**News Summary: Archdiocese “Addressing Gun Violence: Promoting a Culture of Life” Summit**

[**Messenger: A grieving father urges fellow St. Louis Catholics to help battle gun violence**](https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/column/tony-messenger/messenger-a-grieving-father-urges-fellow-st-louis-catholics-to-help-battle-gun-violence/article_bb6abe56-2fc8-11ee-8a44-b38145867b7f.html?mode=comments)

*STL Post-Dispatch*

Just a few days after the men who killed his daughter were set free, Atif Mahr went to confession. On Saturday morning, Mahr stood before 350 of his fellow Catholics at the Cardinal Rigali Center and let them in on a secret. “It hurts to have a hole placed in your heart,” Mahr told them.

His daughter, Isis, was gunned down in a quadruple shooting on Oct. 17, 2021, in the Baden neighborhood. She was sitting in her vehicle at the time of the shooting. Isis was a 19-year-old graduate of Cardinal Ritter College Prep. She played basketball and soccer and continued to mentor children at the school. She wanted to be a nurse. “You question your faith,” Mahr said. “You question God.”

Mahr, who attends St. Alphonsus Rock Church, was one of several speakers at a gun violence seminar organized this past weekend by the Archdiocese of St. Louis. Many, like Mahr, had experienced gun violence firsthand. They urged fellow Catholics to lean on the belief in the sanctity of life, to help battle the American obsession with guns, to care for the children in our midst.

St. Louis prosecutors charged two men with killing Isis, but the primary witness to the crime died. Last week, the charges were dropped. Still, Mahr has healing on his mind. The way to beat gun violence is to care for all of the young people in our communities, he said. It was a mantra I heard from former St. Louis Police Chief Don Isom several years ago at a similar gathering after a young person was killed.

Like a preacher rallying the faithful, Mahr beseeched the crowd to care about the victims of gun violence, and not just the ones like his daughter, who appeared to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

*The ones involved with drugs?*

“Those are our children,” Mahr said.

*The ones with mental health issues?*

“Those are our children.”

*The ones carrying guns?*

“Those are our children.”

Alexzandria Bell was one of those children. The 15-year-old died on Oct. 24, 2022, in the mass shooting at Central Visual & Performing Arts School. On Saturday, Tobias Winright told the story about how his daughter had to step over Bell’s body as she was ushered safely away from the school by police officers. Winright is a professor of moral theology at St. Patrick’s Pontifical University in Ireland. He moved there last year after spending 17 years teaching at St. Louis University. His daughter, a senior at CVPA, stayed behind to graduate. When the shooting started, she texted her parents. “There is a lockdown right now,” she wrote. “It is not a drill. I love you so much.”

Winright told his fellow Catholics about the fear that went through their minds. They told their daughter how much they loved her. They followed her texts with pained hearts as she heard police yelling at the shooter. Finally, another text came. “We’re out.” In Ireland, a “very Catholic country,” Winright told the crowd, he never worries about gun violence. There’s no comparison between the U.S. and most other countries in terms of gun ownership, gun violence statistics — homicides and suicides — and, of course, mass shootings.

“We have a problem,” said Lori Beck, a nurse at St. Louis Children’s Hospital. “It’s an epidemic.” Indeed it is. Gun deaths have replaced motor vehicle accidents as the leading cause of death in children. Speakers on Saturday urged attendees to become part of the solution, advocating for better gun safety laws in Missouri, distributing gun locks and applying their faith to this pernicious problem.

From the Catholic perspective, Winright says, the nation’s gun fetish makes no sense. “Violence is something that Christians have always seen as an issue,” he said, pointing out the long tradition of Catholic philosophers who advocated for nonviolence. “In the Catholic tradition, rights are always accompanied by duties.”

Winright keeps a slide on gun violence in America that he uses for presentations. He has to update it regularly, often more than once a week. The numbers are damning: More than 400 mass shootings just this year, and 24,000 gun deaths and climbing. The numbers don’t lie. And yet, when it comes to gun safety, America too often takes more steps backward than forward. “The data says so much,” Winright says, “yet we will not listen to it.”

After the death of his daughter and the moments when he questioned his faith, Mahr is now leaning on his faith to propel him forward. He is taking his “feet to the streets” and becoming a mentor for young people and an advocate against gun violence.

“I don’t not believe that any other father should feel the way that I feel,” he said. His daughter and Bell, and the other children who have died from gun violence this year and in past years, are more than numbers on a chart.

“They are all our children.”

**['A multi-prong problem' | Experts, leaders gather to address St. Louis gun violence](https://www.ksdk.com/article/news/local/archdiocese-of-st-louis-holds-gun-violence-summit/63-dc777cfe-38d4-4d7c-999b-20578ae5287b)**

*KSDK, Channel 5*

<https://www.ksdk.com/article/news/local/archdiocese-of-st-louis-holds-gun-violence-summit/63-dc777cfe-38d4-4d7c-999b-20578ae5287b>

Right now, there's a continued push to put an end to gun violence across the St. Louis area. The Archdiocese of St. Louis held a gun violence summit on Saturday. Faith leaders, healthcare professionals, community activists and others came together at the Cardinal Rigali Center in Shrewsbury.

The morning started with speakers and ended with breakout sessions, but the whole day was centered around the crisis our city and country continue to face. The hours-long summit was filled with long conversations about how to solve this issue together as a community and with powerful and emotional testimonies from people personally affected by gun violence.

It's something that can't be ignored, Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski said. "Those stories are real. They're human, and they show the experience— the devastating experience that gun violence brings to us," he said. Songs, prayers and conversations filled the center on Saturday morning. Archbishop Rozanski said the issue of gun violence is something they want to help solve.

"We are a church that promotes hope— hope in Jesus Chris, and we see the despair of gun violence. So, we wanted to bring the light of hope to the darkness of gun violence— to see how we can help to transform our society, so that those choices for gun violence will not be made," the archbishop said.

It's a darkness that has impacted and traumatized many who filled the room on Saturday, including Professor of Moral Theology Dr. Tobaias Winright.... The crisis that gun violence has become is why the Archdiocese of St. Louis hosted the one-day summit, according to Archbishop Rozanski...

"It's a human life issue, and it's a quality of our life issue," the archbishop said. "When people are threatened by gun violence, they're not living the fullest potential of their lives. Going to school in fear or going to your workplace in fear is really against what human freedom truly is, so churches are working to bring about the fullness of respect for life, quality of life and human freedom." ... The Archdiocese of St. Louis isn't stopping with just this event. Archbishop Rozanski wants to set up a task force for the archdiocese to focus on what the church can do to prevent gun violence, help victims and heal the community.

**Other coverage:**

[KTRS Interview 072723](http://my.tvey.es/k3EHg)

[KMOX Interview 073123](https://omny.fm/shows/total-information-am/archdiocese-hosted-a-summit-on-how-to-fix-gun-viol)

[St. Louis Archdiocese takes on gun violence during summit](https://www.kmov.com/2023/07/30/st-louis-archdiocese-takes-gun-violence-during-summit/) (KMOV)

[RFT Reviews the Week](https://www.riverfronttimes.com/news/rft-reviews-the-week-july-24-to-july-30-40572893) (brief mention)

[Expertos y líderes se reúnen para abordar la violencia armada en St. Louis](https://www.redlatinastl.com/noticia/st_louis/11116) (Red Latina, in Spanish and English)

**(The St. Louis Review and Catholic Health World articles have not yet published; I will share once they do.)**