

# Shepherdstown Friends Meeting

## Our Position Against Gun Violence

*Thou shalt not kill. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.  
If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other cheek as well.*

These are profound commandments of moral action present in the Bible. In Quaker tradition, the testimonies of peace and non-violence counsel us to abhor violence of any kind. Thus we wholeheartedly support pleas for meaningful action on reasonable and rational gun-safety legislation, such as the Friends Council on Education letter of Jan 14, 2013.

Quakers include Democrats, Republicans and independents. We do not oppose gun ownership. Yet unfortunately, guns are often used to enforce one individual's will against others through violence or threats of violence. We do oppose permitting guns in public areas where there are children. We oppose access to weapons that are never appropriate for civilized use. According to the Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery, 80% of all gun deaths and 87% of all child deaths by guns occur in the US.

Jesus' instruction to turn the other cheek is one of the most difficult commandments — difficult precisely because it runs counter to our instinctive nature when we are attacked by another person. Quaker testimony expresses Jesus' transcendent conviction that the answer to violence is not more violence. It is not an eye for eye, nor a tooth for a tooth. Instead it is a path that turns away from fear, hate, and vengeance; that turns instead towards love, hope, forgiveness, compassion, and kindness.

Great religious leaders and philosophers throughout the ages teach essentially the same thing. We Quakers find that message in our heart to reject violence. Peaceful conflict resolution practices are an attainable ideal. When our forebearers from out of the wilderness laid the foundation of the civilization they could only dream of, they agreed — even in the mythic “Old West” — to leave the guns outside the doors of civil society. In a democratic society, we affirm, under the rule of law, we will seek justice and the remedies to grievances of every kind through civil means, not shoot it out in the street.

This present epidemic of gun violence has deep roots involving many social issues: mental health, culture, social inequalities, poverty and more. These issues must be addressed. Peaceful conflict resolution is a sober process of distinguishing the positions people take from their real interests. It requires wisdom and patience to see common ground amidst apparently irreconcilable positions.

Violence is not only about guns, and gun violence is not only about mass killings. However the first step toward a commitment to peace, to an end to violence, is “leaving the guns at the doors” when we sit down to resolve conflict. That does not make the solution easy politically. But the absence of perfect solutions is no excuse for us to give up hope.

We ask that every political and faith leader go on record, now, and lend their voice to urgent effective action to reduce gun violence and ensure that current and future generations may live and learn in our country free from the threat of gun violence. Do not remain silent.

*Adopted by Shepherdstown Friends Meeting, WV, on January 20, 2013*