Dear Friends,

I grew up in a house of hunters, and subsequently in a house with guns. Some of my fondest memories are early mornings, sitting in “goose pits” with my father, waiting for a flock of geese to land amidst our decoys.

Through instruction, from my father and siblings and peers, I learned a very healthy respect for guns. This respect was passed on to our children — who also learned gun safety.

Fast-forward 24 years. I was then a priest and deeply involved with young people. It was a cold day just like most are in February, when a 14-year-old walked in to a school, filled with young people I knew and cared deeply for, with guns in hand. This was three years before Columbine. In the end, one teacher and two students were killed. I’m still connected with a number of those young people, most of whom have kids of their own. Like me, most of these young people grew up with guns for hunting — not as weapons to kill or injure other human beings.

Since that time we have experienced tragedy after tragedy at those hands of those with guns.

When did violence against the innocent and vulnerable become an option for people to strike back for the pain and anguish they experience in their own lives? When did we as a society decide that weapons developed for a battlefield belong on our streets and in our homes? What is our response to this escalating violence?

A change must take place. A significant portion of that change must focus on who has access to weapons, how much access they have, and what kind of weapons should be permissible. These are important legal questions that we as a society must discuss.

I also believe there are deeper questions that we as people of faith must take the lead on. Do we truly believe every human being is made in the image of God and is, as such, a child of God? Do we believe that our neighbor should be loved as we are loved? Do we believe that the dignity of every human being should be respected?

These are Gospel imperative questions that should frame our belief in the sacred value of every life. This is why I support the policy agenda of Protect Minnesota as it seeks to find sensible solutions to end these senseless tragedies.

Blessings,

The Rt. Rev. Brian N. Prior
IX Bishop, Episcopal Church in Minnesota