



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

**For Immediate Release
October 31, 2011**

BISHOPS ISSUE GUIDANCE ON CONCEAL AND CARRY LAW

As Wisconsin's law permitting people to carry concealed weapons takes effect, Wisconsin's Roman Catholic bishops are urging Catholics to reflect on the meaning of freedom, the Catholic tradition of nonviolence, and to remember that churches are "sacred spaces."

In a statement issued today to individual Catholics and parish leaders the bishops do not mandate that parishes prohibit concealed weapons but do advise parishioners to "seriously consider not carrying them into church buildings as a sign of reverence for these sacred spaces."

In discussing freedom, the bishops wrote that both natural law and our constitutional tradition uphold individual freedom as an intrinsic human right.

"True freedom, however, is not a license to do whatever we choose. Rather, it is the ability to do what we morally ought to do, to build a just society, and to glorify God who is the author of all liberty and the source of human dignity," they noted.

"We are called to apply this teaching to our right to carry concealed weapons. The right to bear arms is protected under our Constitution, but like all rights, it must be exercised responsibly and in accordance with applicable laws," they wrote. "We are obligated to use this particular freedom with due respect for others and for the desires of those who welcome us into their homes, places of business, and other public spaces, such as churches and religious institutions."

The bishops also urged Catholics to reflect on Catholic teaching, which is committed to non-violence.

"While the Church has always upheld the right to self-defense, peaceful means of reconciling conflicts and differences, both as individuals and nations, is the preferred method," they said. "We think of Jesus who told His disciples 'to put their sword away' rather than to act violently to defend Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. We think of the many Catholic martyrs who suffered violence and death for the sake of the Gospel, praying for their killers as Jesus did on the cross.

Some of these martyrs were actually killed in churches, such as Thomas Becket, Wenceslaus, and Josaphat.”

The bishops asked Catholics to remember that the Church parishes and church facilities are “sacred spaces” where all come to find peace.

“The Catholic Church has a long tradition of sanctuary, allowing people fleeing violence to take refuge in church buildings as a place of safety and protection. For the most part, this practice has worked well because most people respect the sacred, peaceful nature of such holy places,” the bishops recalled. “Indeed, when violence occurs in a Catholic church, it must be reconsecrated. Intuitively, we understand that acts of violence, destruction, and murder are antithetical to the message and person of Jesus Christ and have no rightful place in our society, especially sacred places.”

The bishops urged pastors and others who exercise leadership in parishes and religious institutions to consider these factors in determining whether to prohibit concealed weapons in parishes and other buildings owned by the Church and Catholic organizations.

“This decision should be firmly grounded in our teaching and made with due regard for the pastoral reality and customs of the local community,” they suggested.

“Bearing witness to the Gospel always presents challenges and opportunities. We encourage you to embrace this opportunity to live the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace,” the bishops concluded.

In a related development, Catholic Mutual Group is recommending that parishes and church facilities bar weapons from their premises and is also advising its clients that a decision to bar weapons from their buildings will not impact the liability protection or the cost of coverage in the property and liability program.

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