

JPIC Resolution for 2016

Resolution on Gun Violence:

“Choose Life so that you and your descendant may live”...Dt.30:19

Statement of Resolution: Be it resolved that we, as members of the Franciscan Federation, upholding the inherent dignity of all human life and our willingness to embrace the common good, in the tradition of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi, denounce all forms of Gun Violence that is tearing apart the social fabric of society and leaving children dead on our streets and families afraid in their homes. St. Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and spoke the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationships with one another. We pledge to work for the elimination of gun violence by committing ourselves to respect for life by cultivating a culture of life that explores nonviolent living and to advocate for each individual, family, school, and neighborhood so that our communities can once again become places of peace and beacons of life movements.

Background: Gun violence is on the rise in the United States. For decades the National Rifle Association blocked most gun control legislation and it is a powerful demonstration of how special interest groups can thwart majority sentiment. Rising gun violence is beginning to cause many to demand action. Our families are torn apart by violence. Reflecting on the Kerner Commission, the USCCB reported that “no nation on earth, except those in the midst of war, has as much violent behavior as we do--in our homes, schools, on our televisions, and in our streets.” Statistics indicate the number of deaths went from 12,589 in 2014 to 13,417 in 2015. Of these deaths, the number of children from age 0-11 went from 625 to 696. The number of teen age deaths, age 12-17 went from 2,367 to 2,690. Mass shooting went from 280-330 and an Officer involved incidents went from 3,218 to 4,385; whereas accidental shootings went from 1,602 to 1,962. In 2015 on average, because of carelessness by an adult, a toddler in America shoots someone about once a week. . As of May 13, 2016 there have been 18,662 gun violence and crime incidents validated with over 4,758 deaths. It is also noted that African-Americans and Latinos are being murdered or harmed by gun use at a significantly higher rate than the rest of our society. (TheTrace.org/2015)

Gun Violence can be decreased and hopefully eliminated in a number of ways:

1. Stricter background checks for all types of gun purchases. Individuals requesting firearms must complete a full background check prior to purchasing a firearm regardless if the firearm is small or large.
2. Making sure that all firearms be registered with the local police station within three days of purchasing the firearms from the arms dealer or a fine will be instilled on the purchaser.
3. Realizing that the US Government can restrict the right to bear arms to mental health patients, we must examine, strengthen, and advocate for a stronger mental health system.
4. We have to address simultaneously declining family life and the increasing availability of deadly weapons, the lure of gangs and the slavery of addiction, the absence of real opportunity, budget cuts adversely affecting the poor and the loss of moral values.

Rationale: As Franciscans, we affirm our relationship with all persons as our brothers and sisters. Following the example of St. Francis who reached out to the poor, oppressed and marginalized in his day, we have special concern for the dignity of all human beings and a call to respond when persons are suffering due to gun violence.

Call to Respond:

Let us, as members of the Franciscan Federation, continue and increase our effort to address the needs of our times, as we respond individually and collectively to the issues of gun violence and the culture of death. May we cultivate in small but key ways the culture of life to which we are called to through our faith. We must be committed to life and offer a vision of hope and a call to action.

Members are encouraged to:

- Respond prayerfully by engaging in prayer services and events with prayers for peace and an end to violence; by offering intercessions during liturgies and on other such occasions, and by holding in contemplative silence victims of gun violence, perpetrators and those responding in various ways to this horrendous injustice.
- Become better educated about the issues of gun violence; teach basic values and conflict resolution and see to it that our children have a safe place to go after school hours. We can encourage our Religious Education programs to provide the values and support that can help people, especially young people, choose life and reject violence.
- Engage in advocacy efforts such as petition and postcard campaigns, calls, letters and visit's to our legislators, letters to the editor, nonviolent marches, vigils and demonstrations, media and other advocacy opportunities as they arise.
- Encourage all church leaders to promote gun control as a life issue and to invite priests and deacons to speak of this topic in their homilies. We are grateful that it has been added under life issues in the Voter's Guide, but urge the bishops to add a reason why they chose to include it as a life issues.