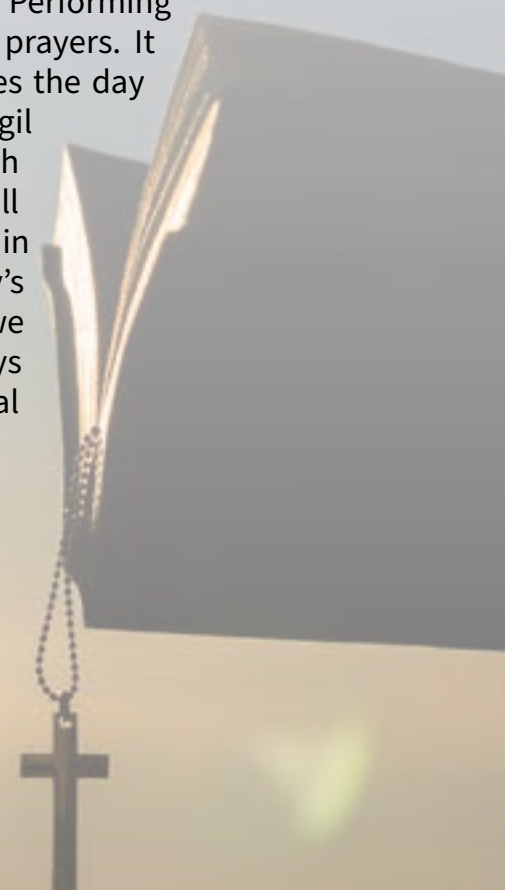
Missouri Gun Laws

Missouri laws regulating guns have continued to loosen in recent years. The state currently does not require a waiting period for purchasing a gun, does not prohibit open carry, and in 2016, passed “constitutional carry”, allowing concealed carry of a firearm without a permit. In 2021, the General Assembly passed the “Second Amendment Preservation Act” which sought to nullify “all federal acts, laws, executive orders, administrative orders, court orders, rules, and regulations, whether past, present, or future, that infringe on the people’s right to keep and bear arms as guaranteed by the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution and Article I, Section 23 of the Missouri Constitution”. However, the law is currently tied up in a legal battle and was recently struck down by a federal judge. Regardless, Missouri remains one of the friendliest states for those supporting expanded gun rights.

Statement from Archbishop Mitchell T. Rozanski Regarding Shooting at Central Visual & Performing Arts High School

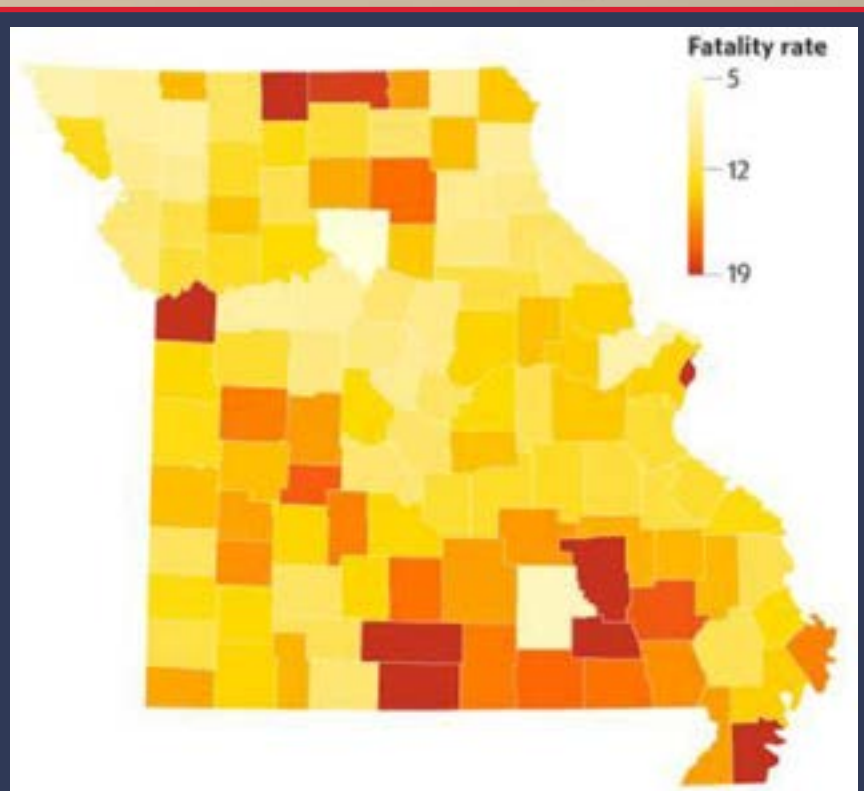
“Once again people in our city have experienced the tragic loss of lives and the trauma of a school shooting. I am holding our neighbors in the Central Visual & Performing Arts High School community in my prayers. It is a sad irony that this tragedy comes the day before the multi-denominational Vigil to Save Children’s Lives and Interfaith Gun Safety Initiative launch. I urge all people of good will to join together in prayer for everyone affected by today’s shooting, and for divine guidance as we continue as a community to seek ways of addressing the dual crises of mental health and violence.”

- Most Reverend Mitchell T. Rozanski
Archbishop of St. Louis



Missouri Gun Fatality Rate per 100,000 (1998-2018)

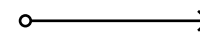
*Humera Lodhi and Neil Nakahodo,
The Kansas City Star*





Jessica Woolbright, Executive Director of the Saint Martha's domestic violence center in St. Louis, and Deacon Tyler McClay, Director of Advocacy, Catholic Charities of St. Louis, discuss the impact of guns in domestic violence situations, federal and state legislation, and the upcoming gun violence summit, in this episode of MCC from the Capitol.

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What does the Church say about gun policy?

The U.S. bishops have consistently advocated for federal and state policies to curb gun violence. After the tragic shooting in Uvalde, Texas where an eighteen-year-old shot and killed nineteen children and two teachers, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) called for “dialogue followed by concrete action” from Congress “to bring about a broader social renewal that addresses all aspects of the crisis, including mental health, the state of families, the valuation of life, the influence of entertainment and gaming industries, bullying, and the availability of firearms.”¹

In addition to policies addressing the larger societal causes of violence, the USCCB has also supported the following concrete policies intended to reduce gun violence²:

- A total ban on assault weapons, which the USCCB supported when the ban passed in 1994 (Congress failed to renew it in 2004);
- Measures that control the sale and use of firearms, such as universal background checks for all gun purchases;
- Limitations on civilian access to high-capacity weapons and ammunition magazines;
- A federal law to criminalize gun trafficking;
- Improved access to and increased resources for mental health care and earlier interventions;
- Regulations and limitations on the purchasing of handguns;
- Measures that make guns safer, such as locks that prevent children and anyone other than the owner from using the gun without permission and supervision; and,
- An honest assessment of the toll of violent images and experiences which inundate people, particularly our youth.

The USCCB also supports “wholistic measures, such as the promotion of mercy and peacebuilding in our communities through restorative justice policies and practices, ongoing encounters and discussions at the parish level regarding violence in communities.”

Keeping with this approach, the Archdiocese of St. Louis is planning a summit on gun violence on July 29, 2023. The non-partisan event will focus on the impact on public health and the Catholic perspective on the crisis of gun violence in our communities.

Save the date **Addressing GUN VIOLENCE**
Promoting a culture of life

A one-day summit exploring the Catholic perspective on the crisis of gun violence in communities throughout the Archdiocese.

Welcome by Archbishop Mitchell T. Rozanski

SATURDAY, JULY 29
9:00 am - 3:00 pm

Cardinal Rigali Center
20 Archbishop May Dr.
St. Louis, MO 63119

More information:
Marie Kenyon ■ mariekenyon@archstl.org ■ 314.792.7062

¹ Letter to Congress on Gun Violence, June 3, 2022, <https://www.usccb.org/resources/letter-congress-gun-violence-june-3-2022>

² Backgrounder on Gun Violence: A Mercy and Peacebuilding Approach to Gun Violence, January 2020, <https://www.usccb.org/resources/backgrounder-gun-violence-mercy-and-peacebuilding-approach-gun-violence-january-2020>