

Lukewarm no more: A call for repentance and action on gun violence

“A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more” (Matthew 2:18).

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?” (Matthew 5:13a)

The Church of the Brethren has spoken and acted for peace and healing throughout our history of discerning the leading of the Holy Spirit. While we have not always lived this as we should, we have marked our way in this discernment through publicly recalling the scriptures and our mutual understanding found in Annual Conference statements.

In the wake of repeated mass shootings and the proliferation of gun violence, we are called to remind and recommit ourselves to the work of peacemaking.

In 1999 our Annual Conference wrote:

“We call on congregations to teach peace and pursue it within their fellowship, and to take the lead in advocating for peace within their communities, nation, and world. We also encourage congregations to actively approach school boards and other appropriate public policy agencies to request the establishment of school-based curricular instruction in conflict resolution, peace education, anger control, and the tolerance of others.

“We call our members, especially the youth of the church, to turn away from the culture of violence in its many manifestations in our society and to live as people of peace.

“In addition we call for more effective gun control legislation, especially legislation that would protect our children from gun-related violence, and encourage our members to actively support such legislation.”
(www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1999childrenviolence.html)

The work of the church is pastoral and public. We must preach the Gospel in word and deed. In this work, we call ourselves to repent for the ways that we have failed to be “the salt of the earth.” We have fallen short of discipleship in the way of Jesus, lost sight of Christ’s reconciling work, grown weary in doing good, become numb to shootings, and tolerant of widespread violence in our nation. We call ourselves into greater and more energetic care for all people through direct service, bold peacemaking, and the work of challenging policies that do not lead to well-being and God’s *shalom*.

Aware that shooting deaths occur on the streets of our cities every week, and with the wounds of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School mass shooting weighing, we urge our members, congregations, and ministries to:

1. Pursue discipleship that is biblical, risk-taking, and confirms the baptismal vows that place Christ before all other loyalties.
2. Refocus on our Church of the Brethren history of peacemaking in order to discern our present ministry of reconciliation.
3. Consider ways in which our personal and institutional decisions—in the economic, social, and community spheres—provide a creative means to decrease the prevalence and ease of access to guns designed to destroy human life.
4. Join with larger efforts to change policies that favor or inadequately oppose access and use of weapons that do not further the incarnate healing of Christ.

“So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. . . . Be earnest, therefore, and repent. Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in” (Revelation 3:16-17, 19b-20a).

We are called, as a church, to consider how we have become accustomed to these tragedies. We are called into a fuller embodiment of Jesus's way of peace.

Additional Church of the Brethren statements and resolutions:

[2010 resolution supporting the National Council of Churches' "Ending Gun Violence" statement:](#)

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.

From the [1999 Annual Conference statement, "Children and Violence":](#)

In addition we call for more effective gun control legislation, especially legislation that would protect our children from gun-related violence, and encourage our members to actively support such legislation.

From the [1978 Annual Conference statement on "Violence and the Use of Firearms,"](#) which provided a detailed report that included research into opinions of Brethren on guns in the 1970s:

We urge Congress to develop and enact further legislation to restrict the availability of handguns. Alternatives should be considered ranging from steps to increase uniformity (and, therefore, effectiveness) of state and local gun control measures, to initiation of a national handgun control program. Any new legislation should include procedures to verify an individual's identity and lack of criminal background in order to purchase or possess a handgun, and to regulate transfers within the existing private inventory of handguns, not just new handguns.

We urge federal legislation that provides for swift and fair prosecution of violators.

We urge that legislation on this subject contain provisions for periodic evaluation. In general, the cost of any gun licensing or registration system depends on the system's requirements, especially the thoroughness and efficiency of its screening process. The dollar cost issue, though real, should not be evaluated alone. A comparative assessment should be made of benefits to society resulting from expected lower homicide rates and dollar costs needed for the system to obtain a balanced view of the impact of handgun control.

The Mission and Ministry Board at its meeting on Sunday, March 11, 2018, adopted the statement "Lukewarm no more: A call for repentance and action on gun violence" by unanimous consent.