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Pope Leo XIV delivers his blessing as he recites the Angelus noon prayer from the window of his studio overlooking St.Peter's Square, at the Vatican Aug. 31 (AP/Andrew Medichini)

Nicole Winfield

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Associated Press

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Pope Leo XIV today (Aug. 31) called for an end to the "pandemic of arms, large and small," as he prayed publicly for the victims of a shooting during a Catholic school Mass in the United States.

History's first U.S. pope spoke in English as he denounced the attack and the "logic of weapons" fueling wars around the world, during his Sunday noon blessing from his studio overlooking St. Peter's Square.

"Our prayers for the victims of the tragic shooting during a school Mass in the American state of Minnesota," said the Chicago-born Leo. "We hold in our prayers the countless children killed and injured every day around the world. Let us plead God to stop the pandemic of arms, large and small, which infects our world."

> 'The voice of weapons must be silenced, while the voice of fraternity and justice must rise.'
> —Pope Leo XIV
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Two children were killed Aug. 27 and 18 people were injured during the shooting attack at the Church of Annunciation in Minneapolis, as hundreds of students from the nearby Annunciation Catholic School and others gathered for a Mass. The shooter fired 116 rifle rounds through the church's stained-glass windows, and later died by suicide.

The attack once again reignited the debate over guns in America. Those who support stricter background checks on gun purchases and other laws, often Democrats, say that Republican politicians who appeal to "thoughts and prayers" after school shootings are trying to distract from their own inaction on gun restrictions.

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In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, Leo had refrained from any political commentary about guns in America, sending a telegram of condolence that focused exclusively on the spiritual. He said he was saddened by the "terrible tragedy" and sent his "heartfelt condolences and the assurance of spiritual closeness to all those affected."

Leo's predecessor, Pope Francis, had long railed against the weapons industry and proliferation of arms fueling wars, denouncing gun manufacturers as "merchants of death." During his historic 2015 speech to the U.S. Congress, the Argentine pope asked the lawmakers why weapons were being sold purely to kill.

"Sadly, the answer, as we all know, is simply for money: money that is drenched in blood, often innocent blood," Francis said then. "In the face of this shameful and culpable silence, it is our duty to confront the problem and to stop the arms trade."

Leo had opened his appeal Sunday by demanding an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine and a "serious commitment to dialogue" from the warring sides.

"It's time that those responsible renounce the logic of weapons and take the path of negotiations and peace, with the support of the international community," he said. "The voice of weapons must be silenced, while the voice of fraternity and justice must rise."

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This story appears in the **Minneapolis church shooting** feature series. View the full series.