

The Price of Freedom?

by Rev. James Moos

Executive Minister, Wider Church Ministries

Co-Executive, Global Ministries

On the evening of October 1st, a lone gunman opened fire on a crowd in Las Vegas, killing 58 concertgoers and injuring another 546 in the deadliest mass shooting in modern American history. In the aftermath, commentator Bill O'Reilly declared the carnage to be "the price of freedom." He further stated that "even the loons" have the right to bear arms under the Second Amendment to the Constitution.

Ordinary people doing ordinary things are the most frequent victims of mass shootings. Parishioners in Virginia gather for a prayer service: 9 are killed. Elementary school children and teachers in Connecticut go off for another day in school: 26 never make it back home. People in Florida have a night out on the town: 49 end up dead. A congregation gathers for worship in Texas: 26 lives end. Is this the freedom you celebrate, Mr. O'Reilly?

It's well known that the United States has the highest rate of gun ownership in the world, with 100 guns per every 101 residents; no other country even comes close. The National Rifle Association has long claimed that increased gun ownership does not lead to more gun violence, but the evidence indicates otherwise. In the largest study of its kind covering 30 years of data, the Boston University School of Public Health concludes that there is a direct correlation between levels of gun ownership and firearms violence: the more guns per capita, the more gun deaths occur.

Even so, the debate over restrictions of gun ownership is moribund, the White House declaring in the wake of the Las Vegas shooting that it wasn't the right time to debate gun laws; the right time never seems to come. There was some movement toward banning the "bump-stock" attachment that turned the Las Vegas shooter's semi-automatic assault rifles into fully automatic ones, but they are still legal and there are currently no steps being taken to outlaw them.

Typically, gun rights advocates quote only the second half of the Second Amendment: "[...] the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." The first half of the Amendment gives context to those familiar

words: “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free state..” A well-regulated militia is, in our day, the National Guard; the dangerous fringe elements of society that Mr. O’Reilly believes should have unfettered access to guns are anything but necessary to the security of a free state.

In 1941 as World War II raged and the U.S. contemplated entry, President Roosevelt gave his famous “Four Freedoms” speech, the fourth being freedom from fear. As long as parents must worry about the safety of children in school, as long as not even a church sanctuary is a safe space, we do not enjoy that freedom. Mass shootings aren’t the price of freedom, they are the cost of our society’s unwillingness to come to terms with its gun obsession.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. James Moos is Executive Minister, Wider Church Ministries and Co-Executive, Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ.

LEARN

ucc.org/justice

DONATE

ucc.org/donate

ARCHIVE

WJ
f

bit.ly/witness4justice

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.