

Let's Lift Restrictions on the CDC, Allowing Research into Gun Violence Epidemic

by Michael J. Readinger
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I JUST don't know anymore. Honestly. I. Just. Don't. Know. Anymore. I am genuinely afraid right now. What has happened to our society? The polarization and violence that is ripping us apart is not historically unique. It has happened before and we did ultimately move past it and return to a more civil environment. How can we recover this time?

As we paused to remember the anniversary of the Pulse Night Club tragedy in Orlando, we again faced an unthinkable act of horror with the Congressional baseball team shootings in Virginia. When will these acts of gun violence come to an end? Where is the outrage and the call to action? It seems that we have become desensitized to, and accepting of, this as a way of life.

In 2016, gun violence accounted for more than 15,000 deaths in the United States. We are literally and figuratively killing ourselves and it must stop. It is time for us to collectively raise our voices and call on Congress — yes, the most recent victims of this carnage — to take action to stop this senseless violence once and for all. We need common sense gun laws and we need them now. We are not calling for restrictions of people's second amendment rights. Let's just make it harder for those with a history of violence to acquire and use guns as weapons.

How can we make a difference? Here is a good place to start. While we are at UCC General Synod 31 in Baltimore, let's unite behind the Resolution of Witness that is being submitted by the UCC's Council for Health and Human Service Ministries (CHHSM), urging the recognition of gun violence as a public health emergency.

This resolution calls on the Congress to lift its gun-research restrictions on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). By allowing research on the increasing prevalence of gun violence and death, the CDC can make recommendations regarding gun safety, training and storage methods that will lead to a reduction in gun deaths.

Since 1996, Congress, in response to the National Rifle Association's lobbying efforts, has prevented the use of federal money to conduct research on gun violence generally, and on why our nation has five times the per capita rate of gun deaths per year than most European countries specifically.

In October 2015, a group of 110 U.S. Representatives called on leaders of the House to begin allowing scientific evidence into the debate on gun control. The American Medical Association officially added their support in June 2016, pledging to help overturn the ban on the CDC's research capabilities.

The United Church of Christ has a long history of leading the way on social justice issues and public health. Let's join this movement and assume a leadership position now. We can make a difference in the lives of all Americans, giving more of us a chance to live safely. Let's start now and unite in voice, spirit and action to work towards ending the rampant gun violence epidemic that is sweeping across our country. It is our moral imperative to do so.

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