

Bishops United Against Gun Violence
Statement on the Atlanta Spa Shootings
March 18, 2021

On Tuesday, another white man who should not have had a gun shot and killed seven women and one man at massage spas in the Atlanta area. Six of his victims, all women, were of Asian descent. The gunman had been a patron of at least two of the spas where the massacre took place; and in the aftermath of the shootings, he confessed, saying that he considered the women at the spas to be a sexual temptation he needed to eliminate because of his Christian faith.

It is hard to know what to decry first in the toxic stew of racism, misogyny, religious violence, and gun culture. Most basic, perhaps, is the fact that the alleged killer bought his weapon just hours before the attacks began. The sale was entirely legal, showing yet again that standards for gun purchasing and ownership across our nation are far too lenient. Day after day, innocent people pay the price.

In addition to the need to enact sane gun legislation, we must eradicate from our culture the racist, misogynist ideas that lead white men to perceive Asian women as sexual objects. Such demeaning stereotypes that turned deadly in Atlanta on Tuesday are rooted in this country's centuries-long history of anti-Asian laws and policies. In the past year, these old hatreds have been revived by mendacious politicians and misguided people who have attempted to exact retribution from Asians and Asian Americans for the origin and spread of the COVID-19 virus. Women have borne the brunt of these lies: [Stop AAPI Hate reports](#) that in the last year, Asian women have reported hate incidents 2.3 times more often than Asian men.

As Christian leaders and bishops, we are particularly disturbed that the alleged shooter's Christian faith is reported to have fueled his desire to murder the women in massage spas whom he believed were sexual temptations. It grieves us that the Christian faith we profess can be twisted and deformed in ways that give rise to violence, particularly to gun violence, by white Christian men against women and people of color. Christian churches, regardless of theology or denomination, must explicitly reject the idea that God wants Christian men to dominate or kill other human beings. Such is not the way of Jesus. Such is not the way of love.

We extend our profound sympathies to the families of the victims of this shooting, and we are praying for everyone who has been touched by this brutality. As we have repeatedly emphasized, we pray not to avoid taking action, but to prepare for it. Please join with us in reaching out to the Asian American people in your congregations and communities. Join us too in helping to raise awareness of the ways in which men in this country objectify women, particularly Asian women, and leave them vulnerable to trafficking and gender-based violence. And join us in advocating with your United States Senators to pass these essential pieces of legislation now before them that can help prevent gun violence and save lives:

[HR 1620, the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2021](#)
[HR8 Comprehensive Background Checks Bill](#)
[HR1446 Charleston Loophole Bill](#)