News



by Heidi Schlumpf

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The nation's young people are "shaming the adult world into action" on gun violence, said Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich, referring to survivors of the recent school shooting in Parkland, Florida, who have become activists on the issue. "Their voices are a wake-up call that should have been heard years ago."

"The time for words is over, our children our telling us. What is now required is action," Cupich said Feb. 28, adding that elected officials should "stop saying that they will pray for victims and uphold family values if that is the only response they care to give to these tragedies."

Connecting gun control to other life issues, such as abortion and immigration, Cupich said, "It is now up to those we elect to serve the common good to act to stop the rampant gun violence that has turned our schools, churches, theaters and streets into places of slaughter."

Cupich called for "common-sense" laws that limit gun ownership to "those who have proven they can manage the responsibilities that come with it, just as we do with automobiles."

He made his remarks at a press conference at his state's capitol, as several such bills were being considered by Illinois lawmakers. Fr. Michael Pfleger from Chicago's St. Sabina Parish also was in Springfield with a busload of parishioners sharing their support of gun reform bills.

One such bill is named for Chicago Commander Paul Bauer, who was killed in the line of duty earlier this month. The suspect charged in his death used a semi-automatic weapon with a 30-round magazine. House Bill 1469 would prohibit the sale of magazines with capacity of more than 10 rounds, with exemptions for law enforcement and military personnel.

Cupich stopped short of supporting individual bills, although he said he had met recently with Bauer's widow and daughter, who support the bill. He urged bipartisan, incremental movement on gun control to "do it right," but noted that the "March for Our Lives," planned by Parkland students, is less than a month away.

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"Our young people are going to be impatient," he said, urging lawmakers to not let "delay mean defeat."

"Our elected officials may not be able to do everything all at once, and they may not be able to save everyone, but in the name of those murdered children, they must begin the process of walking away from the moral compromises that doom our society to inaction," he said.

As a hunter who once organized a bishops' pheasant hunt, Cupich said he understood the importance of hunting culture to some gun-rights supporters. "This is not about infringing on Second Amendment rights," he said. "It's about upholding the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that our young people are reminding us about."

He also pointed to the role of arms dealers who are driven by profits in "our national epidemic of gun violence," noting that some oppose limits even on armor-piercing bullets, bump stocks and high-volume magazines.

"My brother bishops in the United States have long advocated for sensible gun-safety regulations without any infringement on the legitimate rights guaranteed by

the Second Amendment," Cupich said. "Defense of those rights, however, cannot take a second place to the rights our children are demanding to guarantee their futures."

Cupich also referenced critics of the Parkland student activists, many of whom have reported receiving death threats from gun advocates. In addition to action on gun control, Americans should "at the least … defend their right and the rights of others to speak out, and condemn any attempt to silence them with defamation and threats of retribution."

Responding to a reporter's question about Springfield Bishop Thomas Paprocki's recent announcement that he would continue to ban U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin from Communion for his views and votes on abortion, Cupich said he "respect[ed] any bishop who needs to take action within their own diocese."

Durbin, a Catholic, voted against the "Pain-Capable Unborn Children's Act," which would have prohibited abortions 20 weeks after fertilization. Cupich called it a bill that "should have been passed by both houses" and a "serious issue."

Yet, when pushed to state whether he would deny Communion to Durbin in the Chicago Archdiocese, Cupich said the senator needs to talk with Bishop Paprocki. "I'm not his bishop," he said.

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