

A Resolution in Support of the National Council of Churches of Christ, USA: Ending Gun Violence

“Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you” (2Corinthians 13:11).

The Church of the Brethren has declared a clear position against gun violence. In Annual Conference statements of 1987 and 1994 the church noted the proliferation of gun violence in the lives of the American people. In response, the 1994 Annual Conference “Statement on Violence in North America” called church members to “work with other Christians to find dramatic and effective ways to witness to the peace and reconciliation offered through Jesus Christ” (www.cobannualconference.org/ac_statements/94ViolenceNA.htm).

The 1987 Annual Conference “Statement on the Death Penalty” stated, “Perhaps the most obvious area of need in preventing violent crime is handgun control—the number of people killed every year in the US because of the wide availability of handguns is truly astounding. No other measure could have such a dramatic effect on murder rates throughout this country as strict handgun laws ” (www.cobannualconference.org/ac_statements/87DeathPenalty.htm).

In 2009, representatives from the Historic Peace Churches met in Philadelphia for Heeding God’s Call: A Gathering on Peace. During the meeting a new movement emerged to work on gun violence in the cities of America. This witness has been effective and noticeable.

Now the National Council of Churches of Christ, USA, has requested member communions to join in a common voice and action to end gun violence, with a resolution coming from the NCC Governing Board.

Therefore, the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board endorses this resolution and encourages Church of the Brethren members 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” (www.heedinggodscall.org) to insist that commercial sellers adopt and adhere to responsible sales practices; and
- 3) prayerfully, financially, and otherwise support the NCC in 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.

Adopted on Saturday July 3, 2010 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

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

3
4 *“[L]ive in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.” 2 Corinthians 13:11*
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6 Adopted by the Governing Board May 17, 2010
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8 This Resolution and Call to Action is a collaboration of the member communions of the
9 National Council of Churches USA (“NCC”), with local and regional ecumenical bodies of the United
10 States. It addresses the grievous problem of gun violence in the United States, and is a part of our
11 continuing response to the crisis, faithful to our biblical perspective.
12

13 **NCC POLICY BASE**

14 This Resolution and Call to Action build upon the 1967 NCC policy statement on firearms
15 control, “Firearms Control—A Policy Statement of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in
16 the United States of America,” adopted by the General Board (September 15, 1967).[†]
17

18 It also draws upon a presentation entitled, “Against Gun Violence,” prepared by the Rev.
19 Michael Livingston, former President of the National Council of Churches and executive director of
20 the International Council of Community Churches, to the General Assembly of the NCC and Church
21 World Service in Minneapolis, MN (2009).^{††}
22

23 **GUN VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES**

24 In an average year, 100,000 Americans are shot or killed with a gun.⁴ Every day (on average) 300
25 Americans are victims of gun violence, with 85 lives taken daily as a result.⁴ The United States is rapidly
26 moving from a land of hospitality and freedom to a land of the fearful and the besieged, with gun
27 violence being the driving force behind this change. We have become a nation at war with ourselves
28 and numbed to the sacredness of human life.
29

30 Responsible gun ownership can be consistent with our constitutional rights; however, it must be
31 stressed that there are relatively few shootings by average citizens defending themselves.¹ Rather, most
32 fatal and non-fatal shootings result from abuse or misuse of guns.² Over 30,000 deaths annually are
33 caused by citizens shooting and killing other citizens, whether these shootings are intentional,
34 accidental, suicidal, drug or gang related.
35

36 In the decade following the Federal Assault Weapons Act of 1994 there was a 66% decline in
37 assault weapon use. According to the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, if the Act had not been
38 passed and the banned assault weapons continued to make up the same percentage of crime gun traces
39 as before the Act’s passage, approximately 60,000 additional assault weapons would have been traced to
40 crime during the 10 year period—an average of 6,000 additional assault weapons linked to crime each
41 year.⁶ The Brady Act was not extended by the Senate once the initial period covered by the legislation
42 ended in 2004.
43

44 Annually, there are 1.5 million crimes committed where firearms were used. 68% of murders are
45 gun related and 55% of suicides are by using guns. More than 69,000 shootings each year are non-fatal,
46 yet still leave in their wake a trail of pain, suffering, disabilities and/or disfigurement, and anguish and
47 grief for family and community.³
48

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

56 57 **THE CHRISTIAN CALL TO NON-VIOLENCE**

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

62
63 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you,
64 Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.... You have
65 heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your
66 enemies and pray for those who persecute you . . . (Matt. 5: 38-39, 43-44).

67
68 It is difficult to imagine that the One whose own Passion models the redemptive power of non-
69 violence would look favorably on the violence of contemporary U.S. society. Present-day violence is
70 made far worse than it otherwise would be by the prevalence of weapons on our streets. This stream
71 of the Christian tradition insists that it is idolatry to trust in guns to make us secure, since that usually
72 leads to mutual escalation while distracting us from the One whose love alone gives us security.

73
74 On the other hand, Christians also know, from both experience and scripture, that all humans
75 are sinful, capable of acting with hostile aggression toward their neighbors. This "realistic" view of
76 human nature also argues for restricting access to guns which, in the wrong hands or without adequate
77 supervision, can make violence ever more deadly. Christians can certainly contend that it is necessary
78 for public authorities to take up arms in order to protect citizens from violence; but to allow assault
79 weapons in the hands of the general public can scarcely be justified on Christian grounds. The stark
80 reality is that such weapons end up taking more lives than they defend, and the reckless sale or use of
81 these weapons refutes the gospel's prohibition against violence.

82 83 **RESOLUTION AND CALL TO ACTION**

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

- 87
88 (1) call upon our local, state, and federal legislators to enact reforms that limit access to assault
89 weapons and handguns, including closing the so-called federal “gun show loophole,” which
90 allows for the purchase of firearms from private sellers without submitting to a background
91 check, or providing documentation of the purchase.
92
93 (2) participate with movements such as “Heeding God’s Call” (<http://www.heedinggodscall.org/>)
94 to insist that commercial sellers adopt and adhere to responsible sales practices.
95

96 (3) prayerfully, financially, and otherwise support the NCC staff in coordinating ecumenical efforts
97 for gun violence reduction, including preparing educational materials about the magnitude of
98 gun violence, developing avenues for dialogue among gun owners and gun control advocates
99 within our congregations, and offering a faithful witness in cooperating with inter-faith and
100 nonreligious anti-gun violence advocacy organizations.
101

† 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. Batters' 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