



## A Letter on Gun Legislation

December 2018

As Pope Francis has observed, violent acts “of different kinds and levels,” such as war, terrorism, mass shootings, domestic violence, abuses suffered by migrants, and the devastation of the environment, cause many to suffer daily. These sorrows call for our heartfelt prayers. How sad it is when students can’t feel safe at school or families can’t feel safe going about their daily lives!

We believe that weapons increasingly capable of inflicting great suffering in a short period of time are simply too accessible. The right to bear arms as found in our Constitution must be balanced against the safety and well-being of the populace as a whole. The Supreme Court has held that such restrictions are fully compatible with the Second Amendment. In our reflection, we are also guided by the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which teaches that the commandment to love oneself justifies self-defense within moral limits against an unjust aggressor, but also requires that deadly force be used as a last resort.

This issue is timely because the regulation of guns has been an ongoing subject of legislation here in Iowa during the past several years. This letter is not intended to be a comprehensive review of the Church’s moral teaching on violence and weapons, but simply to offer a few suggestions in a spirit of helpfulness and love for the communities we serve:

- We ask legislators to consider the passage of a law providing for Gun Violence Restraining Orders. A recent study seems to indicate these orders may at least help reduce firearm-related suicides. The orders would allow persons in a close relationship with a gun owner to seek an order that allows authorities to temporarily take guns away when there is clear evidence that the gun owner is a danger to themselves or others.
- The role of mental illness and addictions cannot be discounted as a factor in gun violence. We support ongoing efforts to improve our state’s health care systems, including mental health care and help for opioid addiction. Many times, a person committing violence was themselves a victim of violence in the past.
- The state should consider requiring a background check anytime a weapon is sold.
- We oppose legislation such as House Joint Resolution 2009 that would restrict the state’s ability to regulate weapons in the future.
- We support the repeal of the recently-passed “Stand Your Ground” law.

Finally, we encourage prayer for the safety and protection of all. Lord, make haste to help us!

Handwritten signature of Michael Jackels in black ink, starting with a cross symbol.

Most Rev. Michael Jackels  
Archbishop of Dubuque

Handwritten signature of Thomas Zinkula in black ink, starting with a cross symbol.

Most Rev. Thomas Zinkula  
Bishop of Davenport

Handwritten signature of R. Walker Nickless in black ink, starting with a cross symbol.

Most Rev. R. Walker Nickless  
Bishop of Sioux City

Handwritten signature of Richard Pates in black ink, starting with a cross symbol.

Most Rev. Richard Pates  
Bishop of Des Moines