



*A social message on...*

## **Gun-related Violence and Trauma**

*As adopted unanimously by the Church Council on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on April 13, 2024.*

### **This Message in Summary**

*Guns and gun-related violence and trauma are woven into U.S. history and society in substantial, complex, and problematic ways. The full social message therefore requires length, nuance, and complexity. This summary provides an overview of key aspects of the four sections, much like a map that conveys the main points of a complex landscape.*

- I. Introduction: God's Resolve for Peace Abides*
- II. Seeing Trauma in Insecurity, Despair, and Mayhem*
- III. Countering Violence and Trauma as God's Resolve for Peace*
- IV. Toward Shared Responsibility in What Makes for Peace*

*At its heart, this social message makes the case for reframing the gun debate and activity in the U.S. beyond gun rights versus gun control. The message commits the ELCA to a moral framework of shared responsibility that comes to terms with trauma honestly and seeks prevention carefully through a public health model. Such a model suggests individual and institutional practices that could reduce tragic, irresponsible, and illegal uses of firearms and their related risks and harms. This message argues that such a framework can open up constructive dialogue and action across many, many communities and should be publicly embraced.*

*Section I shows how this message builds upon the scriptural references, insights, themes, and commitments found in the ELCA social statement *For Peace in God's World* and the ELCA social message "On Community Violence" and draws from others such as the social statement *The Church and Criminal Justice*. (Readers may review these at [www.elca.org/socialstatements](http://www.elca.org/socialstatements).) From a Lutheran Christian perspective, it returns to themes such as peacemaking and prevention that, too often, have*

*been sidelined. It soberly charts the horrific facts and the disparities of age, class, gender, and race of the nearly 50,000 lives taken each year. It introduces, as well, two factors increasingly recognized by social science: the widespread effects of trauma and the rise of defensive gun cultures.*

*Section II explores the multiple, often unrecognized forms of trauma resulting from armed threats and shootings in which the perpetrator intends to harm others or self. These actions not only harm people physically but traumatize human spirits, families, communities, and the social order itself. The call to see trauma in this way expands moral responsibility for gun-related harm.*

*Section III reminds Christians of the centrality of Christlike service of neighbor in our social roles. It calls them, and all people of goodwill, to practice wise and proactive efforts to restrain gun-related violence and prevent it. This emphasis on prevention aligns the ELCA with a growing movement to approach gun misuse as a public health crisis. This section also recognizes that members of our church and society are divided in various ways and degrees about how to reduce gun-related harms. These divisions cannot be fully addressed in this message, and some of them call for further discernment, such as defensive gun use for example.*

*Section IV calls upon multiple types of secular communities to prevent violence and make peace. It spells out the responsibilities of communities as diverse as shooting associations and firearm defense groups, health care providers and firearm businesses. The section also describes the distinctive responsibilities of our church and other faith communities toward peacemaking. These include calls to bridge divides, build community, advocate policy, and care for the traumatized.*

*This message concludes that such a reframed understanding and practice in responsible communities can resist and reverse the immense and mournful toll of tragic, irresponsible, and illegal gun use in the United States today.*

# A social message on Gun-related Violence and Trauma

## I. GOD'S RESOLVE FOR PEACE ABIDES

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“They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.” —Jeremiah 6:14

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”  
—Matthew 5:9

“For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you.”  
—Isaiah 54:10

Christians are called to be peacemakers. When Christians make peace, they respond in faith and gratitude toward God’s sovereign promise of a world where violence and trauma are no more. God’s resolve for peace through steadfast love calls all people to do as God does—to ever strive for peace through love of neighbor. This striving takes many forms through the roles and places of responsibility where we live—and where today we lament gun-related violence and trauma in the United States.

Christians are not alone in mourning. Most people in the U.S. long for an end to senseless harm and killing, even as they may disagree passionately about solutions.<sup>1</sup> These disagreements reflect cultural and moral diversity in society and in our churches, which are compounded by mistrust, exclusion, and alienation.<sup>2</sup> Discord over firearm misuse cannot be addressed in isolation from these and other social realities. Among them, health disparities of age, class, gender, and race contribute significantly to shootings that claim nearly 50,000 lives each year.<sup>3</sup> Some communities know seemingly endless violence and trauma due to tragic, irresponsible, and illegal gun use. There is no peace for these neighbors or many more throughout our society.

For Christians, human yearnings to live in peace are continually thwarted by relations and activities of sinful brokenness and disorder that beset all people, communities, and institutions. Individually and collectively, humans sin when they fail to love and trust God above all else or when they turn inward at the expense of others. They possess the gifts of God

but withhold them from their neighbors. Gun-related violence and trauma are among the ways humans fail to serve God's covenant of peace and to live in good and right relations. Despite our sinful identities and ways, we trust that God's resolve for peace abides.

For three decades, the ELCA has addressed the manifestations of gun-related violence and trauma in the U.S. through social messages, resolutions, statements, study materials, and pastoral letters. To hold government accountable for civic well-being, ELCA leaders and members have advocated for state and federal regulations to prevent firearm misuse.<sup>4</sup> In these and other ways, our church has sought through teaching and witness to reduce self-harm and criminal violence involving guns. Yet there is no peace.

Nevertheless, we hold that God continues to call all people to strive anew toward solutions. Christians and all people of goodwill should, above all, do no harm and avoid risk of harm while striving in numerous ways for peace—in our homes, our communities, and our souls. Through this message, this church affirms that current societal trends and new understandings of gun-related risks and harms call us to witness anew and with urgency to our shared responsibility for peacemaking. We can collaborate to reduce harm and seek peace, even as we disagree about how to address some complex and changing realities.

### ***What societal trends and new understandings call the ELCA to witness anew?***

#### **Growing and disparate violence amid pervasive insecurity**

At the time of this writing, national gun suicide and murder rates have recently returned to near-record highs. Three hundred people in the U.S. are shot every day. Over 100 perish. Though public mass shootings account for only a tiny fraction of criminal homicides, they have grave effects beyond lost lives. Guns are now the leading cause of death among individuals under 20. Within this population and others, persisting racial disparities of health and harm cry out for attention.<sup>5</sup>

Though U.S. shootings occur disproportionately across populations and places, members of our society share a pervasive sense of insecurity.<sup>6</sup> This insecurity takes different forms and degrees, with various sources and histories. We live in an information-saturated society that delivers instantaneous news of gun deaths and the troubles they tell. Narratives of social unrest, constant change, and uncontrolled threat naturally provoke

fear. This insecurity can be confirmed when elected officials respond to yet more carnage with partisan rhetoric and simplistic solutions.

### **Seeing trauma and seeking protection**

Two dimensions of insecurity merit searching attention today. First, encounters with gun-related violence are increasingly understood by researchers to involve forms of trauma that have powerful lasting effects on individuals and communities.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the risks and harms of gun violence are now understood to extend far beyond people wounded and killed by gunfire.

Second, while gun-related trauma and insecurity take different forms, one significant public response to perceived threat and vulnerability can be seen in the growing trend of defensive gun ownership among people who buy firearms. Security concerns are prompting millions of previously unarmed people each year to become owners. These purchases add to the some 40% of U.S. households where an estimated 75 million or more owners keep over 400 million firearms.<sup>8</sup>

## **II. SEEING TRAUMA IN INSECURITY, DESPAIR, AND MAYHEM**

“Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.” —Jeremiah 31:15

“My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is.  
—Lamentations 3:17

### ***Why is seeing trauma morally significant?***

Peacemaking begins with understanding what is going on and what our neighbors need to flourish. Trauma research offers insight into the often-unmet needs of people and communities that experience gun violence. This research exposes the full reach and impact of tragic, irresponsible, and illegal gun use. It reveals that far more people than officially reported are harmed or at risk of harm. By seeing the trauma of gun-related violence, we become mindful of less visible assaults and burdens that our neighbors bear, which call for moral concern and response.

Gun-related trauma affects people as individuals and as members of families, communities, and society. It affects some people and

communities much more profoundly than others due to disparities in health conditions and protective resources.<sup>9</sup> Seeing trauma can help us to advance our understanding of the threats, impacts, and legacies of criminal violence and self-harm. We can better name wounds that call for care and better formulate wise public policy that seeks prevention as well as restraint.

### ***What is gun-related trauma?***<sup>10</sup>

Gun-related trauma includes individual and collective responses to harmful events and threatening conditions. It stems from exposure to events or conditions that are emotionally disturbing or life-threatening, with lasting adverse effects on health. People can be traumatized at any age, but childhood trauma, especially when untreated or unrecognized, can have lifelong debilitating effects.

Trauma is a subjective and socially conditioned experience. Two or more people can experience the same event or condition but may not be traumatized in the same way. Trauma varies according to one's proximity to the event or condition, the existing resources and strengths of those affected, and the severity and persistence of the assault. It varies according to the amount of support needed and available to affected people.

### **Forms and relations of trauma**

Gun-related trauma can follow an acute incident such as armed robbery. It can result from adverse childhood experiences of routine exposure to gun violence. Traumatic events can be communal as well as individual and can have a compounding effect when they happen to people who cope with preexisting trauma that stems from biases such as homophobia, transphobia, racism, and sexism.

Some people and groups can experience trauma as firsthand participants whereas others may be traumatized as secondhand participants responding to wounded people.<sup>11</sup> Scholars note how trauma extends in different ways through time. A traumatic event may end, but effects can linger.<sup>12</sup> Persisting trauma can be transmitted across generations through families and communities. Whole societies can be traumatized by eruptions of violence such as a terrorist attack that triggers insecurity and disorientation.

### **Powerlessness and trauma**

Human health and well-being depend upon our individual ability to cope with challenging life events. People must summon courage and resilience

to function as agents in relation to others. Similarly, humane societies require individuals who respect, trust, and cooperate daily with others to fulfill life-giving roles and institutions. Gun-related trauma threatens these personal, social, and spiritual goods.

When gun-related trauma occurs, people are wounded in body, mind, and spirit by experiences that overwhelm understanding and integration. These experiences have no place in the beliefs and values people use to make sense of their experiences and to pursue lives worthy of their humanity. In a state of trauma, the existential convictions that hold our lives together can be shredded.

Gun violence threatens bodily life. The trauma that can follow threatens meaningful and purposeful agency. It can provoke emotional and spiritual crisis that has no apparent end or that may lie dormant for years. To see trauma in the lives of people affected by gun-related violence is to see suffering and powerlessness.

### ***How do forms of gun-related trauma affect members of our society?***

#### **Anticipatory trauma and defensive responses**

Traumatizing experiences and resulting perceptions of insecurity can inform the way people picture the future and their environments. These neighbors live in some degree of life-altering fear. Senses of threat can put them on guard for imagined likely harm and even justify hypervigilance. Polling research indicates that four in 10 people in the U.S. fear becoming a victim of gun-related violence. Young people are more fearful than adults. Over half of our neighbors expect gun violence to increase in coming years. They are evenly divided over whether gun ownership makes the country safer. Most individuals who buy guns today do so for defensive uses and are increasingly socially diverse.<sup>13</sup>

Defensive gun owners are responding to various perceptions or experiences of unrest and insecurity—lawlessness, social instability, racism, xenophobia, and tyranny. They seek to protect self, family, community, culture, political liberty, and other goods. Many defensive gun owners think that government fails to keep the peace and that civilians must therefore claim their right to use lethal force in defense against death or grave bodily injury.<sup>14</sup> Certain gun rights rulings from U.S. courts and legislative actions have strengthened the sense of need for defensive gun ownership today.

Though a majority of U.S. residents decline gun ownership, many are open to it in the future. Given current trends, every person will likely know at least one victim of gun violence in their social network.<sup>15</sup> Over half of adults say they or family members have personally experienced gun-related threat, injury, or self-defense. Eight in 10 people report feeling safe in their neighborhoods, yet an equal number report that they have taken at least one precaution to protect themselves or family members from gun-related violence.<sup>16</sup>

In circumstances such as these, where people adopt defensive mindsets and practices, they are exhibiting a form of trauma that can be understood as anticipatory. Anticipatory trauma has been documented among violence survivors and people and communities that take steps to avoid becoming victims.<sup>17</sup> It involves taking protective actions grounded in fear of sudden, life-threatening violence, a fear people know in different ways and degrees. Some people buy guns whereas others purchase knives or pepper spray. Parents talk to their children about mass shooters or the police. Kids go to school wearing bulletproof backpacks and practice lockdown drills. Individuals avoid large crowds. Millions today anticipate trauma.<sup>18</sup>

### **Gun suicide and survivor trauma**

We can see trauma not only in gun-related dread but also in personal loss and pain following gun-related self-harm and suicide. Nearly 60% of gun deaths in the U.S. are self-inflicted, ending over 25,000 lives.<sup>19</sup> Firearms do not cause suicidal thoughts. They do, however, provide a highly lethal means of ending a personal crisis characterized by desperate and impulsive thinking. Ninety percent of gun suicide attempts are completed, and these account for half of all suicides. White and Indigenous men account for the vast majority of these deaths.<sup>20</sup> Because these lives end violently and often without warning, they are traumatic for surviving family and friends.<sup>21</sup>

Research shows that ready firearm access is a risk factor for suicide.<sup>22</sup> Firearm suicides can be reduced through safety restraints that put time and distance between the firearm and the person in crisis. Such restraints include safety-seeking laws, educational programs, and voluntary practices. People increasingly recognize firearm suicide as a public health crisis marked by disparities that call for restraint and prevention. Such suicides can be prevented through improved access to mental health care and greater commitment to the social determinants of health.



## **Criminal homicide and community trauma**

Over 20,000 U.S. residents are murdered with firearms every year. Contrary to widespread belief, this violence, however, is concentrated significantly among relatively few people who live in high-crime neighborhoods and communities. Though the U.S. has the highest rates of gun ownership and homicide among developed countries, 99.21% of gun owners do not threaten or harm others or themselves.<sup>23</sup> Gun violence, then, correlates significantly with communities marginalized because of poverty, race, and ethnicity, which are already suffering from high unemployment and public health disparities.<sup>24</sup> The continual threat of and actual deadly gun use both contribute to cycles of trauma and violence common to economically depressed neighborhoods.<sup>25</sup>

When violence keeps neighborhoods from meeting their needs, considerable community trauma follows.<sup>26</sup> If social needs continue to be unmet, trauma can become intergenerational. Persisting violence erodes social capital, impairs social networks, and breeds hopelessness. Community trauma threatens investments in housing, schools, businesses, and recreational spaces. Social solidarity and responsibility may suffer. Some people may become desensitized to violence and embrace attitudes and behaviors that engender more violence.<sup>27</sup>

Policing and incarceration have historically been the primary responses to community violence and trauma. Today, because more people understand the need for prevention, community-based violence intervention programs are making important gains in many affected neighborhoods and show promise for reducing gun homicide.<sup>28</sup> These programs cultivate community leadership and knowledge, focusing on individuals most at risk of perpetrating violence.

Community-based violence intervention programs develop leaders and provide support services, tailored to local needs, that promote healthy alternatives to daily violence and trauma. Respected community members interrupt conflict and retaliation, reducing the wounds and powerlessness of trauma by building relationships between conflicting parties and between people and the support services they need. Community-based violence intervention programs across our nation do effective peacemaking—and create hope.

## **Public mass shootings and the violence-trauma cycle**

Public mass shootings are another source of trauma. These are events in which four or more people are murdered indiscriminately in public.<sup>29</sup> Though these shootings may receive outsize attention in the news and public opinion, they still cause immense loss, suffering, and fear. They violate spaces where community unfolds—workplaces, schools, worship places, shops, plazas, clubs, theaters. They traumatize the local community—and the nation.

Mass public shootings injure, kill, and traumatize hundreds and sometimes thousands of people at a time with distressing frequency. Though the risk of being shot in public remains extremely low, we as a society should recognize the pervasive fear of wanton murder as anticipatory trauma. These shootings merit societal concern for the losses sustained and the shock, sorrow, and dread that follow for so many people. This violence offers a glimpse into the trauma of all victims and an opportunity to grow in empathy and solidarity.

We must also understand neighbors who kill.<sup>30</sup> Mass shooters typically have experienced violence and trauma as children—parental suicide, physical or sexual abuse, domestic violence, bullying. Without proper care such trauma can inspire teenage and adult rage, hate, and despair that can lead to angry, isolated, and retaliatory behavior, both punishing and suicidal. Trauma does not fully explain mass shootings. However, these events exhibit the violence-trauma cycle seen in other communities troubled by suicide and criminal homicide.

The violence-trauma cycle also is at play in domestic shootings (members of a household and/or family) and intimate partner violence (past and current dating partners and past and current spouses). Guns in the home increase the risk of use and extend the power dynamic of abusers to threaten and control. Statistically, this most often involves males over females. Both gun homicides and threats of gun violence create and increase trauma among survivors, families, and communities.

### III. COUNTERING VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA AS GOD'S RESOLVE FOR PEACE

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“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you: Do not resist an evildoer.” —Matthew 5:38-9

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” —Matthew 5:43-4

Gun-related violence and trauma in the U.S. demand courageous and unremitting works of love seeking peace. This seeking must be undertaken collectively and collaboratively to bridge disabling conflicts and to secure peace for all those threatened and harmed by gun violence—victims, perpetrators, and neighbors at risk. The social teaching of our church calls us to this Christlike service.

#### *What is the current social teaching of the ELCA on gun-related violence?*

##### **ELCA teaching on community violence**

The 1994 social message “Community Violence” addresses a society “haunted by violence” amid “disintegrating social structures and values” that affect U.S. residents of “every class, color, and locality,” while noting inequalities that continue today. It commends a proactive ethic of prevention and urges ELCA members “to take up the challenge to prevent violence and to attack the complex causes that make violence so pervasive.”<sup>31</sup>

The message notes that countering the brokenness and disorder that lead to violence and trauma will be an incremental and long-term process. Present threats and harms must be restrained as well—to protect the neighbor. God tasks government to administer justice, maintain order, and establish security.<sup>32</sup> This governance includes coercive and sometimes lethal force through policing and the military. To safeguard the public, government may enact laws that regulate gun access.

This ethic of restraint supplements an ethic of prevention. Together these paired concerns seek a response equal to the complexity of violence, including its traumatizing dimensions.<sup>33</sup>

## **ELCA teaching on peacemaking**

With the 1995 social statement *For Peace in God's World*, ELCA teaching adopted another proactive stance by affirming a common calling to peacemaking. Though the statement aligns with the Lutheran tradition that Christians may serve in the military and conduct just wars, it boldly adds that this church “needs the witness of its members who in the name of Jesus Christ refuse all participation in war, who commit themselves to establish peace and justice on earth by nonviolent power alone.” Accordingly, the social statement embraces the priority of building a just peace to prevent war.<sup>34</sup> Our church also teaches that peacemaking should define domestic and community life as well as the affairs of the state.

The ELCA statement commits our church to undertake Christian peacemaking in a pluralistic and interdependent society where God works among all people, communities, and structures. We are to participate in God's resolve for peace through the roles, associations, and institutions that sustain human life. In all these, all people of goodwill have opportunities and a shared responsibility to build a just peace of unity in diversity.<sup>35</sup>

## ***How does love of neighbor advance peacemaking today?***

### **Living in the neighbor through love**

Christian peacemakers participate in the love of God when they counter brokenness and disorder through works of love. In the foundational essay “The Freedom of a Christian,” Martin Luther pictures this participation as living in Christ through faith and in the neighbor through love. Christians should “do nothing in this life except what is profitable, necessary, and life-giving” for the neighbor. We should “serve and help our neighbor in every possible way.”<sup>36</sup> Christian love builds powerful relations of giving and receiving that counter the isolation, despair, enmity, and nihilism that often contribute to lethal harm and criminal homicide.

### **Shared responsibility beyond liberal individualism**

Christian love of neighbor advances peacemaking because it counters a widespread understanding of gun ownership that minimizes personal responsibility for societal violence and trauma. Many U.S. residents embrace this minimal understanding, often called liberal individualism, that values personal freedom and autonomy over benefiting others.

In this view, individuals may do as they please so long as they do not harm others or put them at serious risk. Gun owners, then, are duty-bound to do no harm to their neighbors—but not morally obligated to benefit them.<sup>37</sup> Owners fulfill their social responsibility so long as they practice safe firearm use and thereby respect their neighbors' rights to life and liberty. In this view, the state is tasked to protect the public from illegal gun use through legally authorized coercive restraint and lethal force. It should not infringe on a person's sphere of liberty and self-determination. It should not limit individual gun ownership beyond prohibiting harm and serious risk to others.<sup>38</sup>

Owners who embrace this liberal individualism do not see themselves as duty-bound to reduce the collective burdens of U.S. gun ownership. However, Christian love of neighbor calls for greater responsibility. Shared responsibility for the good of society means that Christians and all people should vigorously reduce gun-related harm and risk through many callings and wise practices as works of love. Section IV elaborates on how this can be done.

### ***Can a Christian be a defensive gun owner?***

#### **Addressing defensive gun use**

At this writing, the ELCA has not addressed the question of whether Christians may use guns for defensive purposes. Does the Christian call to peacemaking include a voluntary, legally authorized, and regulated role of defending a vulnerable neighbor against attack? What about self-defense in such situations? These are critical and complex questions for U.S. Christians today that call for open and civil conversations across our church. This message provides a framework for personal and communal deliberation and discernment and calls on members, congregations, and synods to engage in them.<sup>39</sup>

#### **Affirming necessary government restraint**

Millions of U.S. residents buy guns today because they lack confidence in policing to keep them safe. In support of this stance, there are troubling law enforcement deficiencies in some states and communities. Warranted or not, this pervasive sense of insecurity is real. The society-wide question is whether mass civilian ownership of defensive guns promotes personal and public safety and should become a permanent feature of our society.

This message holds that gun-related violence and trauma can and should be vastly reduced through multifaceted restraint and prevention. Our church affirms that police may need to use coercive restraint and lethal force to reduce tragic, irresponsible, and illegal gun use. It also affirms police reform attuned to peacemaking philosophy and practice, along with better public health and safety systems.<sup>40</sup> These encourage the best societal response to gun violence and trauma in the U.S. currently.

### **Nonviolence amid human brokenness and disorder**

Christ's disciples should ever witness to the coming reign of God when violence will pass away. This witness occurs in a sinful world where vulnerable neighbors must be protected from harm. For Christians who practice peacemaking, violence must be the last resort in defense of the neighbor. Violence against an aggressor must avoid collateral harm to others and be limited to restoring peace following hostilities. In this way, disciples seek to love the enemy through nonviolent action while accepting coercive and sometimes violent governmental protection as a godly way of containing sin.

## **IV. TOWARD SHARED RESPONSIBILITY IN WHAT MAKES FOR PEACE**

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“Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.”  
—Romans 14:19

In Romans, St. Paul writes with concern to a community divided over dietary practice. Because the work of God in Christ benefits all, St. Paul urges the community to seek peace and flourishing together. This message teaches that Christians in the U.S. today are called to such reconciling and constructive work in a society divided over gun use and what peace and flourishing require of our society.

At the same time, there is a related responsibility for all people of goodwill as a matter of civic duty. Relatively few people in our society perpetrate gun violence or trauma against others or themselves. However, these neighbors cause immense loss and lasting harm to civic life. This message reasons that a societal project of peacemaking requires all civic-minded individuals and groups to contribute through institutions and associations dedicated to human health and fulfillment. Historical experience and growing research warrant that multifaceted efforts toward

personal and communal peace can reduce gun violence. Peacemaking should be a civic role and a shared responsibility of all.

### ***How can members of our society share responsibility for peacemaking?***

#### **Peacemaking for gun owners and shooting associations**

Approximately a third of adults in the U.S. own guns. They have different interests—collecting, hunting, defense, sporting, work—and different outlooks about what ownership means and requires. Most see gun ownership as a normal lifelong activity, and many worry that various social actors seek to take their guns away. They often feel misunderstood and unfairly blamed for violence.<sup>41</sup>

Many gun owners see themselves as safety-minded and more conscientious about training, storage, and use than others might think. They are reluctant to get involved in gun violence prevention apart from taking responsibility for their own conduct, which typically means seeking personal safety legally. The shooting associations generally support this stance. Though owners and associations often contest coercive legal restrictions to reduce gun misuse, most agree that effective voluntary practices exist and may be willing to promote these practices through collective public action.

Gun owners and shooting associations today should undertake greater public responsibility. By owning and using a lethal device in public, U.S. gun owners and their associations constitute a distinct community and should be accountable to the two-thirds of U.S. adults who do not own a gun and deserve to know that owners are trustworthy and safe members of their communities. When someone misuses a gun, it contributes to societal trauma and threatens the personal freedom and public trust enjoyed by gun owners and nonowners alike in a nation with more guns than people.

The ELCA calls upon U.S. gun owners and shooting associations to assume a collective responsibility and an active commitment to be a trustworthy community within a diverse, interdependent, and fragile society. Some owners are not observant of high standards of public safety through proper training, storage, and use. They should become more responsible through education and formation by associations and other owners committed to reducing misuse and harm through rigorous voluntary practice.<sup>42</sup> Thousands of harmful outcomes could be avoided annually if every gun had a safe owner. These standards can be codified

by shooting associations and exercised voluntarily. Collective voluntary response can preclude the need for protective legal restrictions by government in the absence of universal safe practice.

Active leadership by gun owners and shooting associations to cultivate gun safety would be a major step toward a peaceable society. The safety that gun owners typically seek for themselves, loved ones, and friends must be secured for all people. This church commends creation and promotion of obligatory universal safety standards to support a culture of peace. In addition to saving lives, such activism would address misunderstanding and mistrust between gun owners and nonowners.

Beyond universal safe practice, gun owners and shooting associations can be a cultural and political force for reducing gun-related violence and trauma for all. Collectively, such leaders can promote legal restraints to protect victims and stop perpetrators. They can encourage gun violence prevention through public health strategies and practices.

### **Peacemaking for firearm management and firearm defense groups**

U.S. residents are evenly divided over whether permissive and mass gun ownership diminishes or increases public safety.<sup>43</sup> Two opposing advocacy groups reflect and propagate this division. Both groups seek to protect public safety by restraining violence, albeit in different ways and with differing visions of peace and flourishing.

Firearm management groups seek to regulate and restrict access to guns to decrease risks of misuse—accidents, homicides, and suicides. They seek governmental regulation and enforcement to affirm societal norms and to mitigate harmful behavior that perpetuates the cycle of violence and trauma.

Firearm defense groups seek to protect and support firearm ownership for various uses through limited government infringement upon legal rights to life and to bear arms. They hold that risks of ownership can be mitigated by minimal regulation coupled with rigorous law enforcement and responsible voluntary practices.

Firearm management and defense groups command significant memberships, financial support, and political power. Christians in the U.S., including in our church, participate in these groups and know their political gains and setbacks. Despite vigorous efforts, a complex and costly societal stalemate over guns and safety persists with no end in sight.



The ELCA commends the good-faith intentions and efforts of firearm activist groups when they seek to create a political center that enables our society to exercise shared responsibility for cessation of gun-related violence and trauma. Given abiding polarization and disabling partisanship, new activist groups are needed. These groups should focus upon brokering a political center of cooperation in difference. This church urges formation of peacemaking groups that seek to understand the cultural and political divide over guns and to work toward common ground through dialogue.<sup>44</sup>

### **Peacemaking for community development and social ministry organizations**

The communal dimensions of suicide and criminal homicide need greater attention. The concepts of community trauma and intergenerational trauma help to correct individualistic notions of need and response. Research shows that community-based associations and problem-solving improve life in many ways. They build trust and hope through successful cooperation. Various forms of community-based renewal have positive effects upon the incidence of gun violence and trauma in the U.S. One example of such peacemaking is the Healthy People 2030 objectives of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>45</sup>

The social ministry organizations of the ELCA and other faith communities, likewise, play significant roles in the welfare of U.S. society in times of emergency and abiding need. In addition to direct service lines, these organizations seek to support the social sources of health. They seek prevention and early intervention while dismantling many forms of injustice. Our church values highly the work done by social ministry organizations to advance public health for all and thereby foster peace. These organizations have great potential to reduce gun misuse and minister to trauma.

### **Peacemaking for gun violence researchers**

To pursue restraint and prevention, our society needs willpower informed by common and sound understanding. The questions to be answered are difficult and costly to investigate. Actionable knowledge can be elusive despite rigorous inquiry. Disputes over findings can make the search for truth seem impossible and imperil hope of preventing and restraining gun-related violence and trauma. Current impasses over public policy contribute to inadequate research evidence as well as to polarization and distrust of knowledgeable professionals.

Nevertheless, critical advances in peacemaking demand dispassionate and expert research.<sup>46</sup> New studies into gun and violence data, risks and protective factors, and evidence-based strategies need to be undertaken for the sake of positive social change.

### **Peacemaking for firearm businesses**

U.S. firearm businesses—manufacturers, distributors, vendors, and sellers—share interests, convictions, and involvements with gun owners and shooting associations. As a result, firearm businesses are well-positioned to curb misuse within their communities and the nation and thereby lessen harms and senses of insecurity.

Many firearm businesses today are embroiled in long-standing societal conflict about whether and how they should be held accountable for harms caused by those who misuse shooting products that otherwise function safely. These businesses are not subject to typical federal consumer-product safety oversight. Per state and federal statutes, also they enjoy strong immunity from civil lawsuits by parties claiming public nuisance or product harm liability. Governments, nongovernmental groups, and individuals are utilizing legislation and litigation in efforts both to circumvent and to uphold immunity laws amid conflicting visions of greater public safety. These adversarial actors are engaged in debates and actions that are defining the legal and social norms of firearm businesses in the U.S.<sup>47</sup>

The ELCA holds that businesses bear a reasonable responsibility to minimize harm caused by the design, production, marketing, and distribution of their products. Persisting litigation for product harm brought by aggrieved parties, as well as congressional investigation of five companies that produce AR-15–style rifles, raises doubts about commitments to responsibility among some U.S. firearm businesses.<sup>48</sup>

This church calls upon firearm businesses to embrace structures and practices that reduce tragic, irresponsible, or illegal use of their products. Current immunity from litigation and exemption from oversight for product safety undermine their accountability. However, like other U.S. businesses that face public scrutiny over product safety, gun manufacturers, distributors, and sellers may embrace peacemaking if pressed by public opinion, government regulation, or members of the U.S. gun community.

One troubling fact uncovered by congressional investigators is that five manufacturers of AR-15–style rifles fail to monitor shootings involving their guns. These companies participate in tracing conducted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives in criminal investigations but do not utilize this information. Five percent of U.S. residents own an AR-15–style rifle, yet five manufacturers claim no process for understanding how their firearms are used.

Shared responsibility means that these and other gun manufacturers should join public debates about what makes for restraint and prevention. These companies should ask whether their products and practices make the public safer and more secure and what they can do to support safety in design, marketing, and use. Firearm distributors and sellers should ask these questions as well.

The production and sale of AR-15–style rifles raise urgent and divisive questions of public risk and safety. The ELCA calls upon firearm businesses to engage in the national debate about legal access to this modified military weapon. Our church has consistently affirmed comprehensive legal controls of military assault weapons since 1993.<sup>49</sup>

Some 50% of U.S. adults support outlawing all sales of AR-15–style rifles.<sup>50</sup> They are rightly horrified by experiences and understandings of the injury, death, and trauma that AR-15–style rifles can inflict on victims, survivors, families, law enforcement, first responders, and the public. Roughly one third of adults oppose a national ban, including 20 million owners who safely use this firearm for various reasons and purposes.<sup>51</sup>

A critical issue raised by this message is whether the risks and inevitability of horrendous harm from illegal use justifies outlawing sales of and imposing other restrictions on AR-15–style rifles in the interest of protecting the vulnerable neighbor. Our church continues to hold that some restrictions are needed and urges broader national debate toward shared societal resolve to reduce an untenable public threat in the production and sale of AR-15–style rifles.

### **Peacemaking for law enforcement**

Federal, tribal, territorial, state, county, and local law enforcement officers confront gun-related violence and trauma daily. They labor under high demands and risks. These public servants participate in God’s providence because human society needs fair-minded protectors and keepers of order and justice. This church gives thanks for the dedication

and competence of law enforcement officers to restrain interpersonal conflict and thwart criminal behavior.

Good policing is deeply relational and depends upon partnerships between law enforcement officers and the communities they serve. Public safety depends upon trust in law enforcement to respect and protect the rights of all. Most police work diligently to serve their communities and uphold trust. However, this church has recognized that “the reputation of law enforcement has been stained by evidence of racial bias and excessive use of force.”<sup>52</sup>

This message extends previous ELCA calls for structural reform of police departments, for increased training (such as de-escalation practices) and for trust-building through greater public support of and investment in communities. This includes strengthening policies that engender community-oriented policing to increase public support and partnership.

Improvement of public trust in law enforcement will contribute to greater public trust in the other functions of government to protect society from harms and risks. Broad gains are needed to address the senses of insecurity that contribute to anticipatory trauma and defensive responses. Accordingly, the ELCA urges law enforcement officers and their professional associations to join with other social actors addressed in this message to develop public policy toward strengthening public backing of and trust in government to keep the peace. A comprehensive public health response of restraint and prevention needs the wisdom of policing professionals.

### **Peacemaking for health care providers and public health professionals**

Many public health professionals frame gun-related violence and trauma in the U.S. as a public health crisis. They are supported by research that documents demographic and geographic inequalities in how violence and trauma are distributed. Social inequalities lead to health disparities that contribute to violence and that should be subject to systemic remedy, such as addressing upstream sources of violence to lessen downstream harm.

Our society has addressed public health crises and prevailed. Some 60 years ago, U.S. automobile deaths reached levels that prompted comprehensive national response. Fatalities have since dropped dramatically, and health care providers contribute to that result. Newborns do not go home from the hospital without a car seat. Pediatricians often talk to parents about guns in the home.

Imagine, now, routine conversations between all health providers and their patients about gun safety. Patients might report risks to themselves or others. Providers can encourage safety practices and other protective measures—or intervene as needed. This church affirms efforts by health care providers to monitor and respond to risks and harms related to gun violence and trauma.

### **Peacemaking for journalists and news organizations**

Public understanding of gun-related violence and trauma is affected by news sources and firsthand experiences. Mass shootings dominate news coverage by national outlets and often communicate misunderstandings of gun violence in the U.S. News organizations have a major opportunity to inform the public through stories that consider the causes and risks of gun violence, trauma that follows, and measures to prevent future harm. Importantly, sound information can help individuals critically evaluate their own sense of insecurity and see ways to get involved in solutions.

The ELCA calls upon journalists and news organizations to heed campaigns against copycat shootings. Gun violence perpetrators often seek validation and fame through a performance crime. They study news coverage of past shootings and plot a more infamous one. Resistance campaigns have developed journalistic standards for denying perpetrators the scripts they use and the glory they seek. These campaigns challenge journalists and news organizations to be responsible by minimizing attention to killers and focusing instead on the whole story.<sup>53</sup>

### **Peacemaking for thought leaders**

In addition to news organizations, other sources of information commonly accessed online affect public understanding of gun use and misuse. Individuals and groups rely upon these resources to negotiate life in a changing, complex, and often perplexing society. Society members look to trusted analysts to make sense of public affairs and their own life experiences. They look to authentic and unconventional experts to propose solutions to problems. These thought leaders influence the values and behavior of the public.

Influential public voices play an essential role in the search for shared, responsible action. The complexity and costs of gun-related harm and risk today, coupled with a public policy impasse, require changes that society must enact in concert and over time. To enable common action, thought leaders must renounce misleading and inflammatory discourse.

In response to mistrust and polarization, leaders should model humility, empathy, and openness toward learning from others. U.S. peacemaking must bridge wide societal differences, which requires thought leaders who broker civil, informed, and constructive public dialogue.

### **Peacemaking for political actors**

U.S. residents view gun violence and the inability of major political parties to work together to be among the nation's top five problems.<sup>54</sup> They disagree strongly, along party lines, about the effects of gun ownership on public safety. State and federal laws on gun policy are frequently decided by party-line voting. People generally doubt such laws will bring needed change as partisanship disables civic life and the functioning of democracy.

Our church teaches that all people are called to civic engagement. Political engagement means caring for the neighbor in numerous public ways—informed voting, community organizing, attending public meetings, and holding public office, among others. Healthy governmental institutions require vigorous movement toward a political center of cooperation in difference that serves the needs of all.

Gun-related violence and trauma cannot be restrained or prevented without sound and effective governmental action. Sustained reduction will require stronger cooperation by lawmakers and those they represent. Christians practicing civic engagement should seek to discourage polarization and restore public trust in government to protect the neighbor from risk and harm. Such trust can be restored only by change that disrupts public pessimism.

### ***What are the distinctive responsibilities of our church and other faith communities in peacemaking?***

Faith communities cultivate experiences, beliefs, values, and practices to welcome all, connect differences, and engage members with stories of the divine. Faith communities intercede in the brokenness and disorder of life—ministering to pain, speaking truth to power, reconciling conflict, and modeling nonviolence and justice. Given the uncertainty, mistrust, and polarization in U.S. society, what makes for peace must include building shared humanity and community to bridge differences and support purposeful cooperation.

## **Bridging divides**

To achieve shared responsibility, we must bridge cultural divides between people who own guns and those who do not. These divides exist within and across faith communities as well as our nation generally. Faith communities are uniquely prepared to bring together people with different perspectives about guns and safety. Rostered ministers bridge divides when they witness in word and deed to God's reconciling grace in Christ. They lead toward peace by giving voice to community differences. As pastoral caregivers, rostered ministers can talk to parishioners about responsible gun ownership and protecting the neighbor.

## **Cultivating civic empathy**

Mindful of St. Paul's call for mutual upbuilding, faith communities should cultivate civic empathy that enables people to understand and respect the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of those with whom they disagree. This empathy honors the legitimacy of their participation in civic life, acknowledges human fallibility, and promotes political compassion between neighbors. Such generosity of spirit can counter disabling discord so that people can work out their moral and political differences toward community peace in difference, and their needs can be met.

## **Building community**

Reducing gun-related violence and trauma must include building interpersonal and community relations where people feel heard, valued, and connected. Research on suicide and homicide reveals a need for trust, inclusion, agency, and accountability among people at risk of perpetrating violence. The mutual bonds of love and belonging that faith communities cultivate are critical to countering the isolation and alienation that lead to destructive behavior. Love of neighbor always furthers earthly peace.

## **Advocating policy**

This message commends our church and other faith communities to engage in gun-related political advocacy. Our shared responsibility for restraint and prevention expands the scope and scale of such work to address trauma as well as violence.

This message urges congregations and synods within the ELCA to form standing peacemaking groups to learn together and witness publicly. Such ministry will support civic empathy and build community. The mission of these groups will depend upon social location as well as

needs and opportunities at hand. This work may include alliances with ecumenical and interreligious groups. This message outlines various peacemaking callings for these groups and commends existing social teaching documents to advance comprehensive advocacy for peace.

Concerning ELCA advocacy to manage access to guns, our church affirms hunting, sporting, policing, and military uses. Today, handguns are used most often for crime. Since 1993, ELCA policy has called for legislative management of handguns and military assault weapons. This policy has consistently focused on laws aimed at criminal misuse while calling for ongoing assessment of access management. It holds that controls are needed to protect the neighbor and encourage responsible behavior.

### **Healing trauma**

Gun-related trauma occurs in various forms and degrees. Trauma not only harms individuals and communities; it can also contribute to cycles of violence that affect future generations. People in the U.S. are increasingly aware of the complex and lasting aspects of trauma in childhood or in war and the need for restorative care. Greater awareness of gun-related trauma is needed because countless neighbors require care now and in the future. Faith communities have institutional wisdom and members committed to awareness of this often-invisible moral harm. They can affect personal and communal healing.

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## **CONCLUSION: THE SUMMONS TO PEACEMAKING**

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The ELCA believes communities of faith exist because God encounters human beings with divine love as well as divine demands that shape identity and behavior. Consequently, communities of faith should deal with the way things really are and what really matters, grounded in trust of what God will bring about.

As a Christian church, the ELCA teaches that “in publicly gathering to proclaim and celebrate God’s Gospel of peace, the Church uniquely contributes to earthly peace. Its most valuable mission for peace is to keep alive news of God’s resolve for peace, declaring that all are responsible to God for earthly peace and announcing forgiveness, healing, and hope in the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>55</sup>

This message proclaims anew that all people are responsible for peacemaking toward a vast reduction of gun-related violence and trauma



in the U.S. All members of our society are responsible for doing what makes for peace. Christians should make peace by living always in Christ and in the neighbor—sustained in forgiveness, healing, and hope by the promise of God’s resolve for peace.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>24</sup> Apart from mass shootings, intimate partner violence, and suicides, criminal gun violence disproportionately harms people living in Black and Hispanic communities, where rates of injury and death greatly exceed national rates. Black youth and young men represent 2% of U.S. residents but sustain nearly 40% of gun homicide deaths. See “U.S. Gun Violence in 2021: An Accounting of a Public Health Crisis,” Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, June 2023, 15, [publichealth.jhu.edu/sites/default/files/2023-06/2023-june-cgvs-u-s-gun-violence-in-2021.pdf](https://publichealth.jhu.edu/sites/default/files/2023-06/2023-june-cgvs-u-s-gun-violence-in-2021.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> For a comprehensive discussion, see Shani A. L. Buggs, Nicole D. Kravitz-Wirtz, and Julia J. Lund, “Social and Structural Determinants of Community Firearm Violence and Community Trauma,” *ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 704 (November 2022): 224-241, [journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00027162231173324](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00027162231173324). On the community violence and trauma cycle, with a focus on childhood learning and development, see “The Relationship Between Community Violence and Trauma: How Violence Affects Learning, Health, and Behavior,” Violence Policy Center, July 2017, [vpc.org/studies/trauma17.pdf](https://vpc.org/studies/trauma17.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Normalized violence and trauma have been shown to be harmful to the emotional, cognitive, and spiritual development and health of children, youth, and adults. Black and Hispanic youth in one study report feelings of being abandoned by adults—parents, teachers, police—as they navigate high exposure to violence, crime, and drug use. They share a pervasive social mistrust and lack of attachment to their elders. Exposure to and

fear of gun violence cause these young people to give up resilience and hope. To cope with trauma and to support their families, they report becoming indifferent to violence and resigned to delinquent behavior. Seeing no resources to overcome the destruction posed by guns, crime, and drugs, these youth feel they must leave their community to succeed. See Ijeoma Opara, David T. Lardier Jr., Isha Metzger, and others, “‘Bullets Have No Names’: A Qualitative Exploration of Community Trauma Among Black and Latinx Youth,” *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 29 (August 2020): 2117-2129, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8409467/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8409467/).

<sup>28</sup> Buggs and others, “Social and Structural Determinants of Community Firearm Violence and Community Trauma,” 233-4 (see note 26 for link); “Community-based Violence Interruption Programs Can Reduce Gun Violence,” Center for American Progress, July 14, 2022, [www.americanprogress.org/article/community-based-violence-interruption-programs-can-reduce-gun-violence/#:~:text=CVI%20programs%20reduce%20gun%20violence&text=An%20alternative%20to%20reliance%20on,are%20used%20across%20the%20country](http://www.americanprogress.org/article/community-based-violence-interruption-programs-can-reduce-gun-violence/#:~:text=CVI%20programs%20reduce%20gun%20violence&text=An%20alternative%20to%20reliance%20on,are%20used%20across%20the%20country); Jason Corburn, DeVone Boggan, Brian Muhammad, and others, “Advancing Urban Peace: Preventing Gun Violence and Healing Traumatized Youth,” *Youth Justice* 22, no. 3 (2022): 272-289, [journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/14732254211020138](http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/14732254211020138).

<sup>29</sup> Jillian Peterson and James Densley, *The Violence Project: How to Stop a Mass Shooting Epidemic* (New York: Abrams Press, 2021), 4-5.

<sup>30</sup> Peterson and Densley argue that mass shooters typically share four characteristics: (1) childhood trauma, (2) an identifiable crisis point, (3) a script to follow and someone to blame, and (4) opportunity. Research shows the rate of childhood trauma among U.S. mass shooters to be three times higher than in the general population.

<sup>31</sup> ELCA social message “Community Violence” (1994), 1-2, 4.

<sup>32</sup> ELCA social statement *The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries* (2013), 9, 21-2.

<sup>33</sup> “Community Violence,” 6.

<sup>34</sup> ELCA social statement *For Peace in God’s World* (1995), 11-12. The text declares, “First and foremost, love of neighbor obligates us to act to prevent wars and to seek alternatives to them. ... For this reason, this statement focuses on building a just peace and identifies tasks that create conditions for peace.” This focus coheres with “just war” principles, where war is always a mournful act of last resort. However, this moral priority of preventing war bears the influence of pacifism within the wider church.

<sup>35</sup> *For Peace in God’s World*, 7-8.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, trans. Mark D. Tranvik (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 82.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Callahan, “Minimalist Ethics,” *Hastings Center Report* 11, no. 5 (October 1981): 19-25.

<sup>38</sup> This liberal individualism finds expression in the 2008 U.S. Supreme Court decision *District of Columbia v. Heller*, which granted Second Amendment rights to bear arms to private individuals. However, according to *Heller*, this entitlement is not absolute. Government can infringe upon individual liberty through laws that protect the public health and the safety of residents. Personal freedom cannot transgress harm to others. See Michael R. Ulrich, “A Public Health Approach to Gun Violence, Legally Speaking,”

*Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* 47, S2 (2019): 114, [journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1073110519857332](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1073110519857332).

<sup>39</sup> This church needs to be in discernment about whether and under what conditions defensive use may be affirmed. Christians have and should struggle with the question of using lethal force, because Jesus called his disciples to follow him in nonviolent love of friends and enemies alike, even unto torture and death. Though the apostolic church rejected war and embraced martyrdom, Roman soldier converts, as well as Christian protection from and eventual rule over the Roman Empire, brought divisions within the church over nonviolence that endure to this day.

<sup>40</sup> *The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries* (2013).

<sup>41</sup> Michael B. Siegel and Claire C. Boine, “The Meaning of Guns to Gun Owners in the U.S.: The 2019 National Lawful Use of Guns Survey,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 59, no. 5 (2020): 678-685, [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749379720302397](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749379720302397).

<sup>42</sup> For gun owner views and safety practices, see “America’s Complex Relationship With Guns,” Pew Research Center, June 2017 (see note 8 for link); Michael D. Anestis, Jane Moerl-Brooks, Rachel L. Johnson, and others, “Assessment of Firearm Storage Practices in the US,” 2022, *JAMA Network Open*, [jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2801915](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2801915); Michael D. Anestis, Allison E. Bond, Jayna Mocerri-Brooks, and others (2023), “Perceptions of the Utility of Secure Firearm Storage Methods as a Suicide Prevention Tool Among Firearm Owners Who Currently Store Their Firearms Loaded and Unlocked,” *Suicide and Life-threatening Behavior*, 00 (2023): 1-7, [doi.org/10.1111/sltb.13023](https://doi.org/10.1111/sltb.13023).

<sup>43</sup> “Gun Violence Widely Viewed as a Major—and Growing—National Problem,” Pew Research Center, June 28, 2023.

<sup>44</sup> On the prospects for common ground on gun control, see Patrick Sharkey and Megan Kang, “The Era of Progress on Gun Mortality: State Gun Regulations and Gun Death from 1991 to 2016,” *Epidemiology* 34, no. 6 (2023): 786-792, and Kathleen Grene, Armani Dharani, and Michael Siegel, “Gun Owners’ Assessment of Gun Safety Policy: Their Underlying Principles and Detailed Opinions,” *Injury Epidemiology* 10:21 (2023), [doi.org/10.1186/s40621-023-00430-z](https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-023-00430-z).

<sup>45</sup> For the Healthy People 2030 program, see [health.gov/healthypeople](https://health.gov/healthypeople), which includes these goals for gun-related violence: [health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/violence-prevention/reduce-firearm-related-deaths-ivp-13](https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/violence-prevention/reduce-firearm-related-deaths-ivp-13).

<sup>46</sup> Gun-culture and gun-violence research is growing after 20 years of government-related decline, and stable resources are returning to encourage scholars to dedicate their careers to this field, such as the recently formed Research Society for the Prevention of Firearm-Related Harms. Meanwhile, respected institutes such as the Pew Research Center and programs such as RAND Corporation’s Gun Policy in America provide nonpartisan information that serves peacemaking today.

<sup>47</sup> Adam Gabbatt, “Wave of Lawsuits Against US Gun Makers Raises Hope of End of Mass Shootings,” *Guardian*, May 27, 2023, [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/may/27/gun-lawsuits-manufacturer-sellers-crimes](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/may/27/gun-lawsuits-manufacturer-sellers-crimes); Timothy D. Lytton, “An End Run Around the Gun Industry Liability Shield,” *Regulatory Review*, July 26, 2021, [www.theregview.org/2021/07/26/lytton-end-run-around-gun-industry-liability-shield/](https://www.theregview.org/2021/07/26/lytton-end-run-around-gun-industry-liability-shield/).

<sup>48</sup> House Committee on Oversight and Reform, July 27, 2022, “Memorandum to Members on Investigation in Gun Industry Practices and Profits,” prepared by Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, [docs.house.gov/meetings/GO/GO00/20220727/115024/HHRG-117-GO00-20220727-SD005.pdf](https://docs.house.gov/meetings/GO/GO00/20220727/115024/HHRG-117-GO00-20220727-SD005.pdf).

<sup>49</sup> “Community Violence—Gun Control,” Social Policy Resolution, CA93.06.10, [www.elca.org/Resources/Faith-and-Society#Socialresolutions](http://www.elca.org/Resources/Faith-and-Society#Socialresolutions).

<sup>50</sup> “Views on Semiautomatic Weapons Remain Partisan,” AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, May 2022, [apnorc.org/projects/views-on-assault-weapons-remain-partisan/#:~:text=Fifty%2Done%20percent%20of%20Americans,additional%2018%25%20hold%20neither%20opinion](https://apnorc.org/projects/views-on-assault-weapons-remain-partisan/#:~:text=Fifty%2Done%20percent%20of%20Americans,additional%2018%25%20hold%20neither%20opinion).

<sup>51</sup> Emily Guskin, Aadit Tambe, and Jon Gerberg, “Why Do Americans Own AR-15s?,” *Washington Post*, March 27, 2023, [www.washingtonpost.com/nation/interactive/2023/american-ar-15-gun-owners/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/interactive/2023/american-ar-15-gun-owners/).

<sup>52</sup> *The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries*, 9.

<sup>53</sup> Footnote for the Violence Project.

<sup>54</sup> “Inflation, Health Costs, Partisan Cooperation Among the Nation’s Top Problems,” Pew Research Center, June 21, 2023, [www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/06/21/inflation-health-costs-partisan-cooperation-among-the-nations-top-problems/](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/06/21/inflation-health-costs-partisan-cooperation-among-the-nations-top-problems/).

<sup>55</sup> *For Peace in God’s World*, 3.

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