

Feb. 28, 2018

## **Cardinal Cupich remarks on gun violence at Illinois Capitol Press Conference**

Good morning. Thank you for coming.

I have come to our state's capitol today to join my voice to those of countless young people. They along with families suffering grievous loss cry out to us with a demand for action.

Our young people are shaming the adult world to recall that the principle rights among all those we hold inalienable in this nation are the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These rights have been denied 6-year-olds in Newtown, and 14-year-olds in Parkland.

My brother bishops in the United States have long advocated for sensible gun-safety regulations without any infringement on the legitimate rights guaranteed by the Second Amendment. Defense of those rights, however, cannot take a second place to the rights our children are demanding to guarantee their futures.

I also stand in solidarity with those charged with protecting us. Their right to return home safely each day to their families includes the reasonable expectation that those who would harm society are not armed with weapons designed for the battlefield, and bullets designed to kill police officers. In the memory of Commander Paul Bauer and the brave peace officers who preceded him in making the ultimate sacrifice, I, too, call for justice and a pathway for establishing peace in our streets which these officers sacrifice each day to protect.

In the back and forth of the debates on this critical issue, we should not be naïve about the role of money in our national epidemic of gun violence. Arms dealers are driven by profits. Pope Francis has called them "merchants of death." But profits are never more important than people, and we must never allow the desire for money to eclipse our most sacred duty to keep our children safe. When even small measures to limit access to items such as armor-piercing bullets, bump stocks and high-volume magazine, are opposed, we must ask those who oppose them: whom are you protecting?

It is now up to those we elect to serve the common good to act to stop the rampant gun violence that has turned our schools, churches, theaters, and streets into places of slaughter.

- Our elected officials have the power to enact common-sense laws that limit gun ownership to those who have proven they can manage the responsibilities that come with it, just as we do with automobiles.
- They have the power to make incremental changes in the weapons that are available for sale. The response that banning the bump stocks that helped enable the carnage at a Las Vegas concert “requires further study” is simply unacceptable.
- They have the power to fund and authorize data-sharing among authorities to help identify and engage those who are likely to commit these crimes—before they even pick up a weapon.

And they hold the power to address the root causes of violence which many institutions of higher learning have identified:

- They can fund and remove unhelpful laws that limit access to mental health care and the ability of family members to obtain help for their loved ones who need it.
- They can make sure that all students have access to a solid education and that workers receive a fair wage that lifts families out of the cycle of poverty and despair that perpetuates the cycle of violence.
- They can stop saying that they will pray for victims and uphold family values if that is the only response they care to give to these tragedies. The time for words is over, our children are telling us. What is now required is action.

Our elected officials may not be able to do everything all at once, and they may not be able to save everyone, but in the name of those murdered children, they must begin the process of walking away from the moral compromises that doom our society to inaction.

I say it again. The youth of our nation are shaming the adult world into action. At the least we should defend their right and the rights of others to speak out, and condemn any attempt to silence them with defamation and threats of retribution.

Their voices are a wakeup call that should have been heard years ago. The carnage we saw in Florida happens nearly every day throughout our state and our nation. I say this as one who has prayed with family members of children lost to gun violence, trying my best to offer God’s love and healing. I have joined police officers on their nightly rounds and witnessed the peril that comes with every call they answer.

I urge the General Assembly to listen to the voices of our young people, of their own children and the children they represent. I appeal to them to examine the violence-prevention proposals before them closely and to enact laws that will stop the carnage and bring sanity and safety to our schools, our streets, our churches and our homes.

I close with a final word of thanks to all those in law enforcement - in Chicago and throughout the state - who work tirelessly every day to make us safe.

In his letter to me last year upon the announcement of the Archdiocese's Violence Prevention Initiative, Pope Francis remarked, "The consistent practice of nonviolence has broken barriers, bound wounds, healed nations – and it can help heal Chicago."

I add that it also can help heal our state and our nation. It is now up to us to act decisively. Our children are watching.