

PASTORAL GUIDANCE ON CONCEAL AND CARRY LAW



On November 1, 2011, it will be legal for people in Wisconsin with valid permits to carry concealed weapons on their person. The Catholic Bishops of Wisconsin offer some thoughts, in light of Catholic teaching, to assist you, both as individual Catholics and parish leaders, in discerning how to speak and act in regards to this new legal development.

First, we reflect on the true meaning of freedom. God has created us to be truly free, as we exercise our liberty to build a society of respect, justice, peace and prosperity. Both natural law and our constitutional tradition uphold this understanding of individual freedom as an intrinsic human right. This freedom includes both religious liberty and the right to self-defense. True freedom, however, is not 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.

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. 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.

Second, we 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. 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 (Matthew 26:52). 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 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. 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.

Whatever an individual parish decides to do regarding its policy on concealed weapons, we ask that all people seriously consider not carrying weapons into church buildings as a sign of reverence for these sacred spaces.

Those who exercise leadership in our parishes and religious institutions should 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. All decisions should also reflect good stewardship of parish resources and the ability to address legal issues of liability that may arise from local decisions. Thus, we encourage you to consult with your insurance carriers as you proceed, and to consider how posting signs helps pastors balance the need for reverence in sacred space with their desire for security.

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.

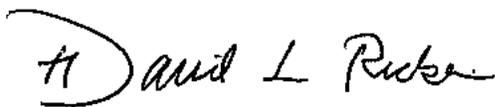
Sincerely yours in Christ,



The Most Reverend Jerome E. Listecky
Archbishop of Milwaukee



The Most Reverend Robert C. Morlino
Bishop of Madison



The Most Reverend David L. Ricken
Bishop of Green Bay



The Most Reverend Peter F. Christensen
Bishop of Superior



The Most Reverend William P. Callahan
Bishop of La Crosse