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The United Methodist Church

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Yesterday, on July 4th, our holiday gatherings were shaken by the sobering news of a mass shooting when a young man opened fire on those attending an Independence Day Parade in Highland Park, Illinois. What should have been a memorable outing for families became a nightmare. I invite you to join me in praying for the six victims who died, ranging in age from 8 to 85, and the more than 30 spectators who were wounded or injured in the attack. Let us lift up in prayer the named victims, Nicolas Toledo and Jacki Sundheim, and the four others as we learn their names.

Our hearts go out to the families who have lost loved ones and all those who are reeling from the violence. We are grateful for the bystanders, local residents and first responders who aided the wounded and dying and those fleeing the scene seeking shelter in the chaos of the moment. In the face of horrific tragedy, our humanity shines through.

This mass shooting calls us to mourn, pray, remember innocent lives lost, and strengthen our resolve to find ways to address the growing epidemic of gun violence in the United States. With one mass shooting reported every day and news reports of injuries and deaths due to gun violence a nightly occurrence in and around the Chicago area, we are called to find solutions that preserve life.

Our 2016 United Methodist Social Principles in paragraph 162 states:

As followers of Jesus, called to live into the reality of God's dream of shalom as described by Micah (4: 1-4), 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 ways to prevent gun violence include the following:

1. For congregations to make preventing gun violence a regular part of our conversations and prayer times. We encourage United Methodist churches to frame conversations theologically by utilizing resources such as "Kingdom Dreams, Violent Realities: Reflections on Gun Violence," a Bible study from Micah 4:1-4 and 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 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 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 for laws that prevent or reduce gun violence at the local and national levels.

Friends, in the face of this 4th of July tragedy, let us channel our holy anger into action as we stand up for life, holding all those whose lives have been forever changed by this shooting and so many others in our prayers.

Almighty God, grant eternal rest to those who have died and healing mercies to the wounded. Surround those who mourn with your spirit's presence that they might know comfort. Grant us the courage to live as people of peace in our words and our actions.

In Christ, we pray, Amen.

Bishop John L. Hopkins

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