

'HOW LONG SHALL I CRY FOR HELP' GUN VIOLENCE

PROPER 26, YEAR C

Lectionary Texts: Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4 Isaiah 1:10-18 Psalm 119:137-144; 32:1-7
2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12 Luke 19:1-10

Focus Text: Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4

1:1 The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw. 2 O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? 3 Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. 4 So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous - therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

2:1 I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what God will say to me, and what God will answer concerning my complaint. 2 Then the LORD answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. 3 For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. 4 Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.

NRSV

ADDITIONAL TEXTS

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh -- my adversaries and foes -- they shall stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident. One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in [the LORD'S] temple. For [the LORD] will hide me in [the LORD'S] shelter in the day of trouble; [the LORD] will conceal me under the cover of [the LORD'S] tent; [the LORD] will set me high on a rock.... Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! If my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will take me up. Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence. I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

Psalm 27

See, the LORD'S hand is not too short to save, nor [the LORD'S] ear too dull to hear. Rather, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden God'S face from you so that God does not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue mutters wickedness.... Their works are works of iniquity, and deeds of violence are in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they rush to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity, desolation and destruction are in their highways. The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths. Their roads they have made crooked; no one who walks in them knows peace.

Isaiah 59:1-8

Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."

Matthew 26:51-52

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them; they will be God'S peoples and God will be with them; God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

Revelation 21:3-4

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

BY REV. RACHEL R. SMITH, CHAPLAIN,
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BRADY CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

Habakkuk, a prophet of unknown origin and obscure circumstances, is often overshadowed by more familiar Israelite prophets. Isaiah's exquisite poetry inspired Handel's Messiah. Hosea's painful personal history as metaphor for Israel's relationship with God, Amos' sharp condemnations of meaningless piety, and Jeremiah's

eloquent indictment of corruption resonate until this day.

Yet Habakkuk stands fully in the tradition of classical Hebrew prophecy. Pronouncing God's judgment on a people blind to God's justice, perhaps his greatest contribution is not his oracles against a wicked nation, but the questions he addresses to God. Habakkuk denounces violence, greed, idolatry, and cruelty in powerful language, but his suffering is palpable when he beseeches God, "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and thou wilt not hear? Or cry to thee, 'Violence!' and thou wilt not save?"

Chapter one makes it clear that Habakkuk lives in a world mired in violence, and it isn't only Israel's enemies who are bent on destruction. Israel itself is no better; "the wicked surround the righteous so justice goes forth perverted." Imagine Habakkuk's astonishment when God announces that God will use the Chaldeans, a nation even more violent and corrupt to punish Israel. When God moves from silence to action it is even more disturbing. Why does God not simply punish the wicked and bless the righteous? Why would God use violence to punish violence?

It is a troubling question, one we would rather not ask. Certainly Habakkuk strains against the inscrutability of God. But Habakkuk fearlessly asks the question, and we must join him in seeking the answer. Why does God not stop the violence in our world? Habakkuk believes that God has the power and the compassion to act: "Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing; why do you look on the treacherous, and are silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they?"

The answer comes in the form of paradox. If the Chaldeans are ready to go to war, then God will use them to show Israel that evil cannot sustain itself. Rather than stopping the violence, God will use it to instill within Israel a fundamental truth: evil is overcome by faithfulness to God. "Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith." God will act in God's own time, and those who live by faith will know that divine intent cannot be thwarted by the machinations of humankind.

The wisdom of Habakkuk reminds me of Bobby Kennedy's favorite quotation which he received in a book given to him by Jacqueline Kennedy after John F. Kennedy was shot: "Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God."

PASTORAL REFLECTION

BY REV. RACHEL SMITH

The school year of 2006 began rather quietly as most school years do. But on August 30th, a boy with a gun walked into a high school in Hillsborough, NC, and the new school year was marked by violence.

Little did we know that this August 30th shooting at a North Carolina high school would be a harbinger of a national spate of school shootings. The young shooter in Hillsborough had a deadly plan and a number of guns; after killing his father he shot and wounded a student at a nearby high school. In September, five members of the Duquesne University basketball team were shot on campus after attending a dance at the student center. Then a sixteen-year-old girl in a Wisconsin high school and a principal in Colorado were victims of gun homicide. And just as our nation was busy forgetting these shootings came the horror in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, when a gunman entered an Amish school and killed five young schoolgirls and wounded several others. For a country still haunted by the specter of Columbine, these latest shootings were particularly painful.

We are a nation at war with ourselves. There are nearly 200 million guns in homes across America. More than 28,000 people lose their lives to gun violence every year in this country. Of these gun deaths, more than half are suicides. Every day we lose 45 people to gun-related suicide. As with all wars, children are the most innocent victims. A recent report before the Child Fatality Task Force showed that in 2004, 51 of North Carolina's children were murdered. Of these, 39 were killed by guns. In 2005, the number of children murdered rose to 78, with guns accounting for 61 of those deaths.

Nationally the statistics of child gun deaths are equally grim. Every day in America we lose 8 children to gun violence. Since the shootings at Columbine High School more than 18,000 children have died, and for every child killed by a gun, four others are injured. Gunshot wounds are the third leading cause of death for American children 4-15 years of age.

What has been Congress' response to this unrelenting loss of life? In the last six years Congress has failed to pass any meaningful gun control measures. Under the guise of protecting the rights of gun owners, our federal representatives allowed the assault weapons ban to expire, passed legislation that prohibits victims from suing irresponsible gun dealers, introduced legislation that would make it almost impossible for the ATF to revoke the licenses of gun dealers who act illegally, and attempted to make federal information about the sources of crime guns secret. Congress has allowed the firearm industry to be largely unregulated, though its product can be lethal. Even a teddy bear has to meet consumer product safety standards. Handguns do not.

What poverty of spirit causes Americans to so glorify their guns – in movies, on television, in video games, on the streets of our neighborhoods and in the halls of Congress? Where are the prophets who will condemn the religion of the second amendment which preaches a sacred right to own any and all kinds of firearms? Why are people of faith and conscience not protecting the sacred trust of children's lives as vehemently as Congress protects the gun lobby? It is time for pastors, priests, rabbis, and imams to speak out against the blasphemy of gun violence. We must expose the magnificent half truth of "Guns don't kill people. People kill people." Guns do kill people. Guns kill our children with devastating regularity in this country. One only has to look at the events of any week in America to see the full truth of gun violence.

Our God is a God who said, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." When Charlton Heston held up a rifle at the NRA convention in Denver, Colorado just weeks after the shootings at Columbine High School and shouted, "...from my cold, dead hands..." he was making an idol of the gun. And when our Congressional representatives ignore human suffering to do the bidding of the gun lobby in exchange for campaign dollars, they are making an idol of the gun.

Idolatry of the gun seduces with false power and teases with illusive security. The idolatry of the gun makes the American obsession with possession of guns seem like freedom when all it really offers is a life lived in fear. How can we see the face of God in every person or claim them as our brothers and sisters when we are so afraid that we think we must carry a concealed weapon everywhere we go? How can we stretch our arms wide towards God's goodness when one hand is grasping a gun? How can we depend only on God when next to our hearts we are wearing a weapon?

The great commandment says we are to love God. The second greatest commandment says we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. As people of faith we must stand witness to the destructive power of gun violence. We must say we will rely not on guns, but on God. We will affirm not guns, but life. We will bless not guns, but our common humanity. We must hold up a higher value saying that our children's lives are a sacred trust and that human life is more important than the so-called right to bear arms. [Editor's note—This Pastoral Reflection was written before the Virginia Tech shootings, which left thirty-three people dead. Sadly, this most recent tragedy only underscores Rev. Smith's call to affirm life, not guns, to bless our common humanity, not guns.]

WORSHIP AID - 'HOW LONG SHALL I CRY FOR HELP'

RESPONSIVE READING

Let us remember all who have been harmed by violence.

We acknowledge the strength of those who survived and of those still struggling to heal.

For their sake and for ours, we commit ourselves to building each other up and to healing together.

Let us remember the families and loved ones of those who have died in violent crimes.

We acknowledge their pain and their deep grief.

They too are part of our community and need our love and help towards healing.

Let us remember the perpetrators, and the families of those who commit violent crimes.

We acknowledge that their lives too are devastated and their hopes dashed.

For their sake, and for ours, we remember that pain goes out in many directions from each act of violence.

We will stand up to violence.

We stand together expressing our unity,

Our connection to each other and to God,

Our hope for healing and for transformation.

Let the Spirit of our Creator move through us.

Help us to transform and heal our communities,

And let us begin by transforming ourselves.

We go in peace and with hope. Amen.

(adapted from "Words of Prayer," www.godnotguns.org)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gracious God,

We confess that in our lives we do not always choose the way of peace. We spread gossip which fans the flames of hatred. We are ready to make any sacrifice when the world demands, but few when God invites. We worship the false god of security. We are tempted to trust in locks, security systems, and guns for our protection. We hold out one hand in friendship, but keep a weapon in the other behind our back. We have divided our communities into those we trust and those we do not. Huge problems challenge us in the world and in our own communities, but our greed, fear and selfishness prevent us from uniting to solve them. Lord, we need your help and forgiveness, your healing and reconciling power. Help us all to lay down our weapons and take up your cross. **Amen.**

(adapted from National Council of Churches of Christ, "An Ecumenical Celebration of the Word," www.nccusa.org/2004ecumenicalcelebration.html)

SUGGESTED HYMNS

- | | |
|---|--|
| ❖ <i>Lord, Make Us Servants of Your Peace</i> | MW 693/TH 593/PH 374 |
| ❖ <i>Hope of the World</i> | NCH 46/CH 538/TH 472/
PH 360/LW 377/UMH 178 |
| ❖ <i>All Who Love and Serve Your City</i> | UMH 433/PH 413/TH 570/
MW 697/CH 670 |
| ❖ <i>Prayer of Peace</i> | GA 729 |

ADDITIONAL PRAYERS

A Prayer of Confession

O God of all people,
We know that you are as near as our next breath.
Wherever we go, you are already there.
Thank you for creating us in your image, and claiming us as your children.

**O Lord, we confess that we have forgotten who we are; that each of us belongs to you.
We confess that we have forsaken your peaceable kingdom,
and allowed gun violence to shatter our communities.**

Forgive us O God.
Remind us that your love is more powerful than any gun and that your spirit will sustain us as nothing else can.
Let us desire, as you desire, forgiveness rather than revenge, reconciliation rather than retribution.

**Give us the courage to live not by the gun but by your spirit.
Open our hearts to you so that we also may open them to each other.
Guide us on the path of peace.**

In the name of all who love you, we pray, Amen.

(Rachel Smith, Vigils Against Violence)

A Prayer for an End to Violence

God of life,
Every act of violence in our world, in our communities, between myself and others, destroys a part of your creation.
Stir in my heart a renewed sense of reverence for all life.
Give me the vision to recognize your spirit in every human being, however they behave towards me.
Make possible the impossible by cultivating in me the fertile seed of healing love.
May I play my part in breaking the cycle of violence by realizing that peace begins with me.
In the name of Christ, who is our peace, **Amen.**

(adapted from St. Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, "Prayer for an End to Violence," www.stethelburgas.org/prayer.html)

◆ <i>Hymnal Legend</i> ◆
† AM – African Methodist Episcopal
† BH – Baptist Hymnal
† CH – Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ)
† CM – Christian Methodist Episcopal
† GA – Gather Hymnal (Roman Catholic)
† LW – Lutheran Worship
† MW – Moravian Book of Worship
† NCH – New Century Hymnal (UCC)
† PH – Presbyterian Hymnal
† TH – The Hymnal 1982 (Episcopal)
† UMH – United Methodist Hymnal

A Prayer of Hope

Beloved God, we give you thanks for the life and message of Jesus, Jesus the Rebel, who remains our guide and inspiration and the promise of Hope in our time.

For Jesus calls us to love in a time of indifference, to nonviolence in a time of injustice, and to life in a time of death. He teaches us not only how to live, but how to die; how to transform not only the world, but our own broken hearts, as well. His revolution transcends all our dreams for a better world and declares your reign here and now, at this very moment in human history.

In Jesus, we meet you, our beloved God. We see your true face. From now on we know that you are not a God of despair but of hope, not a God of wrath but of mercy, not a God of condemnation but of compassion, not a God of imperial power but of suffering, not a God of domination but of loving service, not a God of oppression but of liberation, not a God who blesses injustice but the God of justice, not a God of war but of peace, not a God of violence but of nonviolence, not a God of death but of Life. From now on we know that we all have been created to share in the fullness of life, in your love and unending mercy.

We step forward into the future, supporting each other, building community, making peace, practicing nonviolence, resisting the forces of war, and reconciling with our enemies, come what may. We have met Jesus the Rebel. He is alive and goes before us, summoning us to carry on the mission of nonviolence. We have been changed forever. Beloved God, you have begun the revolution within us. Our hearts burn with the fire of Hope. **Amen.**

(adapted from Janet Chisholm, Episcopal Peace Fellowship, www.epfnational.org/publish/cat_index_56.shtml)

ADDITIONAL HELPS

▣ QUOTES ▣

By our readiness to allow arms to be purchased at will and fired at whim... we have created an atmosphere in which violence and hatred have become popular pastimes.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

We challenge the culture of violence when we ourselves act in the certainty that violence is no longer acceptable, that it's tired and outdated no matter how many cling to it in the stubborn belief that it still works and that it's still valid.

Gerard Vanderhaar

Much violence is based on the illusion that life is a property to be defended and not to be shared.

Henri Nouwen

The cause of violence is not ignorance. It is self-interest. Only reverence can restrain violence - reverence for human life and the environment.

William Sloane Coffin

There will be no justice as long as man will stand with a knife or with a gun and destroy those who are weaker than he is.

Isaac Bashevis Singer

We have cracked down on library books, cell phone calls, fertilizer purchases, and wearing shoes in the airport, but we have done almost nothing at the state level to make it harder for either a terrorist, garden variety armed robber, or young person to get their hands on a handgun.

Sarah Brady

I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent.

Mahatma Gandhi

▪ PERSONAL VIGNETTE ▪

In May 2005, Joslin Sims' son Rayburn was murdered by gunfire in Durham, NC. Since that time, Joslin has become involved with the Religious Coalition for a Nonviolent Durham (www.nonviolentdurham.org). In June 2006, Joslin told her story to the Coalition so that they would have a record of her voice, her pain, her grief. These are her words:

My name is Joslin Sims. My son Rayburn Sims was murdered at the corner of Leon St. and Broad St. on May 21, 2005. He was thirty years old. When I got the call, I didn't know what to expect - my son, Billy, said, "Momma, he's gonna be alright." Once I got to the hospital and it took them a while to come and get me, I realized then that it was worse than what I thought. And once they took me back there and told me that he was dead, I didn't accept it. I couldn't accept it. I said, "He's not my son. He's not dead." I started screaming. And then I kept thinking, *why* would somebody kill him?

He's not a statistic, he's a person. He was my son, he did everything for me. Anything involving his kids, he was there at the school for them; anything concerning my family, he was there because he was a family person. Since he died, nothing is the same. We still laugh a little bit and have our cookouts, but we all know that he's not there. Since Rayburn was murdered, I've been having nightmares. I dream of him in the morgue, and when they are cutting his body I wake up because I felt the knife cutting me. I go to the Parents of Murdered Children meeting, and that helps, but then when you leave there, it starts all over again. For a while there, I had to drink a couple beers just so I could go to sleep. I'm irritable at work with people, and I know it's because of this. It's horrible. It's like a nightmare.

I pray every night that God would do a miracle and bring him back, that I would wake up one morning, and my baby would be alive. It's a circuit - these thoughts just keep going round and round, and no matter what I look at on TV - cause there's a lot of violence on just about every station now- I'm still seeing it in my head. Over and over I see it in my head. O God, I'm tired of seeing it. I see him running, and jumping, trying to get inside that car to get away, and I know he's scared. And I should have been there to protect him - I should have been there because he was my baby.

God, who put that gun in that boy's hand, or whoever it was that killed my son? That person is just cold, some little young punk, probably. Somebody who thinks it makes them a man to carry these guns. They're nothing but cowards. If he had something against my son, he could have gone to him, and they could have had it out hand to hand. I want to know who, I want to know why. I don't want them to face the death penalty, cause I don't want their mother to know that they're going to die. But at least they're locked up, they can't get out and hurt anybody else. At least their mother can go see them and hear them. I have to go to the grave to talk to my son. He can't talk to me. He can't answer my questions...

To the mothers of the children who have been murdered, I say to you: I feel your pain, I have been there. What we're doing is we're learning to live with our pain. The pain is not going away. We have to live on for our other children and family members. But we're only half-alive.

▪ CONTACTS AND OTHER RESOURCES ▪

- ✦ www.godnotguns.org - The *God Not Guns Coalition* is an interfaith partnership consisting of faith-based groups that promote sensible gun policies at the local, state and national levels. With a membership of 18 national faith-based organizations and many more statewide groups, the Coalition seeks to raise awareness of gun violence as a spiritual and moral crisis.
- ✦ www.ncgv.org - *North Carolinians Against Gun Violence Education Fund* is the first statewide, grassroots organization dedicated to educating and mobilizing North Carolinians to prevent gun violence. Founded in 1993, its mission is to make North Carolina safe from gun violence through the education of the public about preventing gun violence, the enforcement of current gun laws, and the enactment of needed new laws. NCGV advocates those approaches which address both prevention, focusing on the underlying causes of gun violence, and punishment, dealing with the perpetrators of gun violence in the criminal justice system. It endorses measures that deal with the underlying reasons for violence, such as poverty, lack of jobs, family breakdown, alcohol and drug abuse, anger and despair, and the glorification of violence in the media. It also endorses measures to rehabilitate young, potentially dangerous offenders, to keep abusive spouses from possessing guns, and to remove violent criminals from society.

- ✦ www.csgv.org – *The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence* and *The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence* have been leaders in organizing for progressive gun laws since 1974. The Coalition emerged from the civil rights movement in the early 1970's and works closely with other organizations to achieve the common goal of reducing firearm death and injury. They employ a four-pronged strategy to reduce gun deaths and defeat the powerful gun lobby. The four points include: advocating a progressive legislative agenda to close illegal gun markets, building a stronger grassroots gun control movement, changing laws by changing our elected leaders, and litigation which seeks to reform the irresponsible practices of the gun industry itself.
- ✦ www.bradycampaign.org – *The Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence* and its legislative and grassroots affiliate, the *Brady Campaign* and its dedicated network of *Million Mom March Chapters*, is the nation's largest, non-partisan, grassroots organization leading the fight to prevent gun violence. The Brady Campaign works to enact and enforce sensible gun laws, regulations, and public policies through grassroots activism, electing public officials who support gun laws, and increasing public awareness of gun violence. Million Mom March Chapters work locally to educate, remember victims, and pass sensible gun laws, believing that children have the right to grow up in environments free from the threat of gun violence. Finally, the Brady Center works to reform the gun industry by enacting and enforcing sensible regulations to reduce gun violence, including regulations governing the gun industry. In addition, it educates the public about gun violence through litigation, grassroots mobilization, and outreach to affected communities.
- ✦ www.interfaithinitiative.org – *Interfaith Initiative Against Gun Violence* is a non-partisan organization of congregations, clergy, and lay leaders dedicated to fighting the plague of gun violence in our society. The Initiative seeks to accomplish its mission through educating the membership of congregations, advocating its positions to appropriate policy makers and media outlets, supporting efforts to reduce the root causes of violence, and cooperating with local and national organizations already active on this issue. The Initiative supports city, county, state, and national policy reforms which address common sense gun legislation. In addition, it maintains an active list of denominational statements concerning gun violence.
- ✦ www.lcav.org – *Legal Community Against Violence* is a public interest law center dedicated to preventing gun violence. Founded by lawyers, LCAV is the country's only organization devoted exclusively to providing legal assistance in support of gun violence prevention. LCAV focuses on policy reform at the state and local level, marshaling the expertise of the legal community to help transform America's gun policies from the grassroots up. Strong state and local measures address concerns of specific communities and regions, improve community health and safety, fill gaps in federal policy, and act as a catalyst for the broader reforms our country needs. By making complex legal and policy issues understandable, conducting legal research, analyzing existing and emerging policy strategies, and generating model regulations, LCAV informs and educates communities, and empowers advocates and governments to pursue effective measures that are legally defensible.

KEY FACTS

DID YOU KNOW?

- Between the year 2000 and 2004, 414 North Carolinians aged 19 or younger were killed by gunfire. Every 9 days, a child in North Carolina is fatally shot.¹
- Over 1,000 North Carolinians die every year from gun violence. Total deaths for the year 2004 were 1,046 adults and children.²
- North Carolina is 9th highest in the nation in the number of men killing women (usually women they know and usually with a gun). In 2004, 48 of 81 (59 %) domestic violence victims in North Carolina were killed with guns.³
- There are more guns in the United States today than in any other modern industrialized country. At last count, there were roughly 200 million firearms in private hands in the U.S.- almost one for every American adult.⁴

North Carolina Council of Churches Statement on Gun Violence⁵

Along with many other Christian people and people of good will, we eschew and abhor violence. Ours has become a too-violent society. We believe that the reduction of the level of violence in our society is to be urgently sought. We further believe that few measures would do as much to diminish the volume of violence than the restriction and regulation of the possession and use of handguns. Handguns have no use other than to threaten, wound, or kill another human being, except occasionally for recreation. It should not be necessary, therefore, for citizens who would restrict them to be called upon to show why they should be regulated. In the context of our violent society, the question should be why death-dealing handguns are allowed at all, not why should they be restricted. No one can be certain of the exact number of handguns privately owned in the United States, but authoritative estimates range from a minimum of 40 million to more than 60 million. No other nation in the world so arms itself, citizen against citizen.

Gun violence, especially handgun violence, has increasingly become a cause for alarm in our nation and state. As Christians, we especially are disturbed. The way of Christ is a way of peace, reconciliation, forgiveness, and love for enemies. The spirit of Christ is sharply opposed to the spirit of violence and the instruments of violence. It is also opposed to the law of retaliation or responding to injury with injury. Christ rejected the use of violence in the pursuit of his mission, and when one of the disciples drew his sword in defense of Jesus, the Lord said, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:51-53).

It is the position of the North Carolina Council of Churches House of Delegates that private possession of handguns eventually should be prohibited throughout the United States. Until federal legislation is passed that would make this a reality, [the North Carolina General Assembly should take action] in order to provide better control over the possession and use of handguns in North Carolina.

- ❑ North Carolina currently has no ban on assault weapons, no ban on large capacity ammunition magazines, no waiting period, no requirement to register guns with local authorities, no limitation of one handgun per person per month, and no required locking devices.⁶
- ❑ In the year 2000, over 6,500 machine guns were registered in North Carolina, with the likelihood that there are many more machine guns present that have not been registered. There are about 3,000 federally licensed firearms dealers in North Carolina.⁷
- ❑ While handguns account for only one-third of all firearms owned in the United States, they account for more than two-thirds of all firearm-related deaths each year. A gun in the home is 4 times more likely to be involved in an unintentional shooting, 7 times more likely to be used to commit a criminal assault or homicide, and 11 times more likely to be used to attempt or commit suicide than to be used in self-defense. Similarly, a gun in the home increases the risk of homicide of a household member by 3 times and the risk of suicide by 5 times compared to homes where no gun is present.⁸
- ❑ Every two years, more Americans die from firearm injuries than the total number of American soldiers killed during the eight year Vietnam War. In 2003, the total number of people killed by guns in the United States was 30,136.⁹
- ❑ Gun violence costs Americans about \$100 billion annually in direct health-care expenditures, lost productivity, personal efforts to manage risk, expenditures for prevention by public agencies, and a general reduction in society's quality of life.¹⁰

1. North Carolinians Against Gun Violence Education Fund, "Facts and Statistics," www.ncgv.org/FactsStatistics_home.html.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. North Carolina Council of Churches, "A Policy Statement on Handgun Control: Adopted by the House of Delegates, 1993;" See also "Children and Gun Violence: A Policy Statement Adopted by the House of Delegates, 1998,"

www.nccouncilofchurches.org/resources/policystatements/gunviolence-children.html.

6. Legal Community Against Violence, "North Carolina State Law Summary," www.lcav.org/states/northcarolina.asp#top.

7. Ibid.

8. Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence, "Statistics, Facts & Quotes," www.ichv.org/Statistics.htm.

9. Ibid.

10. North Carolinians Against Gun Violence Fund, "Facts and Statistics," www.ncgv.org/FactsStatistics_home.html.