



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA

Dear Diocesan Family -

I am posting below the statement from the group Bishops United Against Gun Violence, which we issued this past Friday regarding the horrific school shooting in Parkland, Florida. "Bishops United" is an association of approximately 70 bishops in The Episcopal Church and I am a charter member of that group.

It is clear that a statement along the lines of what we have released in the wake of past mass shootings is no longer satisfactory or sufficient. Such tragedies as these must never be permitted to lapse into what could easily be seen as routine. This is why we are calling for specific action steps.

Please give this statement your every consideration and your deepest prayers as our nation tries to come to terms with the awful reality of gun violence besetting our society during these times. Of course, we welcome your circulating this statement as widely as possible. With the very courageous - and most impressive - response from the students at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, we may be turning a corner with respect to the public's response to this particular shooting. We can certainly hope and pray, but it is my hope that we will do much more than that. Surely there are some concrete steps that can be debated and passed by the U.S. Congress. And perhaps these action steps will make something of a difference. The status quo with respect to guns in our society and culture must not be allowed to stand!

Faithfully yours,

## **Bishops United Urges Assault Weapons Ban, Prayers of Lamentation**

The heart of our nation has been broken yet again by another mass shooting at an American school.

We offer our deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of those who were murdered at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. We mourn with particular sorrow Carmen Schentrup, a 16-year-old student at the school and leader in the youth group at St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church in Coral Springs, who died at the hands of the gunman. We pledge to work with the Episcopal Diocese of Southeast Florida to lend whatever material and spiritual comfort we can to all those who have suffered such a devastating loss.

The phrase "thoughts and prayers" has been devalued by politicians whose prayers seem never to move them to act against their self-interests or the interests of the National Rifle Association. Yet, as Christians, we believe deeply in the power of prayer to console, to sustain and to heal, but also to make evident the work that God is calling us to do. We pray that all who have been touched by this violent act receive God's healing and solace.

In the wake of this massacre, we believe God is calling us to understand that we must not simply identify the social and political impediments to ending these lethal spasms of violence in our country. We must reflect on and acknowledge our own complicity in the unjust systems that facilitate so many deaths, and, in accordance with the keeping of a holy Lent, repent and make reparations.

Specifically, we ask you, members of our church and those who ally yourselves with us, to:

- Contact your elected representatives and ask them to support legislation banning assault weapons such as the AR-15, which is the gun used in most of the recent mass shootings in our country; high-capacity magazines; and bump stocks, the equipment used by the killer in the Las Vegas massacre that allows semiautomatic weapons to fire dozens of rounds in seconds. We understand that mass shootings account for a small percentage of the victims of gun violence; that far more people are killed by handguns than by any kind of rifle; that poverty, misogyny and racism contribute mightily to the violence in our society and that soaring rates of suicide remain a great unaddressed social challenge. And yet, the problem of gun violence is complex, and we must sometimes address it in small pieces if it is not to overwhelm us. So, please, call your members of Congress and insist that your voice be heard above those of the National Rifle Association's lobbyists.
- Participate in a service of a lamentation for the victims of the Parkland shooting and all victims of lethal gun violence. We will be announcing a schedule of such services at churches around the country in the near future. To keep up with these plans, please follow our **Facebook page Episcopalians Against Gun Violence**.
- Enter into a period of discernment with us about how, through prayer, advocacy and action, we can make clear to our elected representatives that they must vote in the interests of all Americans, including law-abiding gun owners, in passing life-saving, common sense gun policies. Visit our **website** to learn more about our work and how to reach us. And if you plan to attend this summer's General Convention in Austin, Texas, plan to join us each morning

for prayer outside the convention hall and to attend the Bishops United Against Gun Violence public witness on Sunday, July 8 at 9 a.m.

Two years after the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary that took the life of Ben Wheeler, an active young member of Trinity Episcopal Church in Newtown, Connecticut, his father, David, asked parents to look at their children and then ask themselves, "Am I doing everything I can to keep them safe? Because the answer to that question, if we all answer honestly, clearly is no." In memory of Carmen and Ben and all of God's children lost to senseless gun violence, may God give us grace and fortitude in our witness so that we can, at last, answer yes.

FOR CHRIST. FOR THIS TIME. FOR ALL TIME.

