

Resolution 2018-01: "A Call to Discuss Gun Violence to Protect Life"

General Church Budget Implications: None

East Ohio Conference Implications: Yes

A Call to Discuss Gun Violence to Protect Life

RATIONALE: United Methodists are committed to the sacredness of life given us by God, and so are called to address ways to protect life lest we "fail to be an obedient church."

Whereas: from the Genesis of creation God called human life "supremely good," blessed as "created in God's own image," and admonished against the deliberate taking of human life; and

Whereas: United Methodists have professed to live "daily lives as disciples of Jesus Christ" and to "covenant together with God," so as

1. "to reject the evil powers of the world,
2. "to accept the freedom and power God gives [us] to resist evil, injustice, and oppression;
3. "to put [our] whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as [our] Lord;
4. "to serve as Christ's representatives in the world;"

(The Book of Discipline 2016, P217, 1-4, p. 157)

Whereas: United Methodist doctrine defines the relationship between Holy Communion and Ethical Christian Discipleship saying, "through Holy Communion, the Holy Spirit works to shape our moral and ethical lives.... [through] a process of conversion, [whereby] we grow in personal and social holiness ... empowered to work for healing, compassion, reconciliation, justice, and peace;" and

("This Holy Mystery," Book of Resolutions 2016 p. 768-9)

Whereas: when we receive Holy Communion, we ask forgiveness because "we have not done [God's] will, we have broken [God's] law, we have rebelled against [God's] love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy"; and

Whereas: we pray in unison each Sunday that God's "will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"; and

Whereas: "love of our neighbors," respect for "God's will" to be done on earth, and respect for the blessing of human life has been contradicted by failing to intervene in easy access to sophisticated guns designed to kill humans in masse, in essence protecting gun rights over the essential right to life; and

Whereas: incidents of mass shooting and the numbers of children, women, and men killed by guns increases daily, inflicting profound suffering on families, communities, and even within our most revered institutions where human life has always been held to be safe, and sacred; and

Whereas: permitting loaded weapons in public venues has increased the imminent danger of shootings in schools, churches, malls, movie theaters, concert venues et al, creating a constant state of domestic terror; and

Whereas: NO intervention has been enacted to stop the gun crisis despite committed efforts by many women's groups marching and protesting, calling our brothers to stand with us because "This is not a battle for [us] to wage alone," and we need their voice, commitment, and action (*Lauren Sandler, "Women Can't Solve our Gun Violence Problem Alone" 2/22/2018*); and

Whereas: arming other-intended professionals such as teachers burdens them from their trained roles, presumes gun-deterrent training is an easy "fix," and has failed to deter mass shootings; instead sanctioning killing as the only means of stopping killing—which is irrational, and immoral, as warned by United Methodist

Women that “militarizing schools will not keep our children safe” (*UMW Press Release “Thanking Students for Faithful Witness,” UMNS Daily Digest, Feb. 26, 2018*); and

Whereas: attributing gun violence to aberrant personal characteristics such as mental illness, situational instability, family problems, poor parenting, etc., misdirects the blame for death from the guns to an individual, based on factors not descriptive of all individuals with mental illness, unstable family circumstances, or non-idyllic family histories, which causes further harm and distrust of those whom we should love with compassionate care; and

Whereas: the speed, range, sheer quantity and kill capacity of guns now manufactured and sold in the U.S. has heightened a culture of fear in which “the other” is regarded as a potential enemy, as “stand your ground” has also done, fueling a perceived “threat” which removes moral restraints of taking life and has been used to justify killing another human being; and

Whereas: episodes of mass shootings have increased even though expanded “concealed carry” laws permit more people to be invisibly armed with weapons in more and more public and private venues with the presumption that some (“the good”) shooters will be fast, smart, and efficient enough to stop “the bad” shooters; and

Whereas: schools, government buildings, and similar institutions of society are being fitted with sophisticated surveillance, protective measures of alert, practiced “lock down,” and added security personnel and features in attempt to protect from anticipated gun violence *instead* of restricting the proliferation of deadly guns, while diverting funds that could otherwise be invested in education, health and other positive benefits to society; and

Whereas: the murder of children and youth at play, women and men claimed to be resisting arrest, posing a threat, or mistaken for someone else has been increasingly tolerated, the victims disproportionately being people of color; and,

Whereas: no industry in the US has been exempted from legal action to modify their products and required to pay significant financial compensation if their products caused death, personal emotional suffering, and damage to communities—except manufacturers of high-powered assault weapons specifically designed to kill humans, to kill faster, more accurately, killing 35,000 people in 2016 (www.CDC.org); and

Whereas: “The mission of our Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” we are called as those disciples to work in our world to “transform” those practices that have caused the widespread, continual, and preventable death and destruction that guns are doing—in defiance of the message and vision of Christ-like life.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that East Ohio Annual Conference affirms the sacredness of life, we are called to prayerfully examine, publicly discuss, and participate in identifying and promoting realistic options to stop gun proliferation and the resulting destruction in our society; and to remain in conversation and communion with each other, committed to pursue serious, significant, effective, and swift interventions to stop death from “our golden calf” (*Peter W. Marty, www.christiancentury.org, Feb. 23, 2018*) mindful that we not become as Jacob’s people” in Isaiah’s prophesy 2:6-11:

“You have abandoned your people, house of Jacob. They are full of sorcerers from the east and fortune tellers like the Philistines; they hold hands with foreigners’ children. Their land is full of silver and gold; they have countless treasures. Their land is filled with horses; they have countless chariots. Their land is filled with idols; they worship their handiwork, what their own fingers have made. Humanity will be brought down; each person laid low—don’t lift them up! Go into the rocks, and hide yourself in the dust from the terror of the LORD, from the splendor of God’s majesty! People’s proud gazing will be stopped, and humanity’s arrogance brought down; the LORD alone will be exalted on that day.”

Submitted by: East Ohio Board of Church & Society, East Ohio Methodist Federation for Social Action and East Ohio Black Methodists for Church Renewal