

1 A social message on ...

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3

Gun-related Violence and Trauma

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

7

8

This Message in Summary

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

14

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

19

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

27

28 *Section I shows how this message builds upon the scriptural references, insights, themes, and*
29 *commitments found in the ELCA social statement For Peace in God’s World and the ELCA social message*
30 *“On Community Violence” and draws from others such as the social statement The Church and Criminal*
31 *Justice. (Readers may review these at www.elca.org/socialstatements.) From a Lutheran Christian*
32 *perspective, it returns to themes such as peacemaking and prevention that, too often, have been*
33 *sidelined. It soberly charts the horrific facts and the disparities of age, class, gender, and race of the*
34 *nearly 50,000 lives taken each year. It introduces, as well, two factors increasingly recognized by social*
35 *science: the widespread effects of trauma and the rise of defensive gun cultures.*

36

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

41

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

47 *fully addressed in this message, and some of them call for further discernment, such as defensive gun use*
48 *for example.*

49
50 *Section IV calls upon multiple types of secular communities to prevent violence and make peace. It spells*
51 *out the responsibilities of communities as diverse as shooting associations and firearm defense groups,*
52 *health care providers and firearm businesses. The section also describes the distinctive responsibilities of*
53 *our church and other faith communities toward peacemaking. These include calls to bridge divides, build*
54 *community, advocate policy, and care for the traumatized.*

55
56 *This message concludes that such a reframed understanding and practice in responsible communities can*
57 *resist and reverse the immense and mournful toll of tragic, irresponsible, and illegal gun use in the United*
58 *States today.*

59
60

61 ***A social message on Gun-related Violence and Trauma***

62 I. God's Resolve for Peace Abides

63

64 "They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, 'Peace, peace,'
65 when there is no peace." —Jeremiah 6:14

66

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

68

69 "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from
70 you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you."

71

—Isaiah 54:10

72

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

78

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

87

88 For Christians, human yearnings to live in peace are continually thwarted by relations and activities of
89 sinful brokenness and disorder that beset all people, communities, and institutions. Individually and
90 collectively, humans sin when they fail to love and trust God above all else or when they turn inward at
91 the expense of others. They possess the gifts of God but withhold them from their neighbors. Gun-
92 related violence and trauma are among the ways humans fail to serve God's covenant of peace and to

93 live in good and right relations. Despite our sinful identities and ways, we trust that God’s resolve for
94 peace abides.

95
96 For three decades, the ELCA has addressed the manifestations of gun-related violence and trauma in the
97 U.S. through social messages, resolutions, statements, study materials, and pastoral letters. To hold
98 government accountable for civic well-being, ELCA leaders and members have advocated for state and
99 federal regulations to prevent firearm misuse.⁴ In these and other ways, our church has sought through
100 teaching and witness to reduce self-harm and criminal violence involving guns. Yet there is no peace.

101
102 Nevertheless, we hold that God continues to call all people to strive anew toward solutions. Christians
103 and all people of goodwill should, above all, do no harm and avoid risk of harm while striving in
104 numerous ways for peace—in our homes, our communities, and our souls. Through this message, this
105 church affirms that current societal trends and new understandings of gun-related risks and harms call us
106 to witness anew and with urgency to our shared responsibility for peacemaking. We can collaborate to
107 reduce harm and seek peace, even as we disagree about how to address some complex and changing
108 realities.

109
110 *What societal trends and new understandings call the ELCA to witness anew?*

111
112 **Growing and disparate violence amid pervasive insecurity**

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

118
119 Though U.S. shootings occur disproportionately across populations and places, members of our society
120 share a pervasive sense of insecurity.⁶ This insecurity takes different forms and degrees, with various
121 sources and histories. We live in an information-saturated society that delivers instantaneous news of
122 gun deaths and the troubles they tell. Narratives of social unrest, constant change, and uncontrolled
123 threat naturally provoke fear. This insecurity can be confirmed when elected officials respond to yet
124 more carnage with partisan rhetoric and simplistic solutions.

125
126 **Seeing trauma and seeking protection**

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

131
132 Second, while gun-related trauma and insecurity take different forms, one significant public response to
133 perceived threat and vulnerability can be seen in the growing trend of defensive gun ownership among
134 people who buy firearms. Security concerns are prompting millions of previously unarmed people each
135 year to become owners. These purchases add to the some 40% of U.S. households where an estimated
136 75 million or more owners keep over 400 million firearms.⁸

137

138 II. Seeing Trauma in Insecurity, Despair, and Mayhem

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140

“Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping.

141

Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children,

142

because they are no more.” —Jeremiah 31:15

143

144

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

145

146 *Why is seeing trauma morally significant?*

147

148 Peacemaking begins with understanding what is going on and what our neighbors need to flourish.

149 Trauma research offers insight into the often-unmet needs of people and communities that experience

150 gun violence. This research exposes the full reach and impact of tragic, irresponsible, and illegal gun use.

151 It reveals that far more people than officially reported are harmed or at risk of harm. By seeing the

152 trauma of gun-related violence, we become mindful of less visible assaults and burdens that our

153 neighbors bear, which call for moral concern and response.

154

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

156 It affects some people and communities much more profoundly than others due to disparities in health

157 conditions and protective resources.⁹ Seeing trauma can help us to advance our understanding of the

158 threats, impacts, and legacies of criminal violence and self-harm. We can better name wounds that call

159 for care and better formulate wise public policy that seeks prevention as well as restraint.

160

161 *What is gun-related trauma?*¹⁰

162

163 Gun-related trauma includes individual and collective responses to harmful events and threatening

164 conditions. It stems from exposure to events or conditions that are emotionally disturbing or life-

165 threatening, with lasting adverse effects on health. People can be traumatized at any age, but childhood

166 trauma, especially when untreated or unrecognized, can have lifelong debilitating effects.

167

168 Trauma is a subjective and socially conditioned experience. Two or more people can experience the

169 same event or condition but may not be traumatized in the same way. Trauma varies according to one’s

170 proximity to the event or condition, the existing resources and strengths of those affected, and the

171 severity and persistence of the assault. It varies according to the amount of support needed and

172 available to affected people.

173

174 **Forms and relations of trauma**

175 Gun-related trauma can follow an acute incident such as armed robbery. It can result from adverse

176 childhood experiences of routine exposure to gun violence. Traumatic events can be communal as well

177 as individual and can have a compounding effect when they happen to people who cope with preexisting

178 trauma that stems from biases such as homophobia, transphobia, racism, and sexism.

179

180 Some people and groups can experience trauma as firsthand participants whereas others may be

181 traumatized as secondhand participants responding to wounded people.¹¹ Scholars note how trauma

182 extends in different ways through time. A traumatic event may end, but effects can linger.¹² Persisting

183 trauma can be transmitted across generations through families and communities. Whole societies can be

184 traumatized by eruptions of violence such as a terrorist attack that triggers insecurity and disorientation.

185 **Powerlessness and trauma**

186 Human health and well-being depend upon our individual ability to cope with challenging life events.
187 People must summon courage and resilience to function as agents in relation to others. Similarly,
188 humane societies require individuals who respect, trust, and cooperate daily with others to fulfill life-
189 giving roles and institutions. Gun-related trauma threatens these personal, social, and spiritual goods.

190
191 When gun-related trauma occurs, people are wounded in body, mind, and spirit by experiences that
192 overwhelm understanding and integration. These experiences have no place in the beliefs and values
193 people use to make sense of their experiences and to pursue lives worthy of their humanity. In a state of
194 trauma, the existential convictions that hold our lives together can be shredded.

195
196 Gun violence threatens bodily life. The trauma that can follow threatens meaningful and purposeful
197 agency. It can provoke emotional and spiritual crisis that has no apparent end or that may lie dormant
198 for years. To see trauma in the lives of people affected by gun-related violence is to see suffering and
199 powerlessness.

200
201 *How do forms of gun-related trauma affect members of our society?*

202
203 **Anticipatory trauma and defensive responses**

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

211
212 Defensive gun owners are responding to various perceptions or experiences of unrest and insecurity—
213 lawlessness, social instability, racism, xenophobia, and tyranny. They seek to protect self, family,
214 community, culture, political liberty, and other goods. Many defensive gun owners think that
215 government fails to keep the peace and that civilians must therefore claim their right to use lethal force
216 in defense against death or grave bodily injury.¹⁴ Certain gun rights rulings from U.S. courts and
217 legislative actions have strengthened the sense of need for defensive gun ownership today.

218
219 Though a majority of U.S. residents decline gun ownership, many are open to it in the future. Given
220 current trends, every person will likely know at least one victim of gun violence in their social network.¹⁵
221 Over half of adults say they or family members have personally experienced gun-related threat, injury, or
222 self-defense. Eight in 10 people report feeling safe in their neighborhoods, yet an equal number report
223 that they have taken at least one precaution to protect themselves or family members from gun-related
224 violence.¹⁶

225
226 In circumstances such as these, where people adopt defensive mindsets and practices, they are
227 exhibiting a form of trauma that can be understood as anticipatory. Anticipatory trauma has been
228 documented among violence survivors and people and communities that take steps to avoid becoming
229 victims.¹⁷ It involves taking protective actions grounded in fear of sudden, life-threatening violence, a
230 fear people know in different ways and degrees. Some people buy guns whereas others purchase knives
231 or pepper spray. Parents talk to their children about mass shooters or the police. Kids go to school

232 wearing bulletproof backpacks and practice lockdown drills. Individuals avoid large crowds. Millions
233 today anticipate trauma.¹⁸

234

235 **Gun suicide and survivor trauma**

236 We can see trauma not only in gun-related dread but also in personal loss and pain following gun-related
237 self-harm and suicide. Nearly 60% of gun deaths in the U.S. are self-inflicted, ending over 25,000 lives.¹⁹

238 Firearms do not cause suicidal thoughts. They do, however, provide a highly lethal means of ending a
239 personal crisis characterized by desperate and impulsive thinking. Ninety percent of gun suicide attempts
240 are completed, and these account for half of all suicides. White and Indigenous men account for the vast
241 majority of these deaths²⁰ Because these lives end violently and often without warning, they are
242 traumatic for surviving family and friends.²¹

243

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

250

251 **Criminal homicide and community trauma**

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

260

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

267

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

273

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

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

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

286
287 Mass public shootings injure, kill, and traumatize hundreds and sometimes thousands of people at a
288 time with distressing frequency. Though the risk of being shot in public remains extremely low, we as a
289 society should recognize the pervasive fear of wanton murder as anticipatory trauma. These shootings
290 merit societal concern for the losses sustained and the shock, sorrow, and dread that follow for so many
291 people. This violence offers a glimpse into the trauma of all victims and an opportunity to grow in
292 empathy and solidarity.

293
294 We must also understand neighbors who kill.³⁰ Mass shooters typically have experienced violence and
295 trauma as children—parental suicide, physical or sexual abuse, domestic violence, bullying. Without
296 proper care such trauma can inspire teenage and adult rage, hate, and despair that can lead to angry,
297 isolated, and retaliatory behavior, both punishing and suicidal. Trauma does not fully explain mass
298 shootings. However, these events exhibit the violence-trauma cycle seen in other communities troubled
299 by suicide and criminal homicide.

300
301 The violence-trauma cycle also is at play in domestic shootings (members of a household and/or family)
302 and intimate partner violence (past and current dating partners and past and current spouses). Guns in
303 the home increase the risk of use and extend the power dynamic of abusers to threaten and control.
304 Statistically, this most often involves males over females. Both gun homicides and threats of gun violence
305 create and increase trauma among survivors, families, and communities.

306

307 **III. Countering Violence and Trauma as God’s Resolve for Peace**

308

309 “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
310 resist an evildoer.” —Matthew 5:38-9

311

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

314

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

319

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

321

322 **ELCA teaching on community violence**

323 The 1994 social message “Community Violence” addresses a society “haunted by violence” amid
324 “disintegrating social structures and values” that affect U.S. residents of “every class, color, and locality,”
325 while noting inequalities that continue today. It commends a proactive ethic of prevention and urges

326 ELCA members “to take up the challenge to prevent violence and to attack the complex causes that make
327 violence so pervasive.”³¹

328
329 The message notes that countering the brokenness and disorder that lead to violence and trauma will be
330 an incremental and long-term process. Present threats and harms must be restrained as well—to protect
331 the neighbor. God tasks government to administer justice, maintain order, and establish security.³² This
332 governance includes coercive and sometimes lethal force through policing and the military. To safeguard
333 the public, government may enact laws that regulate gun access.

334
335 This ethic of restraint supplements an ethic of prevention. Together these paired concerns seek a
336 response equal to the complexity of violence, including its traumatizing dimensions.³³

337
338 **ELCA teaching on peacemaking**
339 With the 1995 social statement *For Peace in God’s World*, ELCA teaching adopted another proactive
340 stance by affirming a common calling to peacemaking. Though the statement aligns with the Lutheran
341 tradition that Christians may serve in the military and conduct just wars, it boldly adds that this church
342 “needs the witness of its members who in the name of Jesus Christ refuse all participation in war, who
343 commit themselves to establish peace and justice on earth by nonviolent power alone.” Accordingly, the
344 social statement embraces the priority of building a just peace to prevent war.³⁴ Our church also teaches
345 that peacemaking should define domestic and community life as well as the affairs of the state.

346
347 The ELCA statement commits our church to undertake Christian peacemaking in a pluralistic and
348 interdependent society where God works among all people, communities, and structures. We are to
349 participate in God’s resolve for peace through the roles, associations, and institutions that sustain human
350 life. In all these, all people of goodwill have opportunities and a shared responsibility to build a just
351 peace of unity in diversity.³⁵

352
353 *How does love of neighbor advance peacemaking today?*

354
355 **Living in the neighbor through love**
356 Christian peacemakers participate in the love of God when they counter brokenness and disorder
357 through works of love. In the foundational essay “The Freedom of a Christian,” Martin Luther pictures
358 this participation as living in Christ through faith and in the neighbor through love. Christians should “do
359 nothing in this life except what is profitable, necessary, and life-giving” for the neighbor. We should
360 “serve and help our neighbor in every possible way.”³⁶ Christian love builds powerful relations of giving
361 and receiving that counter the isolation, despair, enmity, and nihilism that often contribute to lethal
362 harm and criminal homicide.

363
364 **Shared responsibility beyond liberal individualism**
365 Christian love of neighbor advances peacemaking because it counters a widespread understanding of
366 gun ownership that minimizes personal responsibility for societal violence and trauma. Many U.S.
367 residents embrace this minimal understanding, often called liberal individualism, that values personal
368 freedom and autonomy over benefiting others.

369
370 In this view, individuals may do as they please so long as they do not harm others or put them at serious
371 risk. Gun owners, then, are duty-bound to do no harm to their neighbors—but not morally obligated to
372 benefit them.³⁷ Owners fulfill their social responsibility so long as they practice safe firearm use and
373 thereby respect their neighbors’ rights to life and liberty. In this view, the state is tasked to protect the

374 public from illegal gun use through legally authorized coercive restraint and lethal force. It should not
375 infringe on a person's sphere of liberty and self-determination. It should not limit individual gun
376 ownership beyond prohibiting harm and serious risk to others.³⁸

377
378 Owners who embrace this liberal individualism do not see themselves as duty-bound to reduce the
379 collective burdens of U.S. gun ownership. However, Christian love of neighbor calls for greater
380 responsibility. Shared responsibility for the good of society means that Christians and all people should
381 vigorously reduce gun-related harm and risk through many callings and wise practices as works of love.
382 Section IV elaborates on how this can be done.

383
384 *Can a Christian be a defensive gun owner?*

385 386 **Addressing defensive gun use**

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

393 394 **Affirming necessary government restraint**

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

400
401 This message holds that gun-related violence and trauma can and should be vastly reduced through
402 multifaceted restraint and prevention. Our church affirms that police may need to use coercive restraint
403 and lethal force to reduce tragic, irresponsible, and illegal gun use. It also affirms police reform attuned
404 to peacemaking philosophy and practice, along with better public health and safety systems.⁴⁰ These
405 encourage the best societal response to gun violence and trauma in the U.S. currently.

406 407 **Nonviolence amid human brokenness and disorder**

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

414

415 IV. Toward Shared Responsibility in What Makes for Peace

416

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

418

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

423

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

431

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

433

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

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

439

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

446

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

453

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

461 response can preclude the need for protective legal restrictions by government in the absence of
462 universal safe practice.

463
464 Active leadership by gun owners and shooting associations to cultivate gun safety would be a major step
465 toward a peaceable society. The safety that gun owners typically seek for themselves, loved ones, and
466 friends must be secured for all people. This church commends creation and promotion of obligatory
467 universal safety standards to support a culture of peace. In addition to saving lives, such activism would
468 address misunderstanding and mistrust between gun owners and nonowners.

469
470 Beyond universal safe practice, gun owners and shooting associations can be a cultural and political force
471 for reducing gun-related violence and trauma for all. Collectively, such leaders can promote legal
472 restraints to protect victims and stop perpetrators. They can encourage gun violence prevention through
473 public health strategies and practices.

474
475 **Peacemaking for firearm management and firearm defense groups**
476 U.S. residents are evenly divided over whether permissive and mass gun ownership diminishes or
477 increases public safety.⁴³ Two opposing advocacy groups reflect and propagate this division. Both groups
478 seek to protect public safety by restraining violence, albeit in different ways and with differing visions of
479 peace and flourishing.

480
481 Firearm management groups seek to regulate and restrict access to guns to decrease risks of misuse—
482 accidents, homicides, and suicides. They seek governmental regulation and enforcement to affirm
483 societal norms and to mitigate harmful behavior that perpetuates the cycle of violence and trauma.

484
485 Firearm defense groups seek to protect and support firearm ownership for various uses through limited
486 government infringement upon legal rights to life and to bear arms. They hold that risks of ownership
487 can be mitigated by minimal regulation coupled with rigorous law enforcement and responsible
488 voluntary practices.

489
490 Firearm management and defense groups command significant memberships, financial support, and
491 political power. Christians in the U.S., including in our church, participate in these groups and know their
492 political gains and setbacks. Despite vigorous efforts, a complex and costly societal stalemate over guns
493 and safety persists with no end in sight.

494
495 The ELCA commends the good-faith intentions and efforts of firearm activist groups when they seek to
496 create a political center that enables our society to exercise shared responsibility for cessation of gun-
497 related violence and trauma. Given abiding polarization and disabling partisanship, new activist groups
498 are needed. These groups should focus upon brokering a political center of cooperation in difference.
499 This church urges formation of peacemaking groups that seek to understand the cultural and political
500 divide over guns and to work toward common ground through dialogue.⁴⁴

501
502 **Peacemaking for community development and social ministry organizations**
503 The communal dimensions of suicide and criminal homicide need greater attention. The concepts of
504 community trauma and intergenerational trauma help to correct individualistic notions of need and
505 response. Research shows that community-based associations and problem-solving improve life in many
506 ways. They build trust and hope through successful cooperation. Various forms of community-based
507 renewal have positive effects upon the incidence of gun violence and trauma in the U.S. One example of

508 such peacemaking is the Healthy People 2030 objectives of the U.S. Department of Health and Human
509 Services.⁴⁵

510
511 The social ministry organizations of the ELCA and other faith communities, likewise, play significant roles
512 in the welfare of U.S. society in times of emergency and abiding need. In addition to direct service lines,
513 these organizations seek to support the social sources of health. They seek prevention and early
514 intervention while dismantling many forms of injustice. Our church values highly the work done by social
515 ministry organizations to advance public health for all and thereby foster peace. These organizations
516 have great potential to reduce gun misuse and minister to trauma.

517
518 **Peacemaking for gun violence researchers**

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

525
526 Nevertheless, critical advances in peacemaking demand dispassionate and expert research.⁴⁶ New
527 studies into gun and violence data, risks and protective factors, and evidence-based strategies need to
528 be undertaken for the sake of positive social change.

529
530 **Peacemaking for firearm businesses**

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

535
536 Many firearm businesses today are embroiled in long-standing societal conflict about whether and how
537 they should be held accountable for harms caused by those who misuse shooting products that
538 otherwise function safely. These businesses are not subject to typical federal consumer-product safety
539 oversight. Per state and federal statutes, also they enjoy strong immunity from civil lawsuits by parties
540 claiming public nuisance or product harm liability. Governments, nongovernmental groups, and
541 individuals are utilizing legislation and litigation in efforts both to circumvent and to uphold immunity
542 laws amid conflicting visions of greater public safety. These adversarial actors are engaged in debates
543 and actions that are defining the legal and social norms of firearm businesses in the U.S.⁴⁷

544
545 The ELCA holds that businesses bear a reasonable responsibility to minimize harm caused by the design,
546 production, marketing, and distribution of their products. Persisting litigation for product harm brought
547 by aggrieved parties, as well as congressional investigation of five companies that produce AR-15–style
548 rifles, raises doubts about commitments to responsibility among some U.S. firearm businesses.⁴⁸

549
550 This church calls upon firearm businesses to embrace structures and practices that reduce tragic,
551 irresponsible, or illegal use of their products. Current immunity from litigation and exemption from
552 oversight for product safety undermine their accountability. However, like other U.S. businesses that face
553 public scrutiny over product safety, gun manufacturers, distributors, and sellers may embrace
554 peacemaking if pressed by public opinion, government regulation, or members of the U.S. gun
555 community.

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

561
562 Shared responsibility means that these and other gun manufacturers should join public debates about
563 what makes for restraint and prevention. These companies should ask whether their products and
564 practices make the public safer and more secure and what they can do to support safety in design,
565 marketing, and use. Firearm distributors and sellers should ask these questions as well.

566
567 The production and sale of AR-15–style rifles raise urgent and divisive questions of public risk and safety.
568 The ELCA calls upon firearm businesses to engage in the national debate about legal access to this
569 modified military weapon. Our church has consistently affirmed comprehensive legal controls of military
570 assault weapons since 1993.⁴⁹

571
572 Some 50% of U.S. adults support outlawing all sales of AR-15–style rifles.⁵⁰ They are rightly horrified by
573 experiences and understandings of the injury, death, and trauma that AR-15–style rifles can inflict on
574 victims, survivors, families, law enforcement, first responders, and the public. Roughly one third of
575 adults oppose a national ban, including 20 million owners who safely use this firearm for various reasons
576 and purposes.⁵¹

577
578 A critical issue raised by this message is whether the risks and inevitability of horrendous harm from
579 illegal use justifies outlawing sales of and imposing other restrictions on AR-15–style rifles in the interest
580 of protecting the vulnerable neighbor. Our church continues to hold that some restrictions are needed
581 and urges broader national debate toward shared societal resolve to reduce an untenable public threat
582 in the production and sale of AR-15–style rifles.

583
584 **Peacemaking for law enforcement**

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

590
591 Good policing is deeply relational and depends upon partnerships between law enforcement officers and
592 the communities they serve. Public safety depends upon trust in law enforcement to respect and protect
593 the rights of all. Most police work diligently to serve their communities and uphold trust. However, this
594 church has recognized that “the reputation of law enforcement has been stained by evidence of racial
595 bias and excessive use of force.”⁵²

596
597 This message extends previous ELCA calls for structural reform of police departments, for increased
598 training (such as de-escalation practices) and for trust-building through greater public support of and
599 investment in communities. This includes strengthening policies that engender community-oriented
600 policing to increase public support and partnership.

601
602 Improvement of public trust in law enforcement will contribute to greater public trust in the other
603 functions of government to protect society from harms and risks. Broad gains are needed to address the

604 senses of insecurity that contribute to anticipatory trauma and defensive responses. Accordingly, the
605 ELCA urges law enforcement officers and their professional associations to join with other social actors
606 addressed in this message to develop public policy toward strengthening public backing of and trust in
607 government to keep the peace. A comprehensive public health response of restraint and prevention
608 needs the wisdom of policing professionals.

609

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

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

616

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

621

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

626

627 **Peacemaking for journalists and news organizations**

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

634

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

641

642 **Peacemaking for thought leaders**

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

648

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

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

656
657 **Peacemaking for political actors**

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

663
664 Our church teaches that all people are called to civic engagement. Political engagement means caring for
665 the neighbor in numerous public ways—informed voting, community organizing, attending public
666 meetings, and holding public office, among others. Healthy governmental institutions require vigorous
667 movement toward a political center of cooperation in difference that serves the needs of all.

668
669 Gun-related violence and trauma cannot be restrained or prevented without sound and effective
670 governmental action. Sustained reduction will require stronger cooperation by lawmakers and those
671 they represent. Christians practicing civic engagement should seek to discourage polarization and restore
672 public trust in government to protect the neighbor from risk and harm. Such trust can be restored only
673 by change that disrupts public pessimism.

674
675 *What are the distinctive responsibilities of our church and other faith communities in*
676 *peacemaking?*

677
678 Faith communities cultivate experiences, beliefs, values, and practices to welcome all, connect
679 differences, and engage members with stories of the divine. Faith communities intercede in the
680 brokenness and disorder of life—ministering to pain, speaking truth to power, reconciling conflict, and
681 modeling nonviolence and justice. Given the uncertainty, mistrust, and polarization in U.S. society, what
682 makes for peace must include building shared humanity and community to bridge differences and
683 support purposeful cooperation.

684
685 **Bridging divides**

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

693
694 **Cultivating civic empathy**

695 Mindful of St. Paul's call for mutual upbuilding, faith communities should cultivate civic empathy that
696 enables people to understand and respect the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of those with whom
697 they disagree. This empathy honors the legitimacy of their participation in civic life, acknowledges
698 human fallibility, and promotes political compassion between neighbors. Such generosity of spirit can

699 counter disabling discord so that people can work out their moral and political differences toward
700 community peace in difference, and their needs can be met.

701

702 **Building community**

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

708

709 **Advocating policy**

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

713

714 This message urges congregations and synods within the ELCA to form standing peacemaking groups to
715 learn together and witness publicly. Such ministry will support civic empathy and build community. The
716 mission of these groups will depend upon social location as well as needs and opportunities at hand.
717 This work may include alliances with ecumenical and interreligious groups. This message outlines various
718 peacemaking callings for these groups and commends existing social teaching documents to advance
719 comprehensive advocacy for peace.

720

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

726

727 **Healing trauma**

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

735 **Conclusion: The summons to peacemaking**

736

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

740

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

745 This message proclaims anew that all people are responsible for peacemaking toward a vast reduction of
746 gun-related violence and trauma in the U.S. All members of our society are responsible for doing what
747 makes for peace. Christians should make peace by living always in Christ and in the neighbor—sustained
748 in forgiveness, healing, and hope by the promise of God’s resolve for peace.

749 Endnotes

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²⁴ 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.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ 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. 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.

²⁷ 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/.

²⁸ 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; 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.

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

³⁰ Peterson and Denseley 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.

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

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

³³ “Community Violence,” 6.

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ *For Peace in God’s World*, 7-8.

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

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

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ 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.

⁴⁰ *The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries* (2013).

⁴¹ 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.

⁴² 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; Michael D. Anestis, Allison E. Bond, Jayna Mocerl-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.

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

⁴⁴ 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.

⁴⁵ For the Healthy People 2030 program, see 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.

⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷Adam 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; Timothy D. Lytton, “An End Run Around the Gun Industry Liability Shield,” *Regulatory Review*, July 26, 2021, www.theregreview.org/2021/07/26/lytton-end-run-around-gun-industry-liability-shield/.

⁴⁸ 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.

⁴⁹ “Community Violence—Gun Control,” Social Policy Resolution, CA93.06.10, www.elca.org/Resources/Faith-and-Society#Socialresolutions.

⁵⁰ “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.

⁵¹ 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/.

⁵² *The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries*, 9.

⁵³ Footnote for the Violence Project.

⁵⁴ “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/.

⁵⁵ *For Peace in God’s World*, 3.