



DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

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Statement on Colorado Springs mass shooting

November 22, 2022

Another mass shooting occurred late Saturday night at a night club for members of the LGBTQ+ community in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Our faith teaches us to do good to our neighbor, not harm, and explicitly forbids us to kill our neighbor. We do not have to agree with the lifestyle, political views, religious beliefs, or immigration status of our neighbor, but we must respect his or her bodily integrity and take measures to ensure that others respect it as well.

While on November 19 it was members of the LGBTQ+ community who were attacked (as in the Pulse Club massacre in Orlando, Florida), Jews, Christians, Moslems, African Americans, Latinos, students at school, people shopping and music lovers going to concerts have also been the target of hate-filled murderers. This is not the America I grew up in, when such violence was rare, with the exception of violence toward African Americans. When is it going to stop?

When I was young, guns were far less common than they are now. Boys in my school who had a heated argument would often meet after school to fight with their fists. I didn't like that either, but I never saw anyone die from it. Now, young men will bring a gun and kill their enemy and perhaps others with him.

We have put our heads in the sand so that we don't have to face the truth: the proliferation of guns is a strong contributing factor to the surge of violence in our communities. We can speak all day about the right to own a gun, but rights must be balanced with responsibilities. We have a duty not only to defend individual rights but also to promote the common good. The pendulum has swung too far to the side of individual rights. It is time to take effective steps to curb the plague of gun violence.

Criminal and mental health background checks, stronger than those adopted by the US Congress this past summer, should be enacted. Assault weapons used to kill multiple people should be banned outright, as we once did. Those who use guns to hunt should agree, out of a sense of responsibility to the wider community, to store their guns at a local center where they can pick them up when going to hunt and return them when they are finished. Guns for personal protection were not in the dresser drawers of the adults I knew growing up – and gun violence was much less common. How many adolescents have committed suicide using a parent's gun! I've had their funerals.

Pious words lamenting mass shootings have lost all credibility. Action is needed. Will West Virginians rise to the challenge? At the Last Judgement, we will not face the NRA or a

politician as our judge but the Lord Jesus, who died a violent death for our sake. He will ask us: did you love your neighbor as yourself? Did you do to others what you would have them do to you? Did you care more for the safety and welfare of your brothers and sisters than for an individual right enshrined in a political constitution? What answer will we give to him?

I urge you to think and pray about this matter. May the Lord of life bless you and your family.

Faithfully in Christ,

+Mark E. Brennan

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Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston