



December 19, 2012

**One in Grief, One in Hope**  
***Responding to Sandy Hook***

The church in Florida weeps with the families of Sandy Hook Elementary School and the community of Newtown, just as “Jesus wept” upon hearing of the death of his friend Lazarus. We grieve together for the children and their courageous teachers whose lives were taken from us like “Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.” Grief has made us all one; the people of Connecticut, the people of Florida, the people of the United States; people of faith, people of good will, people who choose no faith; we feel the same grief for those who were massacred. Sorrow has overcome our partisan voices. In heartache, our prayers rise up for comfort to the bereaved, eternal blessings for the innocent victims, and resolve that the unity we find at the gravesite becomes a common voice for well-being in our land.

We join interfaith partners and well-meaning citizens across the nation in seeking ways in which our society may intervene to prevent another mass shooting. There are many challenges in shaping public policy on gun violence. Individual rights have to be balanced with social responsibility. Our culture of personal freedom regularly entertains us with gratuitous violence. Access to proper mental health is limited or not available to many in society who need it. For far too many, mental health services are only available in prison after they are charged and convicted of a crime. The forces of political persuasion rally their numbers into divided camps around each of these components. We must go beyond partisanship now. Our unity begins in grief and it needs to be fulfilled in holistic solutions. We must make the effort; otherwise, we face a rising tide of “kill or be killed” desperation. The church prays for this greater unity in our society and pledges its support in the conversations that will bring it about.

As Christians, the scriptures calls us “to give an account of our hope – hope in the peace and reconciliation of the gospel – in this situation?”\* Within our own houses of worship, we must take up with intent and seriousness holy conversations on what it means to be disciples of the Prince of Peace in an age when random acts of mass violence can occur anywhere. We believe that God sent us a message “preaching peace by Jesus Christ--he is Lord of all” (Acts 10:36) which is for everyone. Lives lived well in peace and reconciliation with one another is the Creator’s desire for each and every human being. Yet safe towns and sacred places have been violated. What is our Christian witness? How do we understand our hope and act together in its light? In our families, in our churches, in our institutions, God summons us one and all to conversation on peace-making. In our common grief for Sandy Hook School, let us find our common calling confirmed to naming and acting on our hope. We call upon every pastor, minister and priest to take up this holy conversation in their own community of faith.

As Christian leaders of the church in Florida, we also offer special prayers and counsel for wisdom and courage to the elected officials of our state and public authorities charged with protecting the citizenry. They face many constituent and lobbyist pressures. Florida has been a champion of individual rights on gun ownership, yet a widespread belief exists in society that violence is justified in resolving everyday encounters. The intersection of violence in contact sports and media with the lack of effective mental



health services has contributed to making guns, as the ultimate means of violence, a leading cause of death in young people. Readily easy access to high-powered weapons no longer concerns issues of protection and hunting; such access also exacerbates the unacceptable philosophy of “kill or be killed”. Such philosophy is a form of despair. We must protect our children and youth from both guns and the despair that leads to their inappropriate use. We implore State leaders to re-consider gun laws in the larger social context that celebrates violence as entertainment and a mechanism for problem-solving.

In this holy season, we are reminded that in love for humanity God does the impossible with Mary, breaks the conceited heart, and lifts up the lowly. The angels proclaim to us the birth of a Savior who is Truth and Grace in human form. Although what we shall become is unknown, we are promised that we will be like him when is revealed in glory. This is the Christian vision of violence overcome and of peace established. To such peace, we commit our ministries.

Bishop Charles Leigh  
Apostolic Catholic Church  
President

Rev. Russell L. Meyer  
Executive Director  
Florida Council of Churches

Kent J. Siladi  
Conference Minister  
United Church of Christ in Florida

Kenneth H. Carter, Jr.  
Resident Bishop  
Florida Conference  
United Methodist Church

Reverend Dr. Nancy Kahaian  
Transitional Presbyter  
Tampa Bay Presbytery

Edward R. Benoway  
Bishop  
Florida-Bahamas Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Rt. Rev. Leo Frade  
Bishop  
Diocese of Southeast Florida  
The Episcopal Church

Amalie Ash  
Presbytery Administrator  
Presbytery of Tropical Florida

Daniel S. Williams  
Transitional Executive Presbyter/Stated Clerk  
Central Florida Presbytery

Juan Rodriguez  
Regional Minister  
Florida Disciples Regional Church

Additional signatures will appear on the web at [www.floridachurches.org/sandyhook](http://www.floridachurches.org/sandyhook).

*\* “An Open Letter to the Churches, and an invitation to Participate In Theological Reflection, on the Extent of Violence in 2012”. National Council of the Churches of Christ In the USA (Faith and Order Commission and Interfaith Relations Commission), December 15, 2012.*