

General Synod 20 Resolutions United Church of Christ

Guns and Violence



Background

For decades the National Rifle Association blocked most gun control legislation, a powerful demonstration of how special interest groups can thwart majority sentiment. Rising gun violence finally caused enough people to demand action. When Jim Brady, former press secretary, was shot, he and his wife spent the next decade pressing for passage of the Brady Bill, requiring a seven-day waiting period. It finally was passed in 1993. In 1994 the assault weapon ban passed, banning 19 specific weapons, with the Office for Church in Society and grassroots United Church of Christ people across America mobilizing support that helped make the difference. In 1995 our legislative agenda seeks to hold recent gains. Future gun control steps include Brady Bill 2; Senator Chafee of Rhode Island urging the total ban of handguns, a visionary proposal not yet viable; and Congressperson Owen's bill allowing the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to regulate guns the same way other consumer products are regulated.

Text of Resolution

WHEREAS evening news broadcasts across the nation carry one horror story after another - teachers and students shot, children selling guns, mass murder;

WHEREAS in 1992 handguns were used in the murders of 13 people in Australia, 33 in Britain, 36 in Sweden, 60 in Japan, 128 in Canada and 13,220 in the United States;

WHEREAS in 1991 there were 38,217 people killed by firearms in homicides, suicides and accidents in the United States, more than the total number of Americans killed in the Korean War;

WHEREAS in 1992 more people were killed by guns than in automobile accidents in several states, including Illinois and Maryland;

WHEREAS a new handgun is now produced every 20 seconds; every 14 minutes someone in America dies from a gunshot wound; a child or teenager commits suicide with a gun every six hours;

WHEREAS roughly 100,000 students are bringing guns to school every day in the United States;

WHEREAS our fascination with handguns, assault rifles, and other weapons designed to take human life reflects a deeper spiritual sickness in our cultural character, a sickness born of fear, mistrust, and the desire to dominate another;

WHEREAS gun idolatry is part of a culture of death, nurtured by the National

Rifle Association (NRA), TV ratings, and an international arms industry;

WHEREAS Jesus once lamented over his own city, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem..., would that you knew the things that make for peace;"

WHEREAS Jesus, in whom we have come to know the gentle love of God, was himself the victim of a violent death and so turned us forever against the forces of violence that tempt us to seek annihilation of the enemy;

WHEREAS in proclaiming the resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we confess that God's saving love alone has the power to undo the forces of violence and death and heal our cultural wounds;

WHEREAS the time has come for religious leaders to call for repentance for the sin of violence and our idolatrous fascination with weapons, and to resolve to work with God's life-giving Spirit to restore hope to the victims of violence and our communities; and

WHEREAS the Seventh General Synod in 1969 called for licensing and testing of all gun owners, limiting ammunition sales to license owners and limiting all "handguns to persons whose occupation requires them to possess a handgun for self-protection;"

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Twentieth General Synod calls upon all United Church of Christ churches and members to engage in renewed spiritual reflection in order to better understand the roots of violence in our culture and to

consider the resources of our faith in ending such violence;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twentieth General Synod requests a national body of the United Church of Christ to negotiate with the national leadership of the National Rifle Association to secure its help in eliminating firearm violence; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twentieth General Synod endorse legislative provisions that will:

strengthen the licensing and registration of handgun transfers;

restrict firearm possession by persons convicted of violent crimes and by juveniles;

limit handgun purchases to one per month;

strengthen regulation of gun dealers;

increase civil and criminal liability for misuse of firearms;

prohibit semiautomatic assault weapons, Saturday night specials, explosive ammunition and large-capacity magazines;

require gun safety devices; and

require training in the safe use of firearms as a condition of licensing.

Subject to the availability of funds.