



PRIESTS' ASSOCIATION CALLS FOR ASSAULT WEAPON BAN,
RENEWAL OF 'OUR MORAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR SHAPING A CULTURE OF LIFE'

December 14, 2022 • For immediate release

Following the July 4 mass shooting in Highland Park, Illinois, three bishops in leadership positions called for banning assault weapons and limitations on high capacity magazines.

Rev. John Heagle, chair of an AUSCP Gospel Non-violence working group, praised the advocacy of the members of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, adding "Our only regret is that this position of the USCCB is not well known among our brother priests and fellow Catholics."

"It seems there are no days of the year when our nation is not grieving the latest mass shooting. It has not always been this way, and it is getting worse," said the July statement from Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore, chairman of the bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, and Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco, chairman of the bishops' Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth.

The three committee chairs concluded, "We support a total ban on assault weapons and limitations on civilian access to high-capacity weapons and ammunition magazines."

The priests' statement, issued December 14, on the anniversary of the school shooting at Sandy Hook, asks the bishops to adopt the weapons ban as national policy and to encourage priests to preach about the issue and to support the legislation in Congress (H.R. 1808). Said the priests, "[T]his is an important opportunity for our faith tradition to renew our moral responsibility for shaping a 'culture of life' (to use Pope St. John Paul II's striking phrase) in all of its dimensions."

The brief AUSCP statement follows:

AUSCP advocates for a ban on all assault weapons. AUSCP also proposes that the USCCB make this the official policy of the United States Bishops, including homiletic and catechetical material to implement this moral stance. Recognizing the resistance that our priests are facing from certain groups in the gun lobby, we invite pastoral preaching to unite with their bishops in this effort.

The statement, along with its background and rationale is included, below.

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PROPOSAL ADVOCATING FOR BAN ON ASSAULT WEAPONS
Submitted by the Gospel Nonviolence Working Group
December 8, 2022

Background and Rationale

1. Following the July 4, 2022, mass shooting at Highland Park, Illinois Pope Francis sent a telegram to Cardinal Base Cupich, the Archbishop of Chicago, expressing his shock and sadness over the violent deaths of seven people and the wounding of a dozen more. The Holy Father condemned the “senseless shooting” and appealed for a rejection of all forms of violence.

2. In a similar response to this tragedy, Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore, chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Pro-Life Activities, and Archbishop Cordileone of San Francisco, chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth issued the following statement:

“Over the holiday, yet another community experienced the devastation of a mass shooting, a situation that has become shockingly commonplace in our country. One of the many horrors that emerged from this shooting was the orphaning of a two-year-old boy. He was found underneath his father, who died shielding him from gunfire. Our prayers are with this child, and all those who grieve in the face of this tragedy.

“It seems there are no days of the year when our nation is not grieving the latest mass shooting. It has not always been this way, and it is getting worse. That the Highland Park shooting took place on a day when we celebrate all that is good about America and America’s freedoms is a devastating reminder that mass shootings do not happen with the same relentless and brutal frequency in other places in the world.

“It can be hard to find hope now, though we know our hope is in Jesus who is always near to us in suffering. We are grateful that Congress recently passed its first major gun legislation in nearly 30 years. But in the face of these repeated acts of violence, that cannot be all we do.

*“We call on Catholics, lawmakers, community leaders, health care and social service providers, law enforcement, and families to keep pushing for change and offer prayers, support, and generous assistance to victims. For years, the Catholic bishops of the United States have supported policies to strengthen gun laws, as well as emphasized mental health, family, and cultural factors, aimed at curbing gun violence. **We support a total ban on assault weapons and limitations on civilian access to high-capacity weapons and ammunition magazines.** It is sobering to think that as horrible as mass shootings are, they are but a sliver of total annual homicides committed with guns; and gun homicides, in turn, are far outnumbered by gun suicides.*

“May we live to see an America that can celebrate its freedoms without orphaning its children. May the pursuit of liberty one day be a faithful guardian

to the pursuit of life. May the Light of God's compassion shine on us and guide our feet out of darkness and the shadow of death, and into the way of peace."

3. We are grateful to Pope Francis, Cardinal Cupich, Archbishops Coakley, Lori, and Cordileone for voicing their compassion for the victims and their families, as well as their support for a ban on all assault weapons. Our only regret is that this position of the USCCB is not well known among our brother priests and fellow Catholics, since this is an important opportunity for our faith tradition to renew our moral responsibility for shaping a 'culture of life' (to use Pope St John Paul II's striking phrase) in all of its dimensions.

4. We also affirm the initiatives currently under way in 117th Congress (H.R.1808) to ban assault weapons.

Proposal (accepted by AUSCP Leadership Team, December 13, 2022)

AUSCP advocates for a ban on all assault weapons. AUSCP also proposes that the USCCB make this the official policy of the United States Bishops, including homiletic and catechetical material to implement this moral stance. Recognizing the resistance that our priests are facing from certain groups in the gun lobby, we invite pastoral preaching to unite with their bishops in this effort.