



The Bishop of North Carolina

June 26, 2022

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come, *
and the glory of the Lord has dawned upon you.*

*But over you the Lord will rise, *
and his glory will appear upon you.*

*Violence will no more be heard in your land, *
ruin or destruction within your borders.*

*The Lord will be your everlasting light, *
and your God will be your glory.”*

- From Canticle 11, The Third Song of Isaiah

Dear siblings in Christ,

More than ever before, it seems we are responding almost weekly to news of another mass shooting. Anytime violence happens anywhere, at a church or other house of worship, a school, a grocery store, a concert, we feel the pain, the horror and the outrage in a deep and personal way. A steady drumbeat of gun violence is unfolding with increasing frequency, an alarming and consistent threat to personal and public safety.

Picking up a gun to deal with a problem has become too easy and happens too often. The capacity to see another as a neighbor, a child of God, or even simply as a fellow human being seems to be diminishing. Instead, anger turned outward and, too often, turned inward, has become the dominant emotion, rather than love or compassion or even the most basic respect for life, even one's own life.

Our societal fixation, some would call it an obsession, with violence, and with firearms in particular, is antithetical to the people we are called to be. It is as if protecting an idolatrous interpretation of the Second Amendment outweighs the continuing cost of human lives. In the words of Psalm 88, *“Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness?”*

Mass shootings are only one manifestation of this crisis. The scourge of violence includes guns used in acts of domestic violence, suicide, small disagreements that needlessly escalate exponentially, and guns that are improperly stored and fall into the hands of children. The rate of youth suicide with a firearm is at its highest level in twenty years, according to a [recently released study](#). These losses do not demonstrate responsible gun ownership; they are evidence of a plague – a public health crisis in this country.

We cannot allow the volume and frequency of these events to leave us feeling numb and powerless. It is understandable that some feel the needed changes aren't even possible due to forces deeply entrenched in the way we are governed, but that is when and why we must lean into our faith most deeply and draw from it the strength and the vision to be advocates in ways that will put us on a path to peace. Prayers are necessary, and our prayers at this time propel us to action, to advocacy and to the invitation to become instruments of God's peace. This is the way we live into our vocation to become beloved community. It is especially in the face of violence that we must become instruments of God's peace.

It is time to step outside our comfort zone. It is time to put our thoughts and prayers into action. It is time to bear witness in the public square that our country's tolerance of inaction to this violence is itself a form of collusion with such violence. This is our call as followers of Jesus. This is what it means to become a disciple, making a difference.

The Diocese of North Carolina has formed a new task force dedicated to the work of reducing gun violence. Comprised of clergy and lay individuals with backgrounds in law enforcement, medicine and advocacy work in this area, the task force met for the first time on Thursday, June 23. With your bishops, serving on the committee are:

- The Rev. Sonny Browne, co-chair (All Saints', Roanoke Rapids)
- Sara Smith, co-chair (Holy Family, Chapel Hill)
- Cassandra Deck-Brown (St. Ambrose, Raleigh)
- David Jacobs (St. Peter's, Charlotte)
- The Rev. Sandy Key (St. Stephen's, Durham)
- The Rev. Elaine McCoy (St. Philip's, Durham)
- The Rev. Justice Schunior (St. Martin's, Charlotte)
- The Rev. Sallie Simpson (Saint Augustine's University)
- Berkeley Sumner (Youth Representative)

The group focused its first conversation on issues related to gun violence and actions where the Diocese of North Carolina might affect change, either in a leadership role or in partnership with others.

Among the areas explored for task force leadership:

- Identify advocacy opportunities
- Explore partnerships with organizations already engaged in the work of reducing gun violence
- Education around the role of mental illness, behavioral health challenges and other factors in gun violence
- Share resources to educate and assist churches in developing safety plans, including engagement with local law enforcement for consultation
- Develop a long-term plan to build a sustainable infrastructure to position the Diocese for ongoing calls to action, programs, education and advocacy

The meeting was only a starting point; clearer action plans will be developed in the coming weeks and months, and the work of the task force will be shared as it develops.

As we write this, we celebrate the next step taken toward the passing of a bipartisan gun safety bill, as the Senate voted Thursday, and it now proceeds to the House. Our sincerest hope is that as you read this, the bill will have passed its final vote, and we, as a nation, will have taken a first step toward stricter measures for safe gun ownership. We are grateful to all who wrote to our senators from North Carolina, both of whom supported this legislation.

There is a great deal of work still to be done. But as the faithful of the Diocese of North Carolina have demonstrated again and again, it is work we are willing to do. It is work we will do together as we live into the promise and power of nonviolence and love embodied in Jesus' life and teaching.

Faithfully,



The Rt. Rev. Sam Rodman
Bishop



The Rt. Rev. Anne Hodges-Copple
Bishop Suffragan