



A Call to Action to End Gun Violence

Dear All,

Recent tragedies in Buffalo, Uvalde, Philadelphia and beyond have been painful reminders that the epidemic of gun violence is not showing signs of slowing down. It seems that there is no death toll high enough or life worthy of implementing gun-safety regulations. It is our obligation as the Church to show all of God's children they are worthy - even one life lost is unacceptable. Our diocese can, and will, make a difference. We have 135 churches covering five counties, that is more than enough to make change.

On behalf of the Gun Violence Commission, we call all churches to act to help end gun violence.

Call to Action #1: Legislative Change

This is a national crisis and bipartisan issue. We are asking each church to make sure your local state representatives know what you (a registered voter) demand safer communities. We are asking each church to create a letter writing campaign (or join the Schuylkill Deanery's campaign), producing multiple letters to your state representative calling for an increase in gun safety regulations.

Tips: Make sure your requests are clearly stated, and address possible counter arguments. Send multiple letters over time and make it clear this will not go away. Here are some suggested gun safety changes you can include.

- ✓ Support 'Red Flag' Legislation: this allows courts to temporarily seize firearms from anyone believed to be a danger to themselves or others;
- ✓ Support Raise the Age Act: this bill would establish new restrictions on the sale or transfer of certain semiautomatic firearms to individuals under 21 years of age;
- ✓ Make gun trafficking a federal crime, covering individuals who buy firearms for a third party through "straw purchases;
- ✓ Prohibit unauthorized production or sales of untraceable "ghost guns" that lack unique serial numbers;
- ✓ Federal requirements for secure firearms storage, including in homes where young people are likely to gain access;
- ✓ Restrict sales of devices that make semiautomatic rifles fire more rapidly (like an automatic) and ban sales of large-capacity ammunition magazines.
- ✓ Background checks:
 - Support H.R. 1446, which extends the time to clear a background check from three to ten business days before a person is legally allowed to receive a gun.

- Support H.R. 8, which establishes new background check requirements for firearm transfers between private parties (i.e., unlicensed individuals). Specifically, it prohibits a firearm transfer between private parties unless a licensed gun dealer, manufacturer, or importer first takes possession of the firearm to conduct a background check.
- To find your representative go to:
 - ✓ <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/findyourlegislator/index.cfm>

Call to Action #2: Church Empowerment

We ask all clergy and outreach ministry leaders to take a Mental Health First Aide training to recognize signs such as suicidal ideations, depression, and learn de-escalation techniques. Our Diocesan Health Committee will continue to offer Mental Health First Aide trainings throughout our diocese and expand to the broader communities. These are offered virtually and some in-person.

- ✓ The committee will also continue to offer a series for youth, allowing them a chance to speak about the challenges they face as students and the barriers they encounter. The next series being in the fall.

We are asking once per quarter, a different deanery hold a gun buy back/turn in event in conjunction with groups such as Ceasefire, their local police department, and Mothers Fighting Against Gun Violence (or any local group with similar mission). Our diocese received a generous donation of an anvil and forge that can be used for these events turning guns into useful items such as art, jewelry, garden tools. RAW tools Philly can help train all those interested in this craft or attend an event; <https://philly.rawtools.org/>

We ask that each church include prayers surrounding gun violence in all services, not just when mass shootings occur.

Churches can also offer safety items such as gunlocks.

Future Efforts

In addition to this call to action, our diocese is continuing to develop new ways in which we can take concrete and meaningful action to end gun violence. These include:

Collaboration with schools. Our diocese is pursuing a collaboration with school districts as part of a youth equity program that focuses on at-risk youth for violence/mental health crisis. It will cover mentoring, addressing equity barriers, tutors, and following a

student's education through graduation. This will expand on existing partnerships with Depaul, DBHIDS and the School District of Philadelphia.

Creation of a community review team. Lastly, creating/ being involved with a community review team (consisting of local law enforcement, parole officers, probation officers, D.A. school police, social service agencies). This team will look at recent cases and run interventions such as check-ins with those who are at high-risk of being involved with gun violence, review family needs, missing resources missed, etc. This model has been proven effective in reducing gun violence in Oakland by almost half.

Change will happen with your help. To join the Gun Violence Commission or the Health Committee, contact Canon Toneh Smyth, tsmyth@diopa.org