
Title *

A Good Friday witness against gun violence

Body text *

March 23, 2009

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Faith,

We are writing to urge you to join us in a Good Friday witness against the gun violence that has taken far too many lives in Philadelphia and throughout the Commonwealth.

This Good Friday witness will be on the day when Christians recall the violence and death suffered by The One we follow. This event bears witness not only to the horror of two thousand years ago, but to the continuing outrage of violence that took four hundred lives in Philadelphia in 2007, and, though there were fewer killings by gunfire last year, the number remains appalling.

The linchpin of the illegal trade in handguns that causes the reign of death we witness against is straw purchasing, whereby a person without a criminal record or other impediments purchases weapons on behalf of a gun trafficker, who in turn sells them to others who lack "clean" records.

Colosimo's Gun Center, where our witness will be located, has been identified by the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence as among the top ten sellers of weapons involved in crimes in the country. Furthermore, according to federal data published by the Inquirer, guns sold by Colosimo's accounted for nearly ten percent of all crime guns recovered by Philadelphia law enforcement in a recent year.

In the week preceding the celebration of Martin Luther King's 80th birthday, two of us and ten others were arrested at Colosimo's after the owner refused to sign a Code of Conduct developed by Mayors Against Illegal Guns, of which Mayor Nutter is a member, and signed by Wal-Mart, the nation's largest gun retailer. Mr. Colosimo refused to sign because of a provision in the Code by which software installed in his computers would flag any customer who had previously purchased a weapon that had been used in crime.

The Code of Conduct is not the only way to address the violence and death against which we invite your witness. We, and Heeding God's Call, a newly forming effort in this struggle, are newcomers to this effort. There are other organizations that have labored heroically on this issue for years, and, thank God, many in these organizations are people of deep faith.

Our effort and our invitation is to mobilize people of faith to become part of this work. Good Friday involves powerful symbols for Christians. Our choice of Good Friday is not a slight of any faith tradition. People of all faiths abhor violence and death, with which we, our communities and our children live, and all traditions affirm life. Muslim and Jewish brothers and sisters are part of our effort, and we hope you and your congregation will join us for this witness at 9th and Spring Garden, 4:00pm on April 10.

With confidence in what we as people of faith can do together, and in witness on behalf of all life, please consider joining us.

With Thanks and in Peace,
Bishop Kermit Newkirk, Harold O Davis Memorial Baptist Church, Logan
Rev. Mary Laney, St Christopher's Episcopal Church, Gladwyne
Rev. David Tatgenhorst, St Luke United Methodist Church, Bryn Mawr
Rev. Isaac Miller, Church of the Advocate, North Philadelphia

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