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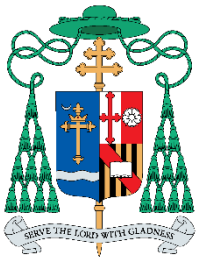
Gun Violence Prevention Tool Kit

TASK FORCE ON GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION



Office of Peace & Justice

ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS | 20 ARCHBISHOP MAY DR., ST. LOUIS, MO 63119



July 9, 2024

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Like many of you, I have witnessed the devastation and tragedy brought on by the senseless gun violence that plagues our nation, cities, and neighborhoods. Far too often than I would like to count, I have prayed for and wept with victims, families, and communities when another human life was lost to an act of violence.

The disturbing frequency of these events calls for serious reflection on why people carry out these senseless acts of violence. It is also appropriate to consider the use of guns in society. Gun violence is a human life issue — a quality and dignity of life issue. Those who are threatened by gun violence are not able to fully and freely live the way that God intends for them.

My fellow Missouri bishops and I have come together on several occasions to address this violence and to call for changes in our laws and our society. Last year, I convened an archdiocesan summit, “Addressing Gun Violence: It’s A Matter Of Life” and established the Archdiocese Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention to develop advocacy, education, parish involvement, and pastoral care guidelines.

Hundreds of people in our very own Archdiocese are killed and many more are injured by gun violence every year. Catholic Social Teaching calls us to combat the unholy trinity of poverty, racism, and violence and to engage in actions that honor the worth and dignity of every human being. So let us all engage in the work of gun violence prevention.

This epidemic calls for bold and faithful action. The Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention has provided us with resources for Catholics across the political spectrum to help engage neighbors and parishes to work together to prevent all forms of gun violence: crimes, suicides, domestic violence, and unintentional shootings. Please review these materials and share them. I pray that you join me in this effort. Together, we can effect change in our Archdiocese and serve as a prophetic sign of hope in our nation.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Mitchell T. Rozanski
Archbishop of St. Louis

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION TOOLKIT

This gun violence prevention toolkit is the work of the Archdiocese of St Louis Gun Violence Prevention Task Force. The Task Force was formed in October 2023 with a need for a response by our Archdiocese to the growing problem of gun violence.

This tool kit contains resources that address various forms of gun violence and specific ways our parishioners can be engaged in its prevention.

Our focus is on gun suicides, domestic violence, and death caused by firearms.

Addressing gun violence is directly connected to protecting human life, a bedrock Catholic social principle.

CATHOLIC TEACHINGS ON GUN VIOLENCE

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

2319 Every human life, from the moment of conception until death, is sacred because the human person has been willed for its own sake in the image and likeness of the living and holy God.

2320 The murder of a human being is gravely contrary to the dignity of the person and holiness of the Creator.

In a January 2002 letter entitled, ***A Mercy and Peacebuilding Approach to Gun Violence***, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) stated:

"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."

HOW CAN WE ADDRESS GUN VIOLENCE IN OUR PARISH?

“As a nation, we face numerous instances of gun violence in our families and communities; people who are taken from us so senselessly from young children, teens and adults, innocent and in the wrong place at the wrong time. As a Church committed to the value of life, we need to address these issues with our Christian perspective....

...Inspired by the teachings of Sacred Scripture and our Church tradition, I am hopeful that we can bring an effective pastoral response to this plague that so devastates our nation,”

-Archbishop Mitchell T. Rozanski, July 29, 2023

Addressing gun violence prevention in your parish.

Gun violence prevention is a pressing concern that must be addressed within our Catholic parishes as part of our commitment to respecting life in all its forms.

Promoting a Culture of Life.

As followers of Christ, we are called to uphold the sanctity and dignity of every human life, from conception to natural death. Gun violence, whether suicide, homicide or as part of domestic violence, directly contradicts this fundamental principle by needlessly and tragically ending lives, causing immeasurable pain, and suffering to individuals, families, and communities. Therefore, it is imperative that Catholic parishes actively engage in efforts to prevent gun violence and promote peace and justice.

The impact of gun violence on our parish communities cannot be overstated. Too often, we witness the devastating consequences of gun violence within our own businesses, schools, and homes. Lives are shattered, families are torn apart, and communities are left grappling with the aftermath of senseless tragedies. Each incident of gun violence leaves a lasting scar on the fabric of our society, perpetuating a cycle of fear, trauma, and despair. As members of the Body of Christ, we cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of our brothers and sisters who are affected by gun violence.

Seek out your people.

To make a positive change on the issue of gun violence prevention, there are several steps that individuals within Catholic parishes can take. First and foremost, look for others willing to help – a living ministries committee, Sodality, or even the parish priest might have recommendations.

Then we must educate ourselves and others about the root causes of gun violence and the effective strategies for prevention. This includes understanding the intersection of factors such as access to firearms, mental health, poverty, and systemic injustice. By deepening our knowledge and awareness, we can better advocate for evidence-based policies and interventions that address these underlying issues.

Do something that fits your parish life.

We can actively engage in efforts to promote responsible gun ownership and safety within our communities. Whether urban, suburban, or rural, all our parishes can address this issue from their lived experience. This may involve participating in gun safety training programs, supporting legislation that strengthens background checks and restricts access to firearms for individuals at risk of harming themselves or others, and advocating for the implementation of common-sense measures to prevent gun-related accidents and tragedies.

In addition to advocacy and policy initiatives, we can also contribute to the prevention of gun violence through community outreach and support programs. This could include volunteering with organizations that work to address the root causes of violence, providing assistance and resources to individuals and families affected by gun violence, and fostering dialogue and reconciliation within our communities. By coming together in solidarity and compassion, we can create spaces of healing and hope for those impacted by gun violence.

Here are some ideas that could help spur your efforts:

- **Liturgy:** Through preaching, prayer, hymns, and anthems as well as participating in activities like National Gun Violence Awareness Day in June, communities of faith are reminded of our calling to stand with the victims of gun violence and to work to prevent deaths and injuries.
- **Pastoral Care:** A healing response to gun violence addresses tragedies in the congregation and community and helps raise awareness of gun suicides and the intersection of gun violence and domestic abuse.
- **Children/family/youth:** Emphasize safe storage for gun owners. Participate in the ASK Campaign that encourages parents to ask this question when they send a child to another home: “If yours is a home with a gun, is it securely locked up?”
- **Adult education:** Sponsor discussions, speakers, films, and book studies supporting gun violence prevention. Resources for speakers include Women Against Gun Violence, The Brady Campaign, and Moms Demand Action.
- **Social justice advocacy:** Engage in letter writing and attend meetings with elected officials to support gun violence prevention, particularly from a faith-based perspective.
- **Public witness:** Display banners, hold vigils, and support public events in your community to support gun violence prevention.

Lean into your Faith.

Prayer is a powerful tool in our efforts to prevent gun violence and promote peace. As Catholic parishioners, we can lift our voices in prayer for victims of gun violence, their families, and all those affected by this epidemic. We can also pray for the conversion of hearts and minds, asking God to guide us in our efforts to build a society where every life is valued and protected.

Moreover, we can use our voices and platforms within our parishes to raise awareness about the issue of gun violence and mobilize others to take action. This could involve organizing educational events, hosting guest speakers, and participating in advocacy campaigns aimed at raising public awareness and promoting policy change. By amplifying our collective voice, we can effect meaningful change and work towards a future free from the scourge of gun violence.

Get started now.

As individuals and as a faith community, we are called to be agents of transformation and reconciliation in the world. By embracing our responsibility to address the issue of gun violence prevention, we can live out our Catholic values and contribute to the building of a more just and peaceful society. Let us heed the call to action and work together towards a future where every life is cherished and protected from the threat of gun violence.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

St. Martha's Hall - <https://saintmarthas.org/>

- Since 1983, Saint Martha's has worked to end the cycle of domestic violence. We empower women to take control of their lives and secure a better future for themselves and their children.

Mercy Neighborhood Ministry Resources - <https://www.mercy.net/practice/mercy-neighborhood-ministry/mercy-neighborhood-ministry-resources/>

- Mercy Neighborhood offers an abundance of resource throughout the St. Louis area.

Cardinal Glennon Hospital - <https://www.ssmhealth.com/cardinal-glennon/>

- Serves children in need of health care throughout St. Louis.

Children's Services Coalition of St. Louis - <https://www.csc-stl.org/>

- CSC members work together to promote the delivery of high-quality social and behavioral healthcare services for Missouri's children and their families through advocacy, collaboration, and communication.

The BRIC (Bullet Related Injury Clinic) - <https://www.thebric.org/>

- Community-based clinic in St. Louis specializing in helping people heal after they have been injured by a bullet. "We provide holistic care for anyone dealing with the impact of a bullet to support your mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing. Whether you have been shot, someone you love has been injured, or there has been a shooting in your community, we are here for you."

Behavioral Health Response - <https://bhrstl.com/>

- Crisis support, mental health counseling, suicide intervention/prevention, resource referral, 24-hour hotline
- Justice and Crisis Response Unit: street triage co-responder model where a trained J-CRU clinician partners with a St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department officer. Our clinician travels on calls related to behavioral health such as mental health, substance use, trauma, quality of life events, self-sufficiency incidents, and more.
- 911 Diversion program helps the community obtain crisis phone services if an emergency response is not needed.

Crime Victim Advocacy Center - <https://www.supportvictims.org/>

- Victim advocacy, trauma-informed counseling, support groups, legal assistance, fundraising for crime victims fund (support for victims of all types of crime, including violence).

SMART for Kids - <https://besmartforkids.org/>

- The Be SMART campaign was launched in 2015 to promote responsible gun ownership to reduce child gun deaths. Whether you're a gun owner, or you know someone who owns a gun, there is a role for everyone in the conversation around secure gun storage. Be SMART is a framework that parents, caretakers, and community leaders can follow to help keep their communities safe.

HOW CAN WE HELP OUR PARISHIONER(S) WHO IS A VICTIM OF GUN VIOLENCE?

Supporting a parishioner who is a victim of gun violence or has had a family member who is a victim, requires compassion and understanding. Here are ways your parish community can help.

1. Organize a prayer service at church. Enlist the assistance of your Pastor and key parish leaders. Invite the entire parish community to join the family in prayer for the victim and their family.
2. Help with practical needs. Organize meals for the family, gift cards, or money donations. Help with transportation, childcare, or other needed help during their time of need.
3. Encourage parishioners to send cards with messages of hope and support.
4. Attend the Funeral or Memorial Mass.

NATIONAL GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION GROUPS

Everytown for Gun Safety - <https://www.everytown.org/>

Four key components for **Everytown for Gun Safety** are:

Moms Demand Action is the nation's largest grassroots volunteer network working to end gun violence, with more than 700 local groups across the country and a chapter in every state. Volunteers campaign for new, strong solutions to lax gun laws

Students Demand Action is a national movement of high school and college-aged volunteers working to end gun violence. Volunteers organize within their schools and communities to educate their peers, register voters, and demand common-sense solutions to this national crisis.

The Everytown Survivor Network is a nationwide community of survivors working together to end gun violence. The Survivor Network connects survivors to each other, amplifies the power of survivor voices, offers trauma-informed programs, provides information on direct services, and supports survivors who choose to become advocates.

Mayors Against Illegal Guns is a bipartisan coalition of more than 2,000 current and former mayors united around three common goals: advancing enforcement and data collection strategies to prevent gun violence; investing in victim services and violence intervention programs to address gun violence; and advocating for gun safety legislation at the local, state, and federal level.

Sandy Hook Promise - <https://www.sandyhookpromise.org/>

Sandy Hook Promise is a national nonprofit organization founded and led by several family members whose loved ones were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012. Based in Newtown, Connecticut, our intent is to honor all victims of gun violence by turning our tragedy into a moment of transformation.

Know the Signs programs teach students and educators to recognize the warning signs of potential violence and get help. These programs build a positive school climate where everyone looks out for one another.

United Against Gun Violence | Brady - <https://www.bradyunited.org/>

Brady approaches ending gun violence in America in three critical ways: changing the laws, changing the industry, and changing the culture.

Our three-pronged approach is unique among gun violence prevention organizations and is founded on the need for ensuring responsible gun ownership.

This three-point strategy follows the roadmap behind other successful social change campaigns, including those to prevent drunk driving, promote seatbelt use, and reduce youth smoking.

Giffords - <https://giffords.org/>

Giffords Center for Violence Intervention researches and promotes community violence intervention strategies, connects community organizations to policymakers and to one another, and helps secure funding for violence intervention initiatives nationwide.

Giffords Law Center fights to draft, enact, and defend the laws, policies, and programs proven to save lives from gun violence.

Gun Violence Research

Everytown Research - <https://everytownresearch.org/>

Everytown Research conducts independent, methodologically rigorous research, supports evidence-based policies, and communicates this knowledge to the public.

The Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions - <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/center-for-gun-violence-solutions>

The team at the **Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions** includes highly experienced researchers and public health-trained advocates to address gun violence as an epidemic-level public health emergency. Because gun violence disproportionately impacts communities of color, they ground their work in equity and seek insights from those most impacted on appropriate solutions.

GUN SUICIDE

- **Suicide is the leading cause of gun deaths.**
- 61% of all suicides in Missouri involve a gun.
- Over 700 people die by gun suicide every year in Missouri.
- 53% of all gun deaths in Missouri are suicides. 11th highest in the country.
- In Missouri, the rate of gun suicide increased **32%** from 2012 to 2021, compared to a **19%** increase nationwide during that time.

Everystat.org

Means Matter is a focus group of the Harvard School of Public Health which raises awareness about the use correlation between the availability and use of guns as a method of suicide and the rate of suicide.

(<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/>)

According to their research:

- Many suicide attempts occur with little planning during a short-term crisis.
- Intent is not all that determines whether an attempter lives or dies; means also matter.
- 90% of attempters who survive do NOT go on to die by suicide later.
- Access to firearms is a risk factor for suicide.
- Firearms used in youth suicide usually belong to a parent.
- Reducing access to lethal means saves lives.

SAFE STORAGE OF GUNS

When not in use, firearms should be stored locked and unloaded, ammunition should be stored separately (preferable locked up), and the key or lock combinations should be inaccessible to children, adolescents, and those at elevated risk of harm to self or others.

More than half of all U.S. gun owners store firearms unlocked. Responsible gun ownership is not only about how, where, and when a person uses their firearm; it's also about how they store it when not in use.

Suicide: Far too often someone in crisis gains access to a family member's firearm that is left unlocked. Suicide is a public health crisis and firearms are the most lethal suicide method. The gun suicide rate has steadily increased, nearly uninterrupted, since 2006.

Theft: Hundreds of thousands of guns are stolen from homes and cars each year, helping to fuel high rates of gun violence across the country, disproportionately impacting communities of color.

Unintentional shootings: Access to unsecured firearms increases the risk of unintentional injury and death by firearm. Children are often impacted by unintentional firearm injuries by gaining access to an unsecured firearm owned by a parent.

Safely storing firearms can reduce gun injuries and deaths, and is supported by researchers, healthcare professionals, and gunowners alike.

Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solution

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Abusers use guns to threaten and control victims. These threats often escalate to murder. Every month, an average of 70 women are shot and killed by an intimate partner.

The ripple effects of guns in the hands of an abuser extend far beyond the intimate relationship. This affects children, family members, coworkers, and the law enforcement officers who respond to it.

Research clearly shows that federal and state practices that disrupt abusers' access to guns can save lives.

- Nearly half of all women killed in the U.S. are murdered by a current or former intimate partner.
- About 4.5 million women in the United States have been threatened with a gun and nearly 1 million women have been shot or shot at by an intimate partner.
- Over half of all intimate partner homicides are committed with a gun.
- A woman is five times more likely to be murdered when her abuser had access to a gun.

A trusted community resource for women who are abused is St Martha's Hall: <https://saintmarthas.org/>



CONTACT INFORMATION

You can contact the Gun Violence Prevention Task Force at: gvptf@archstl.org

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION: IT'S A MATTER OF LIFE