

The Business Committee of the Thirty-Fourth General Synod has recommended this proposed resolution be sent to a Committee of the General Synod.

AFFIRMING GUNS TO GARDENS AND OTHER GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION MINISTRIES

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted by the Metro Denver Association of the Rocky Mountain Conference

1 **SUMMARY**

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3 This resolution calls on the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ to
4 support churches and all other settings of the United Church of Christ in engaging in meaningful
5 action to address the scourge of gun violence in our country. Each church and setting is called to
6 pursue a course of action that best fits their skills, capabilities, and understanding. Actions that
7 seek to end gun violence include but are not limited to organizing Guns to Garden events,
8 organizing events promoting safe storage of firearms, participating in raising awareness and
9 fostering education concerning gun violence, advocating for legislative action concerning gun
10 control, and broader mental health services.

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13 **BIBICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND ETHICAL RATIONALE**

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15 From January through September of 2022 our nation has experienced 32,958 deaths due to gun
16 violence. Of these deaths, over 17,000 were suicides, and 1,190 have been unintentional or
17 accidental deaths. To date there have been 501 mass shootings in schools, houses of worship,
18 grocery stores, and workplaces among others, and over 4500 children and youth were injured or
19 killed due to gun violence.¹

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21 We read in many places in the Biblical text a call to peace and to dismantle the systems and
22 constructs that lead to violence.

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24 Isaiah 2:2-4

25 They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not
26 take up sword against nation; they will train for war no more. Everyone will sit under their own
27 vine and fig tree. No one shall make them afraid.

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29 Psalm 46:1-3; 8-10

30 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though
31 the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters
32 roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Come, behold the works of the
33 Lord; see what desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the
34 earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. 'Be still, and
35 know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.'

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Matthew 5:9

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Romans 12: 14-21

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ No, ‘if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

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. As people of faith, we can no longer be satisfied with being “just another stat.” And though it may be easy to be overwhelmed with the complexity and scope of gun violence prevention, we MUST do something - anything. Peace-making action is required urgently and there is no time to be afraid.

Our thinking and action as they relate to gun violence need to be transformed. It is nothing less than a moral and spiritual imperative that our public policy reflect a commitment to lessening the toll that gun violence takes in communities throughout our country.

We are aware that there is a lack of education and understanding about how and where to surrender unwanted guns in our society. While there are organizations that will help you sell or donate your gun, if one wishes to take the gun out of circulation and use, those organizations are much more difficult to find. Churches can be a place where tools of destruction and violence can be turned in safely. Partnering with organizations like RawTools (Rawtools.org) that has established practices, protocols, and expertise is a viable and streamlined way to begin.

For those who own guns and have them in their homes, churches can also have a gun violence prevention ministry offering gun locks and gun safes for safe storage and handling of these firearms. This prevents accidental deaths.

Guns to Gardens provides a practical, pastoral, and prophetic ministry:

- *Practical:* With more than 400 million guns in private hands, and in many communities no easy way to safely dispose of the ones that are unwanted, Guns to Gardens is a practical service that churches can provide, and it reduces the number of unwanted guns in our communities, without returning them to the gun market where they could do future harm. Examples: a grandfather who has hunting guns from years past and now has

82 grandchildren visiting in the home; a family to whom the police returned a gun after it
83 was used in a suicide or crime by their loved one; a household with someone who has a
84 serious physical illness, depression, or who is going through a crisis, such as
85 unemployment or divorce; an older person who has enjoyed owning guns but no longer
86 feels that they can safely operate or handle them; a family with serious conflict or
87 domestic violence. Providing gun locks and safes also decreases the likelihood of misuse
88 of a firearm, accidental death or to be used in a spur of the moment decision to end one's
89 life.

- 90 • *Pastoral*: Guns hold memories, some good and some painful. The church is an
91 appropriate host to accompany a gun donor while their gun is dismantled. They may
92 appreciate a moment of prayer or silence, or simply someone to share their story with.
93 The church is the place of pastoral healing. To provide gun locks and safes is a pastoral
94 way to keep homes and children safe when firearms are present.
- 95 • *Prophetic*: For citizens to voluntarily rid their homes and communities of unwanted guns
96 is to turn upside down the gun industry myth that we are safer with “guns everywhere.”
97 For the church to facilitate this process is to show that God stands on the side of saving
98 lives and preventing gun violence. By turning guns into garden tools, we demonstrate the
99 biblical vision that God creates us to live in gardens, not battlefields. And, in the absence
100 of action by our government to prevent gun violence, we take direct action to inspire
101 elected officials to find their courage to also act to save lives.

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103 The epidemic of gun violence is out of control in the United States. Our faith in a loving and just
104 God calls us to be leaders in justice movements. Ending gun violence is a justice movement.
105 Thoughts and prayers are wonderful AND we are called to act. Being involved in Guns to
106 Gardens and other gun violence prevention ministries is a way to turn our thoughts and prayers
107 into action. Going hand in hand with this is continued action to call our federal government to
108 enact legislation on gun control and safety as well as better access and funding for mental health
109 programs available to all.

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111 Further information about Guns to Gardens can be found in the endnotes.²

112 113 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

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115 **WHEREAS** there is an absence of federal action on gun control and safety; and

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

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120 **WHEREAS** there is an opportunity for individual congregations, associations and conferences
121 to provide practical, pastoral and prophetic ministry related to preventing gun violence;

122 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church
123 of Christ declares that the time has come for us all – congregations, associations, conferences,
124 and members – to actively promote peace and engage in efforts to end gun violence;

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126 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of
127 Christ implores all United Church of Christ congregations, associations and conferences to pray

128 for peace and for an end to these horrific acts of violence, and to let our prayers move us to
129 meaningful action;

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131 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that we give thanks, pray for, and commend the congregations
132 and organizations that have participated in the Guns to Gardens project as a way to responsibly
133 dispose of unwanted firearms, turning them into garden tools rather than returning them to the
134 gun market;

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136 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of
137 Christ calls on congregations, associations, and conferences in the United Church of Christ to
138 learn about the Guns to Gardens project and prayerfully consider if it is a ministry to which they
139 are called as part of our witness to prevent gun violence, save lives, and provide healing for a
140 nation traumatized by violence;

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142 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of
143 Christ calls on congregations, associations, and conferences in the United Church of Christ to
144 prayerfully consider joining the Guns to Garden movement³, and to host safe surrender events
145 for unwanted guns to be dismantled according to rules of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco,
146 Firearms, and Explosives;

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148 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of
149 Christ calls on congregations, associations, and conferences in the United Church of Christ to
150 prayerfully consider hosting events to give away gun safes and locks to promote safe storage of
151 firearms in the home to prevent unauthorized use and accidental use; and

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153 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of
154 Christ asks Justice and Local Church Ministries to compile materials from existing gun violence
155 prevention ministries to assist UCC congregations with guidance in offering gun violence
156 prevention ministries.

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158 **FUNDING:** The funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance
159 with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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161 **IMPLEMENTATION:** The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries
162 or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

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¹ Gun Violence Archive <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org>

² The copyright for “Guns to Gardens” is held by New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence. They have given free use of this title to Congregations and other church bodies. The founding organization for the Guns to Gardens movement is Rawtools, a ministry based in Colorado and led by Michael Martin, a former Mennonite pastor-turned-blacksmith. RAWtools provides logistical support and safe training on how to use a chop saw. Their national network of blacksmiths forges leftover gun parts into garden tools. Website – Rawtools.org

For further information about Guns to Gardens: Watch the UCC Thursdays for the Soul Video - Shared Learning from Gun Violence Ministries - <https://youtu.be/NmklNzilc4k>

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