

DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA
236th CONVENTION
NOVEMBER 2, 2019

R- _____

Sponsor: The Rev. Sarah Hedgis on behalf of the Anti-Gun Violence Commission
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**IN SUPPORT OF REDUCING GUN VIOLENCE THROUGH
LEGISLATION AND OTHER MEASURES**

RESOLVED:

- A. that the 236th annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania, through its Anti-Gun Violence Commission, urges all Pennsylvania state and federal legislators to sponsor and work for passage of laws to
1. Require universal background checks for every gun purchase, including private sales and those made at gun shows;
 2. Prohibit citizen possession, sale, transfer, importation and manufacture of semi-automatic military-style assault weapons and high capacity magazines; and
 3. Address the persistent problem of the purchase of large numbers of handguns for unauthorized third parties (straw purchases) by limiting individuals' handgun purchases to one per each 30 day period; and
 4. Prohibit persons from purchasing guns without evidence of reputable gun safety training; and
 5. Promote Congressional and state funding for research into the causes and prevention of gun violence, including the repeal by the US Congress of the Dickey amendment.¹
- B. that congregations of this Diocese be strongly urged to:
1. Make preventing gun violence a regular part of our conversations and prayer times and

¹ In United States politics, the Dickey Amendment is a provision first inserted as a rider into the 1996 federal government omnibus spending bill which mandated that "none of the funds made available for injury prevention and control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) may be used to advocate or promote gun control." In the same spending bill, Congress earmarked \$2.6 million from the CDC's budget, the exact amount that had previously been allocated to the agency for firearms research the previous year, for traumatic brain injury-related research. The amendment was lobbied for by the NRA. The amendment is named after its author Jay Dickey, a Republican member of the United States House of Representatives from Arkansas. Many commentators have described this amendment as a "ban" on gun violence research by the CDC.

2. Partner with local law-enforcement agencies and community groups to identify gun retailers that engage in retail practices designed to circumvent laws on gun sales and ownership, encourage full legal compliance, and to work with groups like Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence that organize faith-based campaigns to encourage gun retailers to practice the letter and spirit of appropriate standards and laws and
 3. Display signs that prohibit carrying guns onto church property and
 4. Those congregations that have not experienced gun violence, seek to form ecumenical and interfaith partnerships with faith communities that have experienced gun violence in order to support them and learn from their experiences.
- C. that individual Episcopalians in the Diocese of Pennsylvania be encouraged to:
5. commit to continuing to educate themselves on this issue and share accurate information with others; and
 6. if they own guns as hunters or collectors, commit to safely and securely store their guns and promote the importance of teaching and practicing gun safety.
- D. that the Anti-Gun Violence Commission report to the 237th annual Diocesan Convention on progress in implementing this resolution.

EXPLANATION:

Jesus calls us, his followers, to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). This call is tied to intimate relationship with God and echoes God's dreams for peace for all of creation as expressed in Micah 4:1-4:

"In days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken" (NRSV)

In 2018, the United States recorded nearly 40,000 gun deaths, the largest number of gun deaths in 50 years and

- of those 40,000 gun deaths, 22,000 were suicides; and
- the second most common killer of children under the age of 12 is gun violence; and

- our own state of Pennsylvania's rate of gun homicides is among the highest in the country, with more than 1,500 deaths annually - roughly one victim every six hours

This unconscionably high rate of gun homicides is fueled by an illegal distribution system of handguns built on the practice of straw purchasing, whereby handguns are bought in quantity by stand-ins (straw buyers) acting illegally for gun traffickers, who then sell the handguns to those who cannot pass a background check.

There were 340 confirmed mass shootings in the US in 2018, including the shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pennsylvania.

The statistics above, and many more related to gun violence, emphasize the importance of the Church taking action. The proposed resolution is based on the epidemic of gun violence nationally and regionally as well as conversations with people across the diocese through our Faithful Witness program.² In these conversations, we heard people asking for something to ground and guide us as a diocese.

The first part of the resolution (Part A) focuses on legislation we believe would reduce gun violence. These positions come straight from the resolution passed at General Convention. The only addition is the call to limit individuals' handgun purchases to one per each 30 day period (A-3). This is a unique issue in Philadelphia connected to straw purchasing, where people buy several guns and then sell to people who otherwise would not be able to legally acquire a firearm.

The second part (Part B) turns to us: how will we address gun violence in a way that draws people to God's healing love? And also draws us closer to each other. We includes an explicit role for those who own guns (Part C), because we know there are many responsible gun owners who have an invaluable role in showing what safe and thoughtful gun ownership can look like.

This resolution keeps us connected to this work as a Diocese and to the long-haul work of addressing gun violence in a way that seeks to be inclusive and effective.

Accordingly, **the Anti-Gun Violence Commission urges this Convention to show our commitment to addressing and reducing gun violence by passing this resolution.**

² Faithful Witness is a program that hosts the Memorial to the Lost, a T-shirt memorial with a t-shirt for every person killed by gun violence for the previous year. This Memorial happens through Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence; they have memorials for Philadelphia and each of the surrounding counties. Along with the memorial, congregations hosted an educational or worship service around gun violence. Our hope was to have 10-12 congregations participate from September 2018-November 2019. By convention, 21 congregations will have participated!