



**Testimony of Mr. Jason Adkins Concerning Legislation Related to Gun Violence  
Minnesota House of Representatives Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee  
February 5, 2013**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee:

The Minnesota Catholic Conference explicitly supports a number of the bills being heard today, particularly improved mental- health screening (H.F. 240), tougher penalties for straw-men purchases (H.F. 244), and tighter eligibility requirements for pistols and assault weapons (H.F. 237). But we come before you less as experts on weaponry and crime prevention, but rather to offer some thoughts concerning some of the moral and ethical considerations related to addressing problems of gun violence.

First, it should be said that the problem of gun violence is much bigger than the presence of guns in society. The City of Chicago, for example, has some of the tightest gun laws in the nation yet it also has a tremendous problem with gun-related crime. The causes of the problem, therefore, are more complex, and include substance abuse and mental illness. Our community must ensure that people struggling with mental illness and their caregivers have access to the resources and healthcare they need.

Further, violence is endemic to a culture that celebrates violence and death in its chosen forms of entertainment. And gun massacres are an unsurprising symptom of a society that resorts to violence as a means of problem solving and conflict resolution in the forms of torture, war, the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia.

We must consider as individuals and as a society how we each contribute to a culture of violence through our actions, professions, and consumer choices.

Although the horrors of gun violence have deeper roots than just the prevalence of guns in our society, it does not mean we should not take significant steps to keep weapons designed for and capable of quickly killing many people out of the hands of dangerous people. Persons, not guns, are undoubtedly responsible for the massacres seen around the country. But it is often the gun that makes these mass killings possible. And for that reason, guns may be restricted and regulated to protect the common good and everyone's right to live in peace and free from fear.

475 University Avenue W.  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55103

Tel: 651-227-8777  
Fax: 651-227-2675  
[www.mncc.org](http://www.mncc.org)

ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS ♦ DIOCESE OF CROOKSTON ♦ DIOCESE OF DULUTH  
DIOCESE OF NEW ULM ♦ DIOCESE OF SAINT CLOUD ♦ DIOCESE OF WINONA

The right to keep and bear arms, like all rights, carries with it responsibilities and limitations, particularly the responsibility to use a dangerous weapon only for lawful or legitimate purposes, such as self-defense and hunting. And as weapons become more powerful and capable of being used for destructive and unlawful purposes, as well as have fewer legitimate civilian justifications and uses, such as military-style assault weapons,<sup>i</sup> limitations on their use and purchase become more prudent.<sup>ii</sup>

In all cases, regulations related to sale and proper use of guns are an appropriate means of ensuring that the right to own guns is exercised by people qualified and capable of exercising the right responsibly.

After the Sandy Hook massacre, the Catholic bishops of the United States renewed their call<sup>iii</sup> for all Americans, particularly legislators to:

- Support measures that control the sale and use of firearms;
- Support measures that make guns safer (especially efforts that prevent their unsupervised use by children and anyone other than the owner);
- Support sensible regulation of handguns;
- Support legislative efforts that seek to protect society from the violence associated with easy access to deadly weapons including assault weapons.

Here in Minnesota, we are pleased that legislative solutions along these lines have been introduced.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” It is a statement echoed in many faith traditions. In his World Day of Peace Message for 2013,<sup>iv</sup> Pope Benedict XVI declared that the pursuit of peace is not utopianism, but is truly possible provided we work together to achieve it. We must enact policies that discourage violence as a means of conflict resolution and establishing social order, as well as foster the integral development and well-being of persons, particularly the poor, the addicted, and the mentally ill.<sup>v</sup>

Like many problems, the problem of gun violence can be mitigated if we are willing to work together, despite our differences, to achieve the common good. It is our hope and prayer that all of us will work together as people of peace.

---

<sup>i</sup> “Assault Weapons Backgrounder,” USCCB, February 1995, available at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/criminal-justice-restorative-justice/assault-weapons-background.cfm>.

<sup>ii</sup> “Confronting Armed Violence and Promoting Peace,” USCCB, February 2013, available at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/violence/upload/2013-02-Violence-Backgrounder-FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>iii</sup> “USCCB Committees Call for Action in Response to Newtown Tragedy,” USCCB Media Release, Dec. 21, 2013, available at <http://usccb.org/news/2012/12-219.cfm>.

<sup>iv</sup> “Blessed are the Peacemakers,” Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the World Day of Peace, Jan. 1, 2013, available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20121208\\_xlvi-world-day-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20121208_xlvi-world-day-peace_en.html).

<sup>v</sup> “Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994, available at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/violence/confronting-a-culture-of-violence-a-catholic-framework-for-action.cfm>.