



Ending Gun Violence: A Resolution and Call to Action by the National Council of Churches of Christ, U.S.A.

"[L]ive in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." 2 Corinthians 13:11

Adopted by the Governing Board May 17, 2010

This Resolution and Call to Action is a collaboration of the member communions of the National Council of Churches USA ("NCC"), with local and regional ecumenical bodies of the United States. It addresses the grievous problem of gun violence in the United States, and is a part of our continuing response to the crisis, faithful to our biblical perspective.

NCC POLICY BASE

This Resolution and Call to Action build upon the 1967 NCC policy statement on firearms control, "Firearms Control—A Policy Statement of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America," adopted by the General Board (September 15, 1967).[†]

It also draws upon a presentation entitled, "Against Gun Violence," prepared by the Rev. Michael Livingston, former President of the National Council of Churches and executive director of the International Council of Community Churches, to the General Assembly of the NCC and Church World Service in Minneapolis, MN (2009).^{††}

GUN VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

In an average year, 100,000 Americans are shot or killed with a gun.⁴ Every day (on average) 300 Americans are victims of gun violence, with 85 lives taken daily as a result.⁴ The United States is rapidly moving from a land of hospitality and freedom to a land of the fearful and the besieged, with gun violence being the driving force behind this change. We have become a nation at war with ourselves and numbed to the sacredness of human life.

Responsible gun ownership can be consistent with our constitutional rights; however, it must be stressed that there are relatively few shootings by average citizens defending themselves.¹ Rather, most fatal and non-fatal shootings result from abuse or misuse of guns.² Over 40,000 deaths annually are caused by citizens shooting and killing other citizens, whether these shootings are intentional, accidental, suicidal, drug or gang related.

In the decade following the Federal Assault Weapons Act of 1994 there was a 66% decline in assault weapon use. According to the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, if the Act had not been passed and the banned assault weapons continued to make up the same percentage of

crime gun traces as before the Act's passage, approximately 60,000 additional assault weapons would have been traced to crime during the 10 year period—an average of 6,000 additional assault weapons linked to crime each year.⁶ The Brady Act was not extended by the Senate once the initial period covered by the legislation ended in 2004.

Annually, there are 1.5 million crimes committed where firearms were used. 68% of murders are gun related and 55% of suicides are by using guns. More than 69,000 shootings each year are non-fatal, yet still leave in their wake a trail of pain, suffering, disabilities and/or disfigurement, and anguish and grief for family and community.³

It is also important to recognize that African-Americans and Latinos are being murdered or harmed by gun use at significantly higher rates than the rest of our society. While African Americans compose roughly 12% of the U.S. population, they account for 27% of all gun-related deaths in this country. After African-Americans, Latinos, who are approximately 15% of the population, have the second highest rate of gun homicide rates and gun assaults.⁴ The burden that gun violence imposes on women is also striking. Guns account for more murders of women by their intimate partners than all other methods of killing combined.⁵

THE CHRISTIAN CALL TO NON-VIOLENCE

When thinking about the problem of violence, Christian faith is both “idealistic” and “realistic.” On the one hand, there is a stream within the Christian tradition that counsels non-violence in all circumstances. A seminal text is the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew's gospel, where Jesus instructs his followers to bear violence rather than inflict it.

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.... You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you . . . (Matt. 5: 38-39, 43-44).

It is difficult to imagine that the One whose own Passion models the redemptive power of non-violence would look favorably on the violence of contemporary U.S. society. Present-day violence is made far worse than it otherwise would be by the prevalence of weapons on our streets. This stream of the Christian tradition insists that it is idolatry to trust in guns to make us secure, since that usually leads to mutual escalation while distracting us from the One whose love alone gives us security.

On the other hand, Christians also know, from both experience and scripture, that all humans are sinful, capable of acting with hostile aggression toward their neighbors. This "realistic" view of human nature also argues for restricting access to guns which, in the wrong hands or without adequate supervision, can make violence ever more deadly. Christians can certainly contend that it is necessary for public authorities to take up arms in order to protect citizens from violence; but to allow assault weapons in the hands of the general public can scarcely be justified on Christian grounds. The stark reality is that such weapons end up taking more lives than they defend, and the reckless sale or use of these weapons refutes the gospel's prohibition against violence.

RESOLUTION AND CALL TO ACTION

No community, church or individual believer can address a problem as complex and intractable as gun violence on its own. Therefore, together, the member communions of National Council of Churches U.S.A. **RESOLVE** to:

- (1) call upon our local, state, and federal legislators to enact reforms that limit access to assault weapons and handguns, including closing the so-called federal “gun show loophole,” which allows for the purchase of firearms from private sellers without submitting to a background check, or providing documentation of the purchase.
- (2) participate with movements such as “Heeding God’s Call” (<http://www.heedinggodscall.org/>) to insist that commercial sellers adopt and adhere to responsible sales practices.
- (3) prayerfully, financially, and otherwise support the NCC staff in coordinating ecumenical efforts for gun violence reduction, including preparing educational materials about the magnitude of gun violence, developing avenues for dialogue among gun owners and gun control advocates within our congregations, and offering a faithful witness in cooperating with inter-faith and nonreligious anti-gun violence advocacy organizations.

[†] Appendix A.

^{††} Appendix B.

¹ A gun in the home is 11 times more likely to be used in an attempted suicide than to be used to injure or kill in self-defense. Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, with data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (2006, most recent year available), www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars. <http://www.bradycampaign.org/issues/gvstats/suicide/>.

² In a given year, roughly 642 people killed accidentally are killed accidentally in gun violence. Likewise, 15,698 people survive being accidentally shot. On average, nine children are killed by gun violence each day in the U.S. Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, with data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (2006, most recent year available), www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars. <http://www.bradycampaign.org/xshare/pdf/facts/2008-death-and-injury-stat-sheet.pdf>.

³ Office of Statistics and Programming, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC
Data Source: NEISS All Injury Program operated by the Consumer Product Safety Commission for numbers of injuries. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (2007). <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html>.

⁴ Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, with data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (2006, most recent year available), www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars.

⁵ Rothman E. F., Hemenway D, Miller M, and Azael D. Batterers' Use of Guns to Threaten Intimate Partners. *Journal of the American Medical Women's Association*, 2005. 60 (1): p. 62- 68, <http://www.wagv.org/gun-violence.php>.

⁶ Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence. *On Target: The Impact of the 1994 Federal Assault Weapon Act*. 2004. www.bradycenter.org/xshare/pdf/reports/on_target.pdf