

We Mourn with Our Neighbors in Las Vegas—and Call for Common Sense Protections to Protect Against Gun Violence

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me,
from the words of my groaning?*

—Psalm 22:1 (NRSV)

The Pennsylvania Council of Churches is shocked, outraged and horrified at the October 1, 2017 attack on innocent persons attending an outdoor music concert in Las Vegas—now the largest such attack in recent American history. We hope and pray for peace for a city and country that struggle with yet another violent attack.

However, we also express our righteous anger that our government has refused to adopt common sense legislation to protect people from such senseless violence. Our support for such legislation stems not only from a concern for peace and justice as people of faith, but also from Biblical imperatives:

- The sixth commandment, “Thou shall not kill,” not only forbids killing, but also implies that we are obligated to prevent harm and to preserve life and the well-being of human life;
- Both Isaiah and Micah call us to beat our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks; and
- Jesus calls us to be peacemakers by saying “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called Children of God.”

The Council acknowledges that legal gun ownership is a right for most citizens (with exceptions such as for convicted felons), but we assert the need for responsible gun ownership with legal protections in place. We understand that the vast majority of gun owners take their responsibility seriously. But we also believe that Congress needs to take action to prevent further carnage being carried out by those whose mental health or state of mind prevent them from acting responsibly. Given the absence and seeming inability of Congress to act, we take this opportunity to point to the June 2008 ruling of the US Supreme Court that says that authorities, including state legislatures, have the power to enact “laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms”—and we call on states, including Pennsylvania, to do what they can to enact common sense protections to reduce and prevent the kind of violence we witnessed in Las Vegas and far too many other places.

We pray for the families of those who were killed and injured in Los Vegas, asking for God to surround them with comfort, peace, and healing. We pray for the rapid recovery of all who were injured. We pray for first responders, medical personnel, and all who provided aid to their neighbors in the face of danger, knowing that they are in need of healing for the trauma they have suffered. We pray for insights into the mind of the Las Vegas shooter and all who perpetrate such violence on their fellow human beings, in the hope that we might find ways to prevent these tragedies from continuing to occur.

Finally, we call on all people of faith and good will to stand with our neighbors who are suffering, and to encourage courage by our elected officials who hold the power to enact protections that might reduce or prevent future events like this from happening.

Rev. Elizabeth L. Bidgood Enders

The Rev. Elizabeth Bidgood Enders, President
Board of Directors, Pennsylvania Council of Churches

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See prayer following the Las Vegas shooting (next page)

Dear God,

We have seen and heard the news of yet another mass shooting, and we grieve the senseless and tragic loss of lives. Names that have flashed on screens, with or without images of face, are your beloved children. While we may not have personal connections to them, their lives are known and to family and friends who are overwhelmed with sadness and horror. Be with them, as well as those who are hospitalized and whose prognosis is still unknown.

We pray for the first responders, for rescue workers, medical staff and police officers, whose work to preserve lives and pursue answers continues. Thank you for the spirit of service and dedication in them. Surely, you work through them.

It is harder, God of life to pray for those commit acts of wanton violence. But you tell us to love and to pray for our persecutors. As people of your peace, help but to extend Christ-like love for those like Stephen Paddock, who have felt driven to use violence to express their frustrations. Be with their family members as well, as they try to reconcile their own memories and impressions with developing profiles of killers. Where there is mental illness, lead us to make true help and support available.

Transform our culture from one of violent retribution and dependence on weapons for our peace and security to trust in you. Work in elected officials and our own hearts to discern how to live with one another in the midst of conflicts. Take away our society's love of violence as entertainment. Teach us another way, your way of love and life. As we confess the places where we fail to show Christ's way in our words and actions, forgive us and move us to live and act according to your desire for us.

Rev. Liz Bidgood Enders, October 8, 2017