

June 2016



## Christian Church

(Disciples of Christ)

*In the United States &  
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## A message to the Church

In times of trouble, people of faith call upon God in prayer ([Psalm 61:1-2](#)) In these days, we pray for the families and friends of the 49 women and men killed and 53 wounded - mostly LGBTQ Latinos and Latinas - in Orlando on June 12, 2016. We pray for the families and friends of those killed across the country and around the world each day whose stories we will never hear. We pray for an end to violence of all kinds. ([General Assembly Resolution 1539](#)) Sadly, this week (June 17) is also the first anniversary of the shootings at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston. We pray Our Creator will bring peace to those who mourn, those who cope with the horrors they have seen, and those who will work for years to restore wholeness to lives shattered by violence. And we pray that the Holy Spirit will inspire us to act in powerful ways to build the Beloved Community.

Beyond prayer, people across the United States are asking how we can stop the seemingly endless parade of massacres. We are growing numb even as the numbers of those who have died grow larger and larger, too large to comprehend. We argue over the cause; we get angry and cannot find common ground, then do nothing. And by doing nothing, we become complicit when violence erupts yet again.

We, the undersigned, write to encourage Disciples to move beyond numbness and to turn our anger to a righteous cause. We can start with honest conversation - even spirited debate - grounded in the love and hope God gives us especially for times so disturbing and fearful. We can model civility and mutual respect even in emotionally charged conversations related to religion, sexual orientation, gender identification, race, and weapons. We can seek to share God's love and welcome with others as God has with us, especially those on the margins who see violence as their only option. We can persevere in calling for justice.

The truth is that we are ALL God's beloved children, and we must ALL learn to live together, honoring and respecting one another as fellow humans. We cannot let these hard conversations devolve into nitpicking about types of weapons or national origins or "liberal" vs "conservative" agendas.

Regretfully, the tragedy in Orlando has focused attention on the purported religion of the perpetrator, though the number of violent adherents to Islam are a miniscule percentage of those who claim the faith. We cannot be goaded into condemning all because of a few. The violence we have experienced is not about Islam. It is about hate and bigotry- as the shooting in Charleston was.

This is the moment for religious, civic, and political leaders - indeed, for all of us - to stand together, united, to denounce prejudice and violence directed toward any group.

It is also time for us to consider the violence itself. As a faith tradition that aims to welcome all to the table set by God, conversations about the rights, responsibilities, and consequences of gun ownership are challenging within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). ([GA 1521](#)) But as the death toll rises, as Newtown and Aurora and Charleston and San Bernardino and Orlando become synonymous with the horrors of gun violence, it is clear those challenging conversations must take place. And they must take place now if we have any hope of stopping future massacres. Questions at the core of this conversation include:

- What are the responsibilities and guidelines to determine who should be allowed to own guns and who should not?
- What kinds of weapons should be available to people in the United States?
- How do we communicate with lawmakers and other influencers when personal or political interest appears to supersede issues of public safety and basic human morality?
- How do we help people see beyond violence? How do we help individuals who do not see hope in their lives? How do our communities respond to the marginalized?
- How do we work with other peace-loving people to provide some measure of comfort for wounds that will always linger?

Ultimately, if these conversations are to make any difference at all, they must lead to action. We will undoubtedly find many different approaches to ending gun violence. This is actually an opportunity. Any tactic, public or private or sociological, that may reduce violence deserves to be tried, the results analyzed, and the best solutions implemented widely.

We have already waited too long to begin this work. The lives of children, women and men have already been lost, and countless more lives are at stake.

As Christians we are called to embody compassion and mercy in even the most challenging times, thus we offer prayer and hospitality to the wounded. We are also called to action, to courageously engage in the things that make for peace, starting with the difficult conversations that examine options and lead us toward solutions. Even as we denounce violence, bigotry and hatred, may we then actively seek to model peace-making, respect and love. May we be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit among us, showing us the ways to end gun violence and address the root causes of all violence, bringing the wholeness and peace to which we are called in Christ Jesus. “Blessed are the peace-makers...”

### **Members of the College of Regional Ministers and the Cabinet of General Ministries\***



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Paxton Jones, Kansas

Bill Spangler-Dunning, Upper Midwest

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Gary Kidwell, Christian Church Foundation

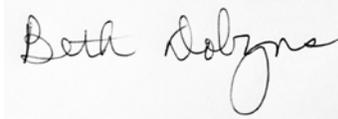
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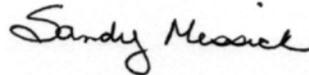
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*\*Please note: Events such as travel schedules, family emergencies and sabbaticals prevented some members of both bodies from participating in this letter due to the very short timeline.*