

I thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on the issue of gun violence. My name is Molly James. I am an Episcopal Priest serving the Diocese of Connecticut and the mother of a two year old. I grew up in rural Maine, and have an awareness of the value of owning a gun for hunting and protection. But I cannot comprehend why any civilian would need to own a gun like what was used at Sandy Hook. I spent the afternoon and evening of December 14th with my bishops and the people of Trinity, Newtown. I assisted at the funeral of Benjamin Wheeler. The horrible pain and grief that has engulfed the community of Newton, and sadly, so many other communities in our country, should not ever be repeated.

I am saddened and outraged that it has taken something as horrific as the massacre at Sandy Hook to awaken us - myself included - to the urgent necessity of changing our gun laws. I heartily endorse the proposals that would ban assault weapons and magazines that have more than 10 bullets. In my home state of Maine, one can only hunt with a magazine that holds five or less. I also strongly support the need to close any loopholes that allow firearms or ammunition to be purchased without a background check. We have failed the most vulnerable of society, and we must do more.

When I arrived home late on the night of December 14th it was a complete and utter privilege to go upstairs and kiss our peacefully sleeping daughter. She is too young to understand the events of that terrible day, and it is my hope and prayer that she will only ever know of that event as one of the past. We must work to ensure that schools are always a safe place for all our children, and surely that is best accomplished by regulating guns and ensuring better care for those with mental illness than by arming our teachers.

The Diocese of Connecticut has a companion relationship with the Diocese of Lebombo in Mozambique. At the end of the civil war in Mozambique, a program was instituted which allowed weapons to be exchanged for farming equipment - truly swords into plow shares. Those guns were then dismantled and the parts used to create artwork. I have a cross that I wear that is made from the pistons of an AK-47. I have worn that cross more often since December 14th as a reminder that change is possible and as an inspiration to be a part of that change. I hope and pray that someday very soon thousands of assault weapons will be transformed into something that inspires and gives hope to future generations.

I join with my bishops and many others in seeking to:

1. Challenge the violence that infects our society by
 - a. Implementing comprehensive legislation and programs to decrease gun violence in all of our communities (cities and towns, suburbs and rural areas);
 - b. Supporting our schools in preventing violence and reducing bullying;
 - c. Improving access to mental health resources for all children and families.
2. Challenge gun violence specifically by:
 - a. Banning military style weapons ("weapons of war") for civilians;
 - b. Outlawing high-capacity ammunition magazines;
 - c. Instituting universal background checks, and closing loopholes in background checks for the purchase of all firearms.

Please support the legislative bills that would institute these reforms.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Molly F. James, PhD
Secretary of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut

Home address: 37 Griswold Drive, West Hartford, CT 06119