

Dear Lay and Clergy of Virginia Annual Conference,

The Board of Church and Society of the Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church grieves with the family and friends of those slain this week in Parkland, Florida and we deplore the seemingly endless acts of gun violence that plague our nation. We remember that only a few years ago, Virginia Tech suffered a similar assault. We pray for the other US schools that have seen shootings already this year. What seems especially deplorable to us is that the US Congress and the Virginia General Assembly cannot pass reasonable legislation that would reduce gun violence. Legislation to require universal background checks and ban the sale of assault weapons, like the one used in Florida, enjoy overwhelming public support. **The offering of our “thoughts and prayers” is an important beginning place as persons of faith to move us to action as we say “never again” to gun violence.**

We commend for your study and action, these steps from the 2016 General Conference Resolution “Our Call to End Gun Violence.” (Resolution #3428)

*As followers of Jesus, called to live into the reality of God’s dream of shalom as described by Micah, we must address the epidemic of gun violence so “that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in God’s paths.” Therefore, we call upon United Methodists to prayerfully address gun violence in their local context. Some of the ways in which to prevent gun violence include the following:*

- 1. For congregations to make preventing gun violence a regular part of our conversations and prayer times. Gun violence must be worshipfully and theologically reflected on, and we encourage United Methodist churches to frame conversations theologically by utilizing resources such as “Kingdom Dreams, Violent Realities: Reflections on Gun Violence from Micah 4:1-4 produced by the General Board of Church and Society.*
- 2. For congregations to assist those affected by gun violence through prayer, pastoral care, creating space, and encouraging survivors to share their stories, financial assistance, and through identifying other resources in their communities as victims of gun violence and their families walk through the process of grieving and healing.*
- 3. For individual United Methodists who own guns as hunters or collectors to safely and securely store their guns and to teach the importance of practicing gun safety.*
- 4. For United Methodist congregations that have not experienced gun violence to form ecumenical and interfaith partnerships with faith communities that have experienced gun violence in order to support them and learn from their experiences.*

5. *For United Methodist congregations to lead or join in ecumenical or interfaith gatherings for public prayer at sites where gun violence has occurred and partner with law enforcement to help prevent gun violence.*
6. *For United Methodist congregations to 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 that organize faith-based campaigns to encourage gun retailers to gain full legal compliance with appropriate standards and laws.*
7. *For United Methodist congregations to display signs that prohibit carrying guns onto church property.*
8. *For United Methodist congregations to advocate at the local and national level for laws that prevent or reduce gun violence. Some of those measures include:*
  - *Universal background checks on all gun purchases*
  - *Ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty*
  - *Ensuring all guns are sold through licensed gun retailers*
  - *Prohibiting all individuals convicted of violent crimes from purchasing a gun for a fixed time period*
  - *Prohibiting all individuals under restraining order due to threat of violence from purchasing a gun*
  - *Prohibiting persons with serious mental illness, who pose a danger to themselves and their communities, from purchasing a gun*
  - *Ensuring greater access to services for those suffering from mental illness*
  - *Establishing a minimum age of 21 years for a gun purchase or possession*
  - *Banning large-capacity ammunition magazines and weapons designed to fire multiple rounds each time the trigger is pulled*
  - *Promoting new technologies to aid law-enforcement agencies to trace crime guns and promote public safety.*

Blessings in this season of Lent,

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