

Jeff's Jottings

We believe ...

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And so here we are again, back on our knees after still more outbreaks of senseless gun violence. Ten days ago, it was at the garlic festival in Gilroy, California. Then last weekend, at the Wal-Mart in El Paso, Texas, and then in a popular nightlife district in Dayton, Ohio — the unspeakable horrors unleashed by violent men armed and committed to kill masses of people. How long, we had to ask again, must we endure this unrelenting assault on innocents at the hands of individuals boiling over with rage?

The answers we got were both unequivocal, and they were thin. It's past time we get serious about guns, we said in print and in the streets. It's past time we get serious about white supremacy and white nationalism; about the hidden layers of U.S. society that gives safe harbor to our most violent tendencies. Yes, it is past time. And yet, in the immediate wake of these horrific events, we looked to our leaders, and they looked away, unable or unwilling to set aside lobby-driven party politics. The National Council of Churches lamented "the near certainty that our elected officials will not respond in any meaningful way to this violence, for they are collectively and shamefully within the captivity of the gun lobby."

How does God call us in our present circumstances to be salt and light in our world, making a difference in our communities as we seek to follow Jesus, especially in face of the outrage and destruction that mass murderers have inflicted upon us?

We need our leaders to step up, to be sure. That means calling our senators and our congressional representatives, not simply to vent, but to let them know our best thoughts about potential solutions. It means standing on the steps of the capitol in Saint Paul, as I know a number of people from PTCA

congregations did Wednesday night. It means listening to voices for change we may not usually listen to.

We live in divided country and a divided world, divided even by how we seek the change we need. Some of my friends are revolutionaries, in both language and action, advocating for wholesale change in individuals and institutions in which they see only gridlock and failure. “There is no neutrality in this fight, is their message. You are either an agent of justice or you are contributing to the problem.” Others tend to be more patient in their approaches, even if they remain idealistic in their objectives, believing in the ability to change the institutions we so desperately need from the inside out.

Like our work in this Presbytery, for which there is no one clear and obvious path, so also is true of our societal woes. What must be clear, however, is our starting point and energy source. We believe, the Belhar Confession says:

- that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells;
- that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

The way forward, of changing hearts and minds toward the “other,” rises from the ground up, as we embrace the hard Christian discipline of hospitality, of opening ourselves to others unqualifiedly in acts and words of welcome reception. Everyone. No exceptions.

We’ve got to work for solutions to the violence. Because we believe.

[Hundreds of Presbyterians join Baltimore residents for action against gun violence](#)