



The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

A letter from the Episcopal bishops in Pennsylvania.

We, the bishops of the Episcopal Church in Pennsylvania: The Rt. Rev. Daniel G. P. Gutiérrez canlan, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Central Pennsylvania and The Rt. Rev. Ketlen Solak, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, serve as spiritual leaders to nearly 65,000 of God's faithful in our Commonwealth. We offer, together, this statement that forged in prayer calls us to unite in mission and work for change.

Membership in our Christian community of faith calls us to strive for justice and peace, and to love our neighbors as ourselves (1). The Baptismal Covenant that joins us is an invitation to collaborate for the building of God's kingdom. We recognize that there are many factors that contribute to an average of 1,600 violent gun deaths in our Commonwealth each year (2). The intersectionality of economic hardship, racism, drug trafficking, an overwhelmed mental health system, and the ongoing effects of the pandemic have created a constellation of stressors that has led many to take desperate, grave, and violent measures ending in the death of neighbors, friends, children, and strangers, alike.

Gun violence is an epidemic in our Commonwealth. The number of violent gun deaths that we suffer in Pennsylvania is more than twice

that of states that we associate with gun ownership: Colorado, Nevada, Wyoming, and New Mexico, as examples; and the number of annual gun deaths in Pennsylvania is reported to be twice that of New York and more than all New England, combined. (3)

We urge our congregations, clergy, and faithful people to persist in working for peace and to hold fast to hope. In scripture we read: “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.” (Isaiah 40:31). It is time for us to press on in hope and with action.

As bishops of The Episcopal Church in Pennsylvania, we offer a united call to address gun violence as a leading source of death in our Commonwealth. Here in Pennsylvania, we suffer from gun violence that includes mass shootings, suicide by gun, the use of firearms in domestic violence, and murder committed with illegal handguns. The leading cause of death for children in our country is by a firearm, and often accidental. (4) All of this is fueled by the sheer volume of guns and assault weapons that are readily available in our State. Through the enactment of sensible and effective legislation, Pennsylvania can take concrete steps to reduce the illegal trafficking of handguns and unsafe use of guns.

We recognize that our Commonwealth is a place where many enjoy the recreational use of firearms through hunting, target shooting and gun clubs. We also recognize the choice of many to own handguns out of a sense of personal safety in their homes. The measures that we advocate do not seek to remove guns from lawful citizens or restrict responsible purchases of firearms. These measures focus on the illegal trafficking of firearms, immediate access to excessive amounts of firearms (often resold illegally) and the elimination of unnecessarily powerful assault weapons.

We support enactment of the following legislation:

- **One Handgun A Month:** The one handgun a month restriction would dramatically increase the challenge of straw

purchasing and illegal handgun trafficking for gun traffickers, which significantly reduces the flow of illegal handguns into streets and neighborhoods, thereby saving lives from gun murder, a proven strategy that has been successfully implemented in other states.

- **Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO):** Judicial orders for the temporary removal of fire-arms from persons deemed dangerous to themselves and/or others. Family members, neighbors, friends, and police may seek these orders from a judge.
- **Prohibition on sales/possession of assault weapons and large capacity ammunition magazines:** Certain military style semi-automatic firearms are designed and manufactured to enable very powerful and rapid firing and to hold magazines of thirty or more bullets. Mass gun murders are usually committed with these assault weapons, which are too dangerous for civil society.
- **Prohibition on sales/possession of ghost guns:** Parts of guns and kits of parts are available for purchase in Pennsylvania, enabling the assembly of guns that have no identifying markings or information. These ghost guns are exceedingly difficult to trace, thereby making the solving of gun crimes extremely difficult for law enforcement.

You can join us in this effort by signing up to serve on one of our dioceses' gun violence committees, by supporting our partner organization Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence (<https://www.heedinggodscall.org>), and by attending a gathering at the State Capitol on March 6th where we will address lawmakers on

our legislative priorities and pray for an end to gun violence in our Commonwealth.

For more information, please contact:

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Yours in Christ,

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(1) *The Book of Common Prayer pg. 304-5*

(2) <https://efsgv.org/state/pennsylvania>

(3) <https://everystat.org/pennsylvania>

(4) <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/issue-brief/child-and-teen-firearm-mortality-in-the-u-s-and-peer-countries>



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