1 TITLE:  Resolution on Preventing Gun Violence and Recognizing it as a Public Health Emergency

2 DATE SUBMITTED:  March 10, 2018

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13 SUMMARY OF INTENT: This resolution declares that the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ supports adoption of legislation to stem the growing epidemic of gun violence including, but not limited to: establish universal background checks, ban assault rifles with high capacity magazines, refrain from arming teachers in schools, and lift gun-research restrictions on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

19 BACKGROUND AND SUPPORTING STATEMENT:

WHEREAS during a time of great civil unrest, Jesus gathered his disciples for the Passover meal. As he washed their feet, Jesus foretold his pending death and pronounced a new commandment, “that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35) If we are to love one another, we have a responsibility to each other; and

WHEREAS every human being is created in the image of God, so that the senseless loss of even one life from gun violence is an affront to our creator, Genesis 1:27, Romans 8 31-39; and

WHEREAS God hears the cries of those who are oppressed and victimized, and sends God’s faithful servants to respond by speaking truth to those in positions of power, Exodus 3; and

WHEREAS, as followers of a truth-seeking, truth speaking Christ, we have a responsibility to search for informed, reasoned and rational solutions to the problems that plague our nation and world. People of faith and goodwill cannot willingly avoid the best possible solutions when it comes to protecting ourselves and our neighbors from the horrendous rates of gun violence and how it poses a public health emergency; and

WHEREAS we are called to action on behalf of those suffering, James 2: 14-16, that is, “thoughts and prayers” are not enough; and

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WHEREAS the United Church of Christ has declared its vision of a just world for all, embodied in the three Great Loves—Love of Neighbor, Love of Children, and Love of Creation, working together to address the inequities in our current world; and

WHEREAS the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ has as a Core Value seeking a more just and peaceful world, honoring each individual as created in the image of God; and

WHEREAS gun violence is a public health crisis that kills 89 people per day in the nation and more than 400 Minnesotans every year, devastates the lives of over 500 others who are wounded but not killed, and costs the state over $764 million in measurable expenses; and

WHEREAS many lives could be saved by passing common sense laws that would help prevent gun violence without taking away the Second Amendment rights of responsible gun owners; and

WHEREAS public health studies have repeatedly shown that states with the strongest gun laws have the lowest rates of gun death in all forms, and states with the weakest gun laws have the highest rates of gun death in all forms; and

WHEREAS Minnesotans including hunters and other gun owners, overwhelmingly support keeping guns out of the hands of those who represent a danger to themselves or others; and

WHEREAS guns can be obtained at a gun show, a gun trafficker, straw purchaser, or through the Internet where private sellers are exempt from having to perform any background check whatsoever before selling a firearm. These sales account for approximately 40% of all gun sales in America; and

WHEREAS assault rifles are weapons with high capacity magazines which are a class of semi-automatic firearms specifically designed to kill humans quickly and efficiently and have been used in multiple mass shooting incidents including Las Vegas, Aurora, Newtown, Orlando, and Las Vegas and most recently (at this writing) at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida; and

WHEREAS beginning with Columbine 19 years ago, more than 150,000 students attending at least 170 primary or secondary schools have experienced a shooting on campus; and

WHEREAS the argument “The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is with a good guy with a gun” is flawed because it ignores the fundamental problem that, according to a 2015 report from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives there are more than 350 million guns in circulation in the United States — approximately
92 113 guns for every 100 people; and
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94 WHEREAS students, law enforcement groups and teacher organizations oppose
95 arming teachers with guns as a viable option for preventing violence; and
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97 WHEREAS the National Association of Secondary School Principals said in a
98 December 2012 statement: “Firearms in principals’ and teachers’ hands might do
99 more harm than good. To be effective, schools must be perceived as safe havens;” and
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101 WHEREAS, since 1996, at the urging of the National Rifle Association, the United
102 States Congress has prevented federal money from being spent on researching gun
103 violence and has actively restricted the nation’s principal public health agency, the
104 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, from looking into why the United States
105 has five times the rate of gun deaths per year than most European countries; and
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107 WHEREAS, in June 2016 the American Medical Association adopted a position that
108 the United States is facing a “public health crisis in gun violence” that requires a
109 comprehensive public health response and solution and will actively lobby Congress
110 to overturn the restrictions on the CDC;
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112 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the 2018 Annual Meeting of the
113 Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ urges our congressional
114 representatives and state legislators to support gun violence prevention measures and
115 oppose any bills that would weaken gun laws; and
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117 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Minnesota
118 Conference United Church of Christ states its support of saving lives by the
119 enactment of common sense gun violence prevention legislation in the state and
120 nation including, for example:
121 - Requiring universal background checks to cover all firearm sales and transfers
122 - Authorizing gun violence protection orders
123 - Funding gun violence prevention programs
124 - Removing prohibitions in current law against the collection of gun-related data
125 for the purpose of public health research
126 - Supporting reinstating federal funding for scientific research of gun violence by
127 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
128 - Banning the sale of assault weapons, large capacity magazines, and devices that alter
129 the operation of guns to make them more lethal; and
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131 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Minnesota
132 Conference United Church of Christ states its strong opposition to
133 - Attempts to weaken current Minnesota gun laws
134 - Attempts to arm educators with guns as a solution to reduce gun violence
135 - Enactment of dangerous gun laws such as “Stand Your Ground,” “Permitless
136 Carry,” “Lifetime Permit to Carry,” “Campus Carry,” and the repeal of gun-free
137 school zones;
Attempts to silence or stifle the scientific and medical community from providing sound methods to save and improve the lives of each other and our neighbors; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Conference Minister, pastors and congregational leaders express the intent of this resolution to all Members of Congress, state legislators, and the governor, and to candidates for those offices, and that they become familiar with the positions of candidates for public office on gun violence prevention measures and encourage voting in accordance with that knowledge; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ directs the Creation Justice Team to - Stay informed on public health data related to gun violence in the state and nation - Stay informed on legislation related to public policy on gun violence - Work with independent gun violence prevention organizations whose missions include promoting a culture of health and safety for Minnesotans by preventing gun violence - Keep Minnesota Conference member congregations and individuals informed of opportunities to promote effective laws and policies, and for education regarding gun violence prevention.

Additional Resources:
- Resources sited for this resolution:
  - http://lawcenter.giffords.org/
  - http://www.bradycampaign.org/

FUNDING: Funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected entities and the funds available. The Creation Justice Team does not anticipate any costs to other entities of the Minnesota Conference, nor any costs to the Team beyond its normal budget.

IMPLEMENTATION: The Conference Minister, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the Minnesota Conference UCC will determine the implementing body or bodies.