



## **Preventing Gun Violence – A Statement from Washington State’s Catholic Bishops**

October 18, 2018

Recent mass shootings in our country have confirmed that violent tragedies have become far too frequent in our communities and very powerful weapons are often too accessible. Since 2014, there have been numerous large scale gun tragedies right here in our state including the Marysville Pilchuck High School shooting (2014), the Mukilteo house party (2016), Cascade Mall in Burlington (2016), and Freeman High School (2017). The sacredness of all human life from conception until natural death demands that the Catholic Church engage in solutions to help prevent these horrific occurrences.

While acknowledging the importance of individual liberties such as gun ownership, the U.S. Catholic Church has long supported measures to bring thoughtful safeguards to the sale and use of firearms. These include a ban on assault weapons, setting an appropriate minimum age for gun ownership, and requiring reasonable safety measures. Endorsing such common sense practices flows from our moral responsibility to protect human life at all stages.

This November, Washington voters will consider Initiative 1639 that would increase background checks, firearm safety training, and waiting periods before the purchase of semiautomatic assault rifles. Additionally, it would prohibit people under age 21 from purchasing assault weapons. I-1639 would also require secured firearm storage or trigger-locks.

In 2014, the Washington State Catholic Bishops endorsed an earlier ballot initiative that expanded background checks on guns sold online and at gun shows. We also declared our support for efforts intended to curb easy access to deadly weapons, including assault rifles. Catholic teaching emphasizes that it is the moral duty of all people to take steps to defend human life and, as pastoral leaders, we have a particular responsibility to participate in efforts that will reduce violence. As our U.S. bishops' 1994 document, *Confronting a Culture of Violence*, states: "We see the loss of lives. We serve the victims. We feel the fear. We must confront this growing culture of violence with a commitment to life, a vision of hope and a call to action."


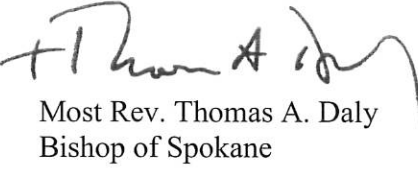
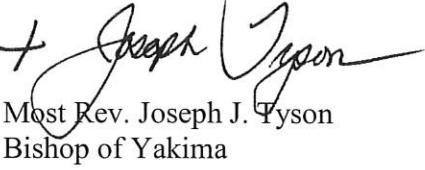
Thus, the Bishops of Washington State offer the following priorities to assist in public discourse and deliberations regarding gun safety. We support:


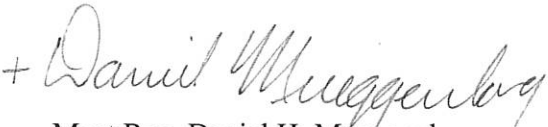
1. Measures that place reasonable conditions on the sale and use of firearms.
2. Measures that make guns safer, while preserving the legitimate exercise of self-defense.
3. Efforts intended to curb easy access to deadly weapons, including assault rifles.
4. A serious commitment to confront the root causes that can accompany gun-related violence which may include such things as addiction, mental illness, poverty and the graphic displays of violence so common in entertainment and video games.

We offer our support for I-1639 given our view that it will help to ensure a higher level of public safety while balancing Constitutional rights around gun ownership.

Thank you for your prayers and action in Jesus' name.

In Christ,

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Most Rev. J. Peter Sartain      Most Rev. Thomas A. Daly      Most Rev. Joseph J. Tyson  
Archbishop of Seattle      Bishop of Spokane      Bishop of Yakima

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Most Rev. Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp.S.      Most Rev. Daniel H. Muegggenborg  
Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle      Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle

For more information, please visit the Washington State Catholic Conference (WSCC) website ([WACatholics.org](http://WACatholics.org)). We encourage you to join the WSCC Advocacy Network to receive important information and timely action alerts on this and other state and federal issues.