



Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ

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Dear Friends, Builders of the Beloved Community:

May the grace and peace of the Christ abide with you.

We have been shocked and horrified by the news of the many acts of violence in our nation. The most recent is always the worst and most horrifying. Often we do not know how to respond, in part because of the shock and failure to comprehend how any human being can commit acts that end the lives of dozens and affect thousands of individuals in just minutes, causing great pain and driving a nation to mourning and fear.

As people of faith who want to respect the opinion of all we are also often cautious not to offend. Because we believe in life as a sacred gift of God, and because we know that our Maker is a giver and preserver of life we turn to God, in prayer and seeking answers. After going to God and discerning God's will, we must then do something. That something must be in accordance to our faith, our values and the God we serve.

In our discernment and in trying to understand and comfort others, as clergy and faithful lay people we must ask ourselves:

Why do civilians need Semi-automatic weapons that converted to function as machine-guns, do we at all need guns if we are preservers of life, builders of the beloved community.

What role or purpose do guns have; what good do they do in our call to serve God?

Why must such tools of destruction be so accessible to civilians?

Why do our political leaders refuse to legislate to the ban of weapons of mass destruction killing many in our own communities, while we call on others to eliminate them?

Why do so many political leaders support the NRA/National Rifle Association standing in the way of banning them, contributing to the campaign chest of political leaders to avoid and or lobby against gun control?

Why is the Department of Justice not charging the CDC/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration; and the Department of Education to identify solutions immediately to this national crisis?

Why does the Affordable Care Act not ensure accessible, high quality, culturally competent and widely accessed mental health treatment in its implementation?

Why do our children have to be exposed to experiencing and witnessing violence on an alarming scale when we already know what works to address such exposure?

Why have we not acted so that assault weapons have no place in class rooms, in our movie theaters, in our places of worship, and in our community streets?

Let us discern and lead others in discerning with God about the above, at every opportunity. All of the above we can address and much more that can be done if we, people of faith, will stand up, speak-up, march-up and call on our national leaders to act responsibly and morally.

There is nothing wrong with peoples of faith taking a stand for legislating in response to the great challenge we face with violence in our communities and nation. To do it for God's sake, upholding the values of our faith convictions and building the beloved community. If some are offended due to our taking of a position to preserve human life and the safety of present and future generation, let it be so – there is no shame in standing up for life and its sacredness. And when our leaders and institutions fail, let us turn to the courts of public opinion in building a new consciousness and culture that reflects God's reign.

Let us pray, pray, pray, preach, then act and be the church in changing the culture of violence that we are too familiar with and that is becoming a common occurrence in our nation and local communities. God, our God, who gives life also affords us courage and moral authority.

May the spirit of the author of life guide us in witnessing to and doing the mission we are called to.

With you in building the beloved community,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jorge L. Morales". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Jorge L. Morales
Conference Minister