

Church of the Brethren Stance on Gun Control

Violence and the Use of Firearms

<http://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1978-violence-firearms.html>

1978 Church of the Brethren Statement

The following queries were received by the 1977 Annual Conference Standing Committee:

Sale and Control of Handguns

Whereas Jesus said: Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called Sons of God . . .

Whereas the Church of the Brethren has traditionally been committed to the saving of life rather than to the taking of life . . .

Whereas there are 25,000 gun-related deaths in the United States each year . . .

Whereas there are over 200,000 persons wounded by firearms each year resulting in paralyzation, sterilization, dismemberment, blindness, and other disabling effects . . .

Whereas the prophet Isaiah warns us to ready ourselves for the days of peace by beating our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks . . .

The Pleasant Hill Church of the Brethren, District of Southern Ohio, through its District Conference, hereby petitions Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren meeting in Richmond, Virginia, in 1977 the following:

That Annual Conference establish a committee to study the issue of the sale and control of handguns and make recommendations regarding our denominational response to the issue.

*J. D. Glick, Moderator
Carolyn Weeks, Clerk*

Action of the 1976 Southern Ohio District Conference: Passed to Annual Conference.

*Ron McAdams, Moderator
Helen Cain, Writing Clerk*

Violence and the Use of Firearms

Whereas, the problem of violence is serious in many of our communities; and

Whereas, firearms are often used as instruments in this violence; and

Whereas, the Brethren traditionally understand the New Testament to stand against violence,

We, of the York Center Church of the Brethren, gathered in Council meeting on October 24, 1976, petition the Annual Conference to give all of our congregations counsel and specific direction about how we are to respond to the problems of violence and the use of firearms in our communities.

*John Young, Moderator
Carol Weaver, Clerk*

Answer of Illinois and Wisconsin District Conference meeting at Lanark, Illinois on Saturday, October 30, 1976: Passed to Annual Conference.

Russell L. McInnis, Moderator

Action of 1977 Annual Conference

The Standing Committee grouped queries 3 and 4 together. The following answer of Standing Committee to these queries was presented by Fred Swartz:

While recognizing that Annual Conference has spoken and continues to speak to the matter of violence in our society, Standing Committee agrees that the sale, control, and use of firearms (and especially handguns) is a specific issue relating to violence and the threat to human life on which Annual Conference should provide helpful direction to our congregations. Therefore, we recommend that a committee of five be elected to study this concern and report to the 1978 Annual Conference.

The answer of Standing Committee was accepted and the following five persons were elected by ballot to carry out this study: Robert Blake, Esther Eichelberger, Nathan Hefley, Peter Kaltenbaugh, and C. Wayne Zunkel.*

[*The committee consisted of a federal prison chaplain, a legal assistant, a former police officer, a hunter, and a pastor.]

1978 Report of the Committee

I. The Concern

We live in an increasingly violent nation. We have seen national leaders, including a President, a civil rights leader, and an Attorney General, shot and killed. We have witnessed violent disruptions in our major cities. We live with a rising crime rate. We have seen individuals arm themselves for combat in order to save a possession or possibly their lives. The violence is not only on the streets. A national expert testified before a U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee this year that violence occurs between family members more often than it occurs in any other setting except with armies in war and police during riots.(1)

It is estimated that there are about 44 million handguns in circulation in the United States today.(2) These easily concealable, lethal weapons are kept both by criminals and by law-abiding citizens. In anyone's hands, they can cause accidents and murders by the thousands. The statement that people, not guns, kill people proposes that without guns, people would find alternative ways to kill one another—a knife, a club, a fist. But the presence or absence of a handgun in the home or on the person is often a critical factor in the outcome of an argument or assault.(3)

Statistics have been used liberally by those in favor of gun controls and by those opposing gun controls. In an attempt to deal responsibly with the statistical side of this issue, primary sources of information were used, including Crime in the United States 1976, Uniform Crime Reports issued by the Director of the FBI(4); To Establish Justice, To Insure Domestic Tranquility, Final Report of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (5); and Handgun Control: Effectiveness and Costs, Report to the Congress by the Comptroller General of the U.S., February 6, 1978.

The 1976 Crime Clock published September 28, 1977,6 indicates:

- One murder was committed in the United States every 28 minutes;
- One robbery every 75 seconds;

—One aggravated assault every 64 seconds.

In 1976, the handgun was used in 49% of the total 18,780 murders; in 1975, it was used in 51% of the total 20,510 murders. During both of those years, rifles and shotguns were the weapons used in only 15% of those murders. The knife or sharp instrument was the second most popular weapon used (18%),⁽⁷⁾ but a serious assault with a gun is five times more likely to cause death as is a similar attack with a knife.⁽⁸⁾ (The deaths resulting from the use of handguns increases when we add to the above murder statistics those deaths resulting from negligence, suicide, accident, and legally justifiable homicide,)⁽⁹⁾ Even assuming that guns don't kill people—people kill people—it is true that people kill more easily with guns than without them.

Murder, By Type Of Weapon Used, 1976

Handgun, 49%; Rifle, 6%; Shotgun, 9%; Cutting Or Stabbing, 18%; Other Weapon (Club, Poison, Etc.), 12%; Personal Weapon (Hands, Fists, Feet, Etc.), 6%

According to FBI statistics, 68% of the murders committed in the U.S. in 1975 fell within one of the following categories: spouse killing spouse, parent killing child, other family killings, killings due to romantic triangles or lovers' quarrels, or other arguments among acquaintances. Only 32% involved known felony types or suspected felony types of persons. And the percentage of family/acquaintance murders in all other years between 1968-1975 was even higher.⁽¹⁰⁾

Murder By Circumstance (Percent Distribution)—1975

Felony Murder: Known felony murder, 23.0%; Suspected felony murder, 9.4%

Non-Felony Murder: Family killings, 22.4%; Romantic triangle and other lovers' quarrels, 7.3%; Other arguments, 37.9%

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1975.

Further, during 1976, firearms were used in 115,841 aggravated assaults and in 179,430 robberies.⁽¹¹⁾ Each of those incidents could have resulted in another death.

The handgun is rarely an effective instrument for protecting the home against either the burglar or the robber. A burglar avoids confrontation and a robber moves too swiftly. A review of available research data demonstrates that a handgun in the home more often increases the probability of homicide and serious injury resulting from domestic quarrels than it deters a robber or burglar.⁽¹²⁾

The data available indicates that there is a positive relationship between firearm ownership and both firearm murder and firearm assault at the regional level.⁽¹³⁾ However, the cause and effect relationships are more difficult to determine. Is the increase in crimes involving firearms caused by an increase in gun availability, or does the increase in crime cause an increase in firearm ownership? Does fear motivate people to purchase firearms for self-protection? Studies indicate that both situations occur, and, consequently, there is a circular effect. People buy guns, crimes committed with guns increase, people are afraid, people buy guns, gun crimes increase, and so on.

Relationship Between Firearm Ownership And Firearm Murder Rate, By Region

Source: Comptroller General Report, February 1978.(14)

The Final Report of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (Eisenhower Commission Report, December 1969) urged individual citizens, particularly on the basis of firearms accidents, to reflect carefully before deciding that loaded firearms are necessary or desirable for self-defense.(15)

II. Current Brethren Attitudes

The committee commissioned J. Henry Long of Elizabethtown College to survey members of the Church of the Brethren to determine their attitudes on the subject of firearms and firearms control. With limited time and budget, the survey concentrated its efforts on a systematic sampling of 1500 Messenger subscribers. To equalize districts that have a low level of Messenger subscribers, an additional 400 rank-and-file members were included from congregations of those districts. This provided a group of Brethren who were not average in some characteristics. Two-thirds were men; three-fourths stated they attend church almost every week; and 60% indicated agreement with the traditional peace position of the church. However, they were drawn from every district of the Brotherhood and were, otherwise, perhaps typical Brethren.

Some of the findings in the survey of this group were as follows:

1. More Brethren own guns than is true in the population generally.(16)

	Brethren	National Poll (Gallup, 1975)
Any Gun	58%	44%
Handgun	21%	18%
Shotgun	47%	26%
Rifle	46%	18%

2. In addition to owning guns for hunting, almost half of the handguns owned by Brethren are also intended for the protection of life and property.¹⁷

Purpose of Ownership	Brethren			National Poll (Harris, 1975)
	Own Handgun	Own Shotgun	Own Rifle	Any Gun
Hunting	76%	88%	86%	73%
Protect life/property	49%	27%	28%	55%
Target shooting	58%	41%	49%	42%
Collector's Item	48%	34%	34%	28%
Protect Business	7%	3%	3%	13%
Part of a Job	5%	2%	2%	6%

3. Gun ownership among the Brethren surveyed who agree with the peace position is 11% less than among those Brethren who disagree with the peace position.⁽¹⁸⁾

4. On three questions, the Brethren give rather strong support for gun-control legislation, nearly as strong as that found in the 1975 national polls.⁽¹⁹⁾

	Brethren	National Polls
Favor the registration of all handguns	75%	77%
Favor stricter laws for the sale of all handguns	72%	69%
Favor registration of all guns	63%	67%

On all other forms of gun control, Brethren studied differ more drastically from national norms.⁽²⁰⁾

	Brethren	National Polls
Favor ban on sale of handguns	32%	51%
Favor ban on ownership of handguns	24%	37%
Favor ban on ownership of handguns in high-crime areas	26%	44%

6. Brethren studied who own guns are less supportive of all gun-control measures. (21) One illustration follows:

	Favor Handgun Registration	
	Brethren	National Polls
All persons polled	75%	78%
Persons who own firearms	68%	69%
Persons who don't own firearms	82%	86%

7. In an attempt to relate views on handgun registration to views on the Church's peace position, the survey found that 86% of the people who strongly agree with the Brethren peace position favor handgun registration. In contrast, 51% of those who strongly disagree with the Brethren position favor handgun registration.(22)

Handgun Registration	Brethren Peace Position				
	Strongly Agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
Favor	86%	81%	70%	51%	58%
Oppose	13%	16%	28%	48%	41%

8. A majority of the Brethren surveyed feel that the church should take some position on gun control as indicated earlier; however, nearly 30% indicated that they did not want the church to speak pro or con on this question.(23)

9. Almost without exception, support for gun-control measures is strongest among women, the young, the better educated, persons with professional employment, and those who are in general agreement with the traditional peace position of the church. Persons attending the more urban churches are also in stronger support of controls. Gun owners, regardless of other characteristics, find it more difficult to support gun-control measures; but, like the others, they are more willing to support the tightening of controls on handguns.(24)

It is clear that the Brethren

- own more guns than the national average, perhaps because fewer of us live in big cities;
- own more pistols and far more rifles and shotguns; and a surprising number of us have them for protection;
- are less pro gun control than other citizens.

Even so, three-quarters of our number favor the registration of handguns.

III. The Biblical View *

*Acknowledgment to David W. Frantz for research assistance.

From the Old Testament Perspective

Old Testament material centers around two major themes: protection and peace. Throughout the Old Testament, true protection comes only from God. The priestly blessing, Go in peace, the journey on which you go is under the eye of the Lord, gives evidence to this point (Judges 18:6).

Even in Old Testament accounts describing the use of violence, it is clearly stated that our faith must be not in weapons but in the power of God. For instance, when David met Goliath on the field of battle, it was David's testimony that Yahweh who rescued me from the claws of the lion and the bear will rescue me from the power of the Philistine (1 Sam. 17:37). David rejected the armour which Saul attempted to give him. It is not by the sword or spear that Yahweh gives the victory, but in the name of the Lord of Hosts (17:45,47). The reader is directed to the power and protection of God—not the power of David, nor the weakness of Goliath, nor even the necessity for a strong defensive action. The saving action comes to David through the power of God, not through the use of weapons. Zechariah reaffirms this truth: Not by might nor by power but by my spirit, says the Lord of Hosts (Zech. 4:6).

From the beginning of time, people have sought peace and freedom from fear. Biblically, God gives peace to the faithful. If you conform to my statutes, if you observe my commandments and carry them out, . . . I will give you peace in the land, and you shall lie down to sleep with no one to terrify you (Lev. 26:3,6).

The prophet Isaiah challenged his listeners to prepare for the days of peace by beating their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks (Isa. 2:4).

In Old Testament scriptures, peace, protection, and freedom from fear of harm and oppression come not through any of our human efforts to protect ourselves; rather, they come only through God's blessing.

From the New Testament Perspective

Through his life and death, Jesus witnesses that error must be overcome not by violence but by truth, hatred not by enmity but by love, evil not by its own weapons but by good.

—Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called Sons of God (Mt. 5:9).

—Love your enemies, do good to those who abuse you (Lk. 6:27).

—To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also (Lk. 6:28).

—Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Mt. 5:10-12).

—Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing (Lk. 23:34).

Paul called for believers to overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:14-21). Concerning the believers' attempts at self-defense, Paul taught, Repay no one evil for evil (12:17). Instead of retaliating against attack, he called the believer to forgive (Eph. 4:32). Believers are admonished to live in harmony with all persons (12:16) and are called to be willing to suffer and even to lay down their lives if necessary for the sake of God's reconciling love and justice (1 Cor. 1:5; 1 Jn. 3:16).

In response to our fear-prone culture, 1 John promises, There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out all fear (1 Jn. 4:18).

In the Old Testament, we are taught that protection is given only by God. In the New Testament, the method of conflict resolution clearly rules out the use of violence. Protection comes from God and only from God. Peace comes only as a gift from God. Freedom from fear comes only as a blessing from God. The Christian is called to be a peacemaker, a lover, a forgiver, a servant not only of Christ but of all people. The Christian is called to a life of love and prayer, not a life of retaliation and self-defense. The biblical challenge is heard in the words of Isaiah. It is time for us to beat our swords into plowshares, and our spears into pruning hooks (Is. 2:4).

IV. The Church of the Brethren and Violence

The Church of the Brethren has spoken in many ways directly and forcefully to the problem of violence in society. In its 1977 statement on Justice and Violence, it said,

Violence of person against person is therefore fundamental violence against the relationship with God.

The Annual Meeting of 1785 debated the issue now confronting us. Their answer, in part, was:(25)

We see further that our loving Savior, though innocent, was attacked in a murderous manner . . . and Peter was quick and ready to draw his sword according to the legal justice of God, and struck a servant, and smote off his ear. But what says the Savior: 'Put up again thy sword into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.' Here, indeed, was the greatest necessity (for self-defense), but all this time the Savior resisted not, but he suffered patiently and even healed the one whose ear was smote off. . . . Thus our Savior had said before, 'That ye resist not evil;' for so he believed, and he spake, and thus he did. . . . So we hope the dear brethren will not take it amiss when we from all these passages of Scripture, and especially from the words of Peter, can not see or find any liberty to use any (carnal) sword, but only the sword of the Spirit. . . .

The answer of our church was consistent across its history. In 1845, for example, Annual Meeting minutes recorded:(26)

In regard to our being altogether defenseless, not to withstand the evil, but overcome evil with good, the Brethren considered, that the nearer we follow the bright example of the Lamb of God, who willingly suffered the cross, and prayed for his enemies; who, though heir of all things, had on earth not where to lay his head—the more we shall fulfill our high calling and obtain grace to deny ourselves for Christ and his Gospel's sake, even to the loss of our property, our liberty, and our lives.

In 1855, we faced the issue again. Hath a brother a right to defend himself with a deadly weapon at the appearance of being in danger? The answer in the Minutes is direct:(27)

Considered, he hath not, inasmuch as the Savior says to Peter: 'Put up thy sword into his place; for all they that take the sword, shall perish with the sword' (Mt. 26:52).

The famous 1935 Conference statement which declared, We believe that all war is sin, continued,(28)

Those beliefs are not based upon a peculiar peace doctrine of our own; they rise from our application of Christian standards to all human relations, whether individual, group, class, or national.

The position of the Brethren historically is that the way of nonresistance is not based on illusions about what will work or win a war or melt the heart of an enemy or turn away an attacker. It is based on the conviction at the heart of the Christian faith that the future is in Jesus Christ and, therefore, we can accept whatever the future may bring without regard to ourselves—even though it may bring a cross.²⁹

The problem of individually-owned weapons of violence in an increasingly crowded, anxious, and violence-prone nation well may pose a moment of truth for our denomination. As individuals, we face the unwanted question of whether the biblical truth we have applied so clearly to nations and races in other settings can now be applied by us to ourselves where we live.

V. The Need for More Strict Controls

At present, state and local laws affecting handguns consist of a “patchwork” of different statutes and ordinances, requirements and definitions. State laws begin and end at the state lines. Laws are often not uniform within a state.

Legislation is not the sole solution to the national crime problem. The roots of the problem extend far deeper into the fabric of contemporary society. Though gun control will not eliminate all crime, it will, under certain conditions, prevent persons from mortally wounding themselves and others. It may be that more stringent gun control laws will not even reduce the number of violent attacks, but the severity of the attacks should be reduced since less lethal weapons will likely be used.

Stricter gun controls will probably be marginally effective at first. With an estimated 44,000,000 handguns in circulation today,³⁰ it is likely that a certain portion of gun owners will be reluctant to participate voluntarily. Stricter legal sanctions and effective enforcement may help to improve participation. Long-term effectiveness is likely to improve as stricter controls and enforcement work together to bring handguns into the system and to limit their availability.

VI. Recommendations

National Imperatives

1. We urge Congress to develop and enact further legislation to restrict the availability of handguns. Alternatives should be considered ranging from steps to increase uniformity (and, therefore, effectiveness) of state and local gun control measures, to initiation of a national handgun control program. Any new legislation should include procedures to verify an individual’s identity and lack of criminal background in order to purchase or possess a handgun, and to regulate transfers within the existing private inventory of handguns, not just new handguns.
2. We urge federal legislation that provides for swift and fair prosecution of violators.
3. We urge that legislation on this subject contain provisions for periodic evaluation. In general, the cost of any gun licensing or registration system depends on the system’s requirements, especially the thoroughness and efficiency of its screening process. The dollar cost issue,

though real, should not be evaluated alone. A comparative assessment should be made of benefits to society resulting from expected lower homicide rates and dollar costs needed for the system to obtain a balanced view of the impact of handgun control.

Personal Imperatives

1. Our heritage and our faith call us as individuals

—to reaffirm our commitment to the Prince of Peace;

—to relinquish voluntarily our own handguns;

—to declare that as individuals we will never use violence against any other person to maim or to take human life.

2. We call upon our districts and congregations

—to provide opportunities for individual declarations.

3. We call upon the General Board

—to prepare educational resources in this area for use in our congregations focusing on approaches which are consistent with the teachings of Christ to the resolution of conflicts in home, neighborhood, church, and work; and to establish workshops to train our members utilizing role-playing, films, and other appropriate aids.

—to develop a DAY OF WITNESS on which we may declare ourselves against the growing violence and for a return to a nation at peace with itself. We ask the Board to provide opportunities for Brethren and others to relinquish their weapons; and, in keeping with the Isaiah dream, to provide a means for melting down these instruments of destruction into tools of peace; and, further, to provide a method whereby those of us not owning weapons may have the opportunity to contribute equal dollar amounts to help underwrite the witness.

As a people of God, we must be committed to eventual elimination of all weapons used primarily for human destruction.

Thus our Savior had said before, 'That ye resist not evil'; for so he believed, and then he spake, and thus he did. . . . So we hope the dear brethren will not take it amiss when we from all these passages of Scriptures . . . cannot see or find any liberty to use any (carnal) sword, but only the sword of the Spirit . . .—From the 1785 Annual Meeting Minutes

Respectfully submitted:

Robert P. Blake
Esther N. Eichelberger, Secretary
Nathan L. Heffley
Peter C. Kaltenbaugh
C. Wayne Zunkel, Chairperson

Footnotes

- 1.) Straus, Murray A., "National Survey of Domestic Violence: Some Preliminary Findings and Implications for Future Research," prepared for hearing on "Research Into Domestic Violence," U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee on Domestic and International Scientific Planning Analysis and Cooperation, February 14, 1978, p. 3.
- 2.) Comptroller General of the U.S. Report to the Congress, "Handgun Control: Effectiveness and Costs," February 6, 1978, p. 18.
- 3.) U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1975, "Handgun Control . . . Issues and Alternatives," p. 4.
- 4.) Kelley, Clarence M., Director FBI, "Crime in the United States, 1976," Uniform Crime Reports, September 28, 1977.
- 5.) Commonly known as the Eisenhower Commission Report, December 10, 1969.
- 6.) Uniform Crime Reports, "Crime in the United States 1976," p. 6.
- 7.) Ibid, pp. 7-11.
- 8.) Zimring, Franklin E., "Getting Serious About Guns," The Nation April 10, 1972, p. 457.
- 9.) Uniform Crime Reports, "Crime in the United States 1976," p. 7: Definition of Murder—the willful killing of another. Deaths caused by negligence, suicide, accident, or justifiable homicide are not included in the count for this offense classification. Attempts to murder or assaults to murder are scored as aggravated assaults and not as murder.
- 10.) Uniform Crime Reports, "Crime in the United States 1975," p. 19.
- 11.) Uniform Crime Reports, "Crime in the United States 1976," p. 13, 21.
- 12.) U.S. Senate Hearings on "The Escalating Rate of Firearms Crimes," Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, Committee on the Judiciary 94th Congress, First Session, Stenographic Transcripts, April 23, 1975, Vol. 1, pp. 128-9; U.S. Congress, House. Hearings on "Firearms Legislation," Subcommittee on Crime, Committee on the Judiciary, 94th Congress, First Session, Stenographic Transcript, March 26, 1975, Vol. 8, p. 529.
- 13.) Uniform Crime Reports, "Crime in the United States 1975," p. 18. Also: George D. Newton and Franklin E. Zimring. Firearms and Violence in the American Life, A Staff Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (Washington, D.C.,: Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 10. (See illustration following.)

Gun ownership and percentage gun use in homicide and aggravated assault by region.

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Sources: 1967 Uniform Crime Report; 1968 Harris poll.

- 14.) Comptroller General of the U. S., "Handgun Control: Effectiveness and Costs," February 6, 1978, p. 20.
- 15.) Final Report of the National Commission and the Causes and Prevention of Violence, December 1969, p. 179-180.
- 16.) J. Henry Long, Project Director: "Firearms Control—Attitudes of Members of the Church of the Brethren," Table 13, p. 20.

- 17.) Ibid, Table 14, p. 21.
- 18.) Ibid, Table 10, p. 15; Table 13, p. 20.
- 19.) Ibid, Tables 15, 17, 18, p. 22-24.
- 20.) Ibid, Summary, p. 35.
- 21.) Ibid, Table 17, p. 23; Table 21, p. 27; Table 24, p. 29; Table 26, p. 31.
- 22.) Ibid, Table 16, p. 23.
- 23.) Ibid, Table 28, p. 33.
- 24.) Ibid, Summary, p. 36.
- 25.) Shultz, L. W., "Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren on War and Peace, 1785-1935."
- 26.) Ibid.
- 27.) Ibid.
- 28.) Ibid.
- 29.) Brown, Dale, Brethren and Pacifism, p. 18.
- 30.) See footnote 2. Also: "Domestic production and imports provide rough national figures indicating that by 1976 approximately 147,500,000 firearms entering the market, such as firearms returned as war trophies (an estimated 8.8 million), antique firearms, and weapons manufactured for the Armed Forces or (2) firearms leaving the market because they are worn out, destroyed, or seized as contraband (as estimated 250,000 annually)." Report to the Congress by Comptroller General of U.S., "Handgun Control: Effectiveness and Costs," February 6, 1978, p. 18.

Action of 1978 Annual Conference

The report was presented by C. Wayne Zunkel, with members of the committee present. The paper was adopted with the addition of one amendment which is incorporated in the preceding wording.

Nonviolence and Humanitarian Intervention, 1996 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference

<http://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1996nonviolence.html>

“God's revelation in Jesus Christ provides a very different sort of answer to the perennial questions intended to justify violence on behalf of victims. Yes, disciples are to care deeply about victims and act on their behalf. But what they do should be in accord with the teachings and spirit of Jesus. Moving against the life of another human being is never in harmony with what God has revealed in Jesus. *In faithfulness to the Lord, disciples do not have guns to use against an attacker.* [emphasis added] Even when terrible inhumanities are being threatened or perpetrated, disciples refuse to become agents or advocates of violence. They cry out with victims. They intercede and pray against the powers of destruction. They may be called into actual accompaniment of victims, sharing their jeopardy, working at mediation, and joining with them in nonviolent resistance to those who victimize them. They seek the Spirit's guidance into creative initiatives that can show the judging love of God to those who move against others.”

“**Peaceable Community.** The peaceable call of Jesus Christ comes first of all to Christians in their life together in the church. The church is empowered to make visible the way of Jesus. The peacemaking efforts and witness it directs toward the wider society and world should have a credible base in peacemaking within the church. Therefore, the Church of the Brethren in congregations, districts, and denominational programs shall:

1. teach all members about the Brethren understanding that Jesus Christ calls us away from all reliance on violence and into active peacemaking;
2. teach about and work at conflict resolution and reconciliation in our families, congregations, and denomination;
3. instruct all members not to have guns for protection against other people;²²
4. advocate "the things that make for peace" (Luke 19:42), the ways of living that lead toward a future filled with blessing and harmonious relationships rather than with violence and destruction;
5. lay low the dividing walls of hostility (Eph. 2:14) because of racial, ethnic, religious, class, national, and other differences to live out the unity of the church as the body of Christ and the unity of humanity as created and loved by God;
6. train and upon invitation deploy Christian conciliation and peacemaking teams and nonviolent monitors in zones of conflict to dampen hostilities and to discourage violence and physical abuse;
7. work with churches located in areas of conflict to encourage teaching and training in nonviolence and conflict resolution so that churches may be agents of God's healing love; and
8. encourage the development of more effective nonviolent tactics for defense against war and tyranny”

Peacemaking: The Calling of God's People in History, 1991 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference

<http://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1991peacemaking.html>

"In the face of grave injustices, we are tempted to secure justice and peace through the barrel of a gun. Yet God did not choose to rule through coercion but through a cross. Our human understanding of what is most effective to secure peace and justice is overruled at times by the requirements of privileged status in the midst of poverty and injustice has often misled us to think of the gospel as an apolitical account of individual salvation. Instead, the good news enlists all followers of the Prince of Peace in the formation of a new global community where justice and peace prevail."

Children and Violence, 1999 Church of the Brethren Resolution

<http://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1999childrenviolence.html>

The Church of the Brethren is deeply concerned by the increased frequency and severity of school-related violence due to a lethal mix of factors, including:

- the pervasiveness of violence and violent images in our culture;
- our own passive acceptance of this culture of violence;
- the ease with which young people can acquire firearms;
- and our nation's readiness to resort to violence in the foreign and domestic arenas.

In light of these disturbing realities, we recommit ourselves to our heritage of nonviolence as modeled by the life and teachings of Jesus and our mission of continuing this vital work.

We call on congregations to teach peace and pursue it within their fellowship, and to take the lead in advocating for peace within their communities, nation and world. We also encourage congregations to actively approach school boards and other appropriate public policy agencies to request the establishment of school-based curricular instruction in conflict resolution, peace education, anger control and the tolerance of others.>

We call our members, especially the youth of the church, to turn away from the culture of violence in its many manifestations in our society and to live as people of peace. We encourage members, young and old, to refrain from playing violent video games of any kind, listening to music that promotes violence or hatred, or viewing movies or television shows where violence is glorified or sanitized.

In particular we reaffirm the 1978 Annual Conference Statement "Violence and the use of Firearms" in its call for elimination of all weapons used for human destruction. In addition we call for more effective gun control legislation, especially legislation that would protect our children from gun-related violence, and encourage our members to actively support such legislation.

In a society and world saturated with violence and violent images, we recommit ourselves to the challenge of the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:21 to, "*...not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*"