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## Illinois Bishops Contemplate Guns in Modern Society

The U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has a longstanding record of urging reasonable regulation of firearms. Recognizing legitimate rights to self-defense, and that there are diverse attitudes about the possession of guns in the urban centers and rural areas across Illinois, we cannot ignore the alarming and pervasive increase of violence in society. Children, parents, siblings and friends have been struck down by gunfire, and we mourn the loss of our brothers and sisters.

In the 1994 pastoral message, *Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action*, the USCCB 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.”

Our U.S. bishops followed with their 2000 statement, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, proclaiming, “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.”

Their words strike a somber note in Illinois these days, and should provoke all citizens to take this issue seriously and work to build a safer and more peaceful society.

Our elected representatives in the Illinois General Assembly have responded with legislation seeking to stem the rising tide of gun-related crimes. These efforts have so far focused on increasing the length of sentences for repeat gun offenders or requiring gun dealers to be licensed by state authorities. Yet, while realizing that in a state as diverse as Illinois, a legislative fix for gun violence can be difficult to craft, it is worth the effort if we are serious about saving lives.

We repeat our concerns for the reasonable regulation of firearms, all the while respecting the rights guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. Defense of those rights cannot take a second place, however, to the relentless pursuit of peace. In this, we look for guidance and encouragement from the words Pope Francis recently addressed to the people of Chicago, which has meaning for us all:

“... [A] culture of nonviolence is not an unattainable dream, but a path that has produced decisive results. The consistent practice of nonviolence has broken barriers, bound wounds, healed nations – and it can heal Chicago.”

-- Pope Francis, writing to Cardinal Blase Cupich on April 4, 2017

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