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OPEN LETTER TO LEGISLATORS ON GUNS AND VIOLENCE

As pastors and leaders in our communities, we are deeply concerned about the rising level of violence in the Commonwealth. Such violence is not inevitable. A concerted public effort can make a difference. Thus, we sign this open letter to legislative leaders, urging rapid passage of substantive gun control legislation at state and federal levels, as on means to help curb gun-related violence.

Our concern emerges from the Christian affirmation that life is a gift from God, the source of all life and all that is good. This affirmation is brutally scorned every time a life is senselessly lost.

Street violence is not an isolated phenomenon. It relates to a whole web of issues: the violence of unemployment and under-employment, of homelessness, of racism, and social deprivation (for example, sub-standard schools and lack of police protection). Street violence is related to the structural violence which our social systems create and/or hide. To confess that we are part of this dysfunctioning social web is the first step toward participation in its redemption.

One concrete step which can be taken to curb the spiral of violence is the passage of gun control legislation, because it would help deprive street criminals of some of the tools of their trade.

We, therefore, urge our elected officials to:

a) outlaw the sale and use of snub-nosed handguns with barrels 3 inches or shorter. They are the weapon of choice by street criminals, cheaper to buy and easier to conceal than other kinds of guns;

b) outlaw the sale and use of assault weapons. Such guns are military hardware;

c) require more adequate background checks on persons wanting to purchase and carry firearms. Law abiding citizens having nothing to hide will appreciate the extra protection such procedures provide against possible criminal intentions;

d) restrict the sale, lease, or rental of any firearms to minors. Only those with written parental consent to buy, lease or rent firearms for instruction or recreation ought to be allowed to do so;

e) impose stiff penalties on dealers and others who violate such restrictions.

The above petitionary letter has been endorsed by the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Council of Churches, as on means to help curb gun-related violence in the Commonwealth.