

The Two Hundredth 'Aha Pae'āina of the Hawai'i Conference of the United Church of Christ

On Becoming a Church Against Gun Violence: A Resolution of Witness

SUMMARY

This resolution calls on the Hawai'i Conference of the United Church of Christ (HCUCC) and its member churches to engage in meaningful action to address the scourge of gun violence in our country. Each church is called to pursue a course of action that best fits its skills, capabilities, and understanding. Actions that seek to end gun violence include but are not limited to: participating in raising awareness and fostering education concerning gun violence, praying for peace, organizing/attending peaceful protests, and/or advocating for legislative action concerning gun control, as well as broader mental health services.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND ETHICAL RATIONALE

As Christ's followers, we look to the Prince of Peace as our Lord and Savior (Isaiah 9:6). The heart of Christ longs for peace and longs for us to understand true peace (Luke 19:42). Christ teaches that those who seek peace are known as "children of God" (Matthew 5:9). As peacemakers, our calling is to not only avoid violence, but also to actively dismantle the constructs that lead to violence. In this vein, the Apostle Paul teaches that, to the best of our ability and skills, we are to pursue peace in our communities (Romans 12:18).

For far too long, our nation has been torn apart by gun violence. As people of peace, we cannot accept gun violence as the norm. We cannot conform to this painful pattern of violence. From January through May of 2022 our nation has averaged more than one mass shooting per day.¹ In those same five months, more than 400 children and nearly 2,000 teenagers were injured by firearms. This must change. Our thinking and action as they relate to gun violence need to be transformed. It is nothing less than a moral imperative that our public policy reflect a commitment to lessening the toll that gun violence takes in communities throughout our country.

The prophet Micah shares a powerful vision of weapons of destruction transformed into tools of cultivation (Micah 4:1-4). The vision describes the action the people of God take after they have "learned God's ways." Micah's vision speaks not only of the dismantling of weapons, but also of the transformation of culture. As a church, we recognize that no one piece of legislation, no singular program, can address the complex and multilayered issue of gun violence. Thankfully, as a denomination, we believe that the Holy Spirit works through each community, each individual, according to their abilities, and weaves our efforts together for good (Romans 8:28). Together, by God's grace, we can end cycles of violence. Together, we can promote the healing of individuals and communities (Ephesians 2:10). Together, we long for God's good

¹ A mass shooting is defined as four or more people shot and/or killed in a single event, not including the shooter.
– The Gun Violence Archive

shalom. For we have learned that true peace is not the absence of conflict – it is the presence of justice.

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS news broadcasts across the nation carry one horror story after another – God’s children brutally shot while grocery shopping, teachers and children horrifically slain in their classrooms, and people of all ages and backgrounds gunned down in the streets; and

WHEREAS we know this violence touches not only our sisters and brothers on the mainland, but also our ‘ohana here in Hawai‘i, as our local news stations report about gun violence here, too, on our islands; and

WHEREAS there have been more than 230 mass shootings in the United States of America in the first five months of 2022; and

WHEREAS the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported 45,222 gun-related deaths in 2020, which represent a 25% increase from 2015; and

WHEREAS nearly eight-in-ten (79%) murders in the USA involved a firearm; and

WHEREAS firearm injuries have become the leading cause of death in children; and

WHEREAS we know in our gut that this gun violence and death are wrong and that they must be stopped; and

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 the death of our enemy; and

WHEREAS we are called to co-create with the Holy Spirit the kingdom of God in this world – a kingdom of peace and justice and care; and

WHEREAS the time has come for the Church 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 to our communities; and

WHEREAS the Twentieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ in 1995 called for meaningful action to address gun violence and continues to call for action;

THEREFORE be it resolved that the Two-Hundredth ‘Aha Pae‘āina of the Hawai‘i Conference of the United Church of Christ declares that the time has come for us all – our churches and our members – to actively promote peace and engage in efforts to end gun violence;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Two-Hundredth 'Aha Pae'āina of the HCUCC implores its churches to pray for peace and for an end to these horrific acts of violence, and to let our prayers move us to meaningful action;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Two-Hundredth 'Aha Pae'āina of the HCUCC calls upon its churches to engage in education, consciousness raising, and renewed spiritual reflection about the cycles of gun violence, 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 Two-Hundredth 'Aha Pae'āina of the HCUCC encourages its churches and members to make their voices heard in the wider community through attending neighborhood or legislative meetings, partnering with community individuals or organizations, participating in peaceful protests, and/or advocating for legislative action concerning broader mental health services and/or stricter gun laws;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Two-Hundredth 'Aha Pae'āina of the HCUCC asks our Justice and Witness Missional Team to assist churches with guidance on how to promote peace and address gun violence;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Two-Hundredth 'Aha Pae'āina of the HCUCC calls upon each of our churches to find a pathway to become a church against gun violence and for peace;

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that this resolution be an item of discussion with progress to be assessed at the Two Hundred and First 'Aha Pae'āina of the HCUCC.