

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

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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.  
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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).<sup>†</sup>  
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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).<sup>††</sup>  
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23                                   **GUN VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES**

24                                   In an average year, 100,000 Americans are shot or killed with a gun.<sup>4</sup> Every day (on average) 300  
25 Americans are victims of gun violence, with 85 lives taken daily as a result.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> Rather, most  
32 fatal and non-fatal shootings result from abuse or misuse of guns.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>  
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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

### 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.

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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:

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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.  
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<sup>†</sup> Appendix A.

<sup>††</sup> Appendix B.

<sup>1</sup> 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.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars). <http://www.bradycampaign.org/issues/gvstats/suicide/>.

<sup>2</sup> 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.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars). <http://www.bradycampaign.org/xshare/pdf/facts/2008-death-and-injury-stat-sheet.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> 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>.

<sup>4</sup> 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.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars).

<sup>5</sup> Rothman E. F., Hemenway D, Miller M, and Azael D. Battersers' 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>.

<sup>6</sup> 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](http://www.bradycenter.org/xshare/pdf/reports/on_target.pdf)