

Firearms in Places of Worship

By: The Rt. Rev. Scott B. Hayashi

Since the article that appeared in the Salt Lake Tribune on November 7th regarding religious bodies and firearms in places of worship, I have received questions regarding the position of the Diocese of Utah in this matter. Of particular concern was that the article stated that only two religious bodies have registered with the state to ban guns in church.

The Tribune is correct: only two Utah religious organizations REGISTERED with the state notifying that guns would be banned in their houses of worship. However, in my opinion, the article is incomplete in its information.

The law gave religious organizations an **EQUALLY BINDING OPTION** to ban weapons. That alternative required the posting of signs banning guns in places of worship. Under the leadership of Bishop Carolyn Tanner Irish, we took that option and signs were supplied to the churches for posting. We joined 30 other religious leaders in adopting a "no guns" policy with the posting option and a joint statement that was delivered by the group on December 31, 2003, stating "Guns have no place in holy spaces."

In fact, we and the other religious leaders fought the legislative provision requiring the registration of our weapons policies with the state in order for the state to allow us to conduct our worship policies and practices as we wished. Among those signing the "no guns" statement and the objection to the registration option in 2003 were Bishop Irish of the Episcopal Diocese, Bishop George Niederaur of the Roman Catholic Diocese, Rabbi Tracee Rosen of Congregation Kol Ami, Rabbi Joshua Aaronson of Temple Har Shalom and Presbyterian minister David Henry.

Bishop Irish further petitioned Governor Michael Leavitt to veto the bill over the registration provision. We maintained (and still maintain) that the state has no jurisdiction over the property rights of religious communities and the need to register in order to receive permission to conduct our churches as we see fit.

Therefore, as your Bishop, let me assure you I am in full support the 2003 position taken by Bishop Irish. I am having new signs produced that state clearly that firearms are prohibited on the premises. I will be sending them out to the congregations for posting, as the signs previously distributed may have grown old with age and need replacement. I urge you to post the signs as a witness against gun violence and for the safety of your people.