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Interfaith leaders ask Phila. gun shops to help reduce gun violence

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By Nadia Maria Smith
CS&T Staff Writer

PHILADELPHIA — Local religious leaders are asking gun shop owners statewide to adopt a “code of conduct” that they believe will help reduce gun violence in Philadelphia and beyond.

Msgr. Michael Carroll, director of the archdiocesan Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, who has been working on behalf of the Archdiocese in this ecumenical effort, said, “When the gift [of life] is threatened or destroyed, we are required, in faith, to reach out to the injured and to do what we reasonably can to prevent any further injury or destruction of life unjustly inflicted.”

He was speaking at a press conference held Monday, Jan. 12 in front of Colosimo’s Gun Center on 9th and Spring Garden streets. “We have joined with our brothers and sisters of differing faith communities to do just that, to prevent in this case, gun violence.”

Msgr. Carroll and the Delaware Valley Faith Leaders Coalition began their campaign by asking James Colosimo, the owner of Colosimo’s, to adopt a 10–point, non–legislative code of conduct suggested by the group Mayors Against Illegal Guns. Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter is a member.

The code of conduct has been adopted by Wal–Mart, the largest gun retailer in the nation, to reduce what is known as “straw purchasing” or the wholesale legal purchase of guns by buyers who then illegally sell the guns to traffickers.

The local faith leaders chose Colosimo’s because it is one of the oldest and most established gun shops in the city. Many guns used in crimes in Philadelphia, Camden and Trenton have been traced back to legal purchases at Colosimo’s Gun Center, according to Bryan Miller, executive director of the anti–gun–violence group Ceasefire New Jersey.

John Hageman, a special agent and spokesman for the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives in Philadelphia would neither confirm nor deny Miller’s assertion about Colosimo’s, however.

“There are many ways in which crime guns get on the street,” he said. “That includes straw purchasing, but we see more guns being stolen from licensed gun dealers, thefts from residents and businesses and a black market of guns that continue to be moved from one criminal to the next.”

Colosimo declined to sign the code of conduct the religious leaders presented. He said that although his shop was already in compliance on several of the points, he was unwilling to get a computerized crime gun–trace log and alert system. The system, he alleged in a letter to the religious leaders, endangers police officers and their investigations.

The faith leaders rejected Colosimo’s assertion, saying that the system does not require public disclosure of information, only enabling the seller to find out if a purchaser has been investigated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives for a crime involving guns.

That information, said Thomas Swain, the clerk for the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, would then inform the seller’s decision whether or not to sell to that gun buyer.

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