

A Mercy and Peacebuilding Approach to Gun Violence

An updated backgrounder on USCCB positions on gun violence



United States
Conference of
Catholic Bishops

Committee on
Domestic Justice and
Human Development

The USCCB first issued "A Mercy and Peacebuilder Approach to Gun Violence" in 2018, with the last update in 2020.

Why Does the Church Have an Opinion on Gun Violence?

When the preservation of life is at issue, we must respond. There are tens of thousands of gun-related deaths each year in the United States. A majority of these deaths are the result of suicide. This epidemic of violence is present in every community and affects the people of God in our dioceses and parishes.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has historically supported common sense measures of gun policy to address the violence, including:

- A ban on assault weapons
- Universal background checks
- A federal gun trafficking bill
- Regulations on sales of handguns
- Improved access to mental health care
- Banning large capacity magazines
- Safe storage measures
- Extreme risk protective orders
- An honest assessment of violent images and experiences in our society.

Whether the result is homicide, suicide, or injury, we mourn the loss of life and situations which led to it. We are called to stand in solidarity with victims and families, while also seeking practical policies and interventions for those at risk of harming themselves or others to better safeguard human life.

CNS/Lola Gomez



"Let us plead God to stop the pandemic of arms, large and small, which infects our world. May our Mother Mary, the Queen of Peace, help us to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah: 'They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks' (Is 2:4)."

POPE LEO XIV

August 2025 Angelus Address in response to the school shooting at Annunciation Catholic School in Minnesota

The History of USCCB Positions on Gun Violence

In 1994, recalling the words of Pope Paul VI, “if you want peace, work for justice,” the U.S. bishops issued their pastoral message, *Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action*. The bishops stated, “We have an obligation to respond. Violence -- in our homes, our schools and streets, our nation and world -- is destroying the lives, dignity and hopes of millions of our sisters and brothers.”

With this reality in mind, the USCCB supported the Federal Assault Weapons Ban initially passed in 1994, but which expired in 2004. In 2000, the U.S. bishops issued their pastoral statement, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, and called for all people to work toward a culture of life, to do more to end violence in our homes, and to help victims break out of patterns of abuse. Regarding gun violence prevention the bishops wrote, “We support measures that control the sale and use of firearms and make them safer (especially efforts that prevent their unsupervised use by children or anyone other than the owner), and we reiterate our call for sensible regulation of handguns.”

In addition to several statements and testimony offered to Congress on gun violence following several of the tragedies in recent years, the USCCB formed a Special Task Force to Promote Peace in Our Communities in response to the violence of the summer of 2016. The USCCB has consistently urged policy changes in the wake of violent tragedies which have become far too frequent in our cities and towns. Most recently, the USCCB has spoken out against the rise of political and ideological violence in our nation with the 2024 pastoral statement ‘*Pursue What Leads to Peace*’: A Christian Response to Rising Threats of Political and Ideological Violence.

Timeline of USCCB Advocacy

1975

The U.S. bishops issue their pastoral message: *Handgun Violence: A Threat to Life*.

1994

The U.S. bishops issue their pastoral message: *Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action*.

2002

The U.S. bishops issue their pastoral message: *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*.

2012

Three USCCB chairmen respond to the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting with Call for Action in Response to Newton Tragedy.

2016

In response to violence in the summer of 2016, the USCCB establishes the Special Task Force to Promote Peace in Our Communities, which issued a final report and recommendations in the fall of that year.

2019

At the Bishops’ General Assembly in fall of 2019, Bishop Frank Dewane, then Chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, gives a comprehensive overview of various policy responses to gun violence.

2022

Four USCCB chairmen respond to the Robb Elementary School shooting in Uvalde, Texas with a letter to Congress on gun violence in the United States. The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which passed later that year, was the first federal gun policy legislation enacted into law in nearly 30 years.

2024

In response to rising threats of political and ideological violence, Archbishop Borys Gudziak, then Chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, issues, ‘*Pursue What Leads to Peace*’: A Christian Response to Rising Threats of Political and Ideological Violence.