



Our Words and Actions Are Incongruent

Bentley deBardelaben Phillips

Executive for Administration and Communications, Justice & Local Church Ministries

What lessons are we hoping to teach our children when, day after day, they are confronted with terror and trauma-inducing events conveying that human life is not precious, despite adults saying it is?

Daily children are bombarded by images of fear, violence, and death in the news on their screens and in the life around them, sadly often as a result gun violence.

In many children's sermons, church leaders tell children that they are precious in God's sight and that God loves them unconditionally. Often in our schools, we educate children about principles of sharing, being selfless, and the "golden rule." And in many of our homes, children experience being the center of the universe at some time or another.

We do all of these things to teach and reinforce their value in society, yet when it comes to reducing gun violence in the places and spaces they dwell, it feels as if we—society generally, adults especially—are ignoring or settling for ineffectiveness about the violence they face. In short, our words and actions as a society are not in alignment when it comes to keeping children's precious lives safe.

Instead it has become a far too familiar scene: our children and youth needing grief counseling due to the loss of a classmate or family member by gun violence. According to Wikipedia, "As of October 31, 2019, 370 mass shootings have occurred in 2019 that fit the inclusion criteria of this article. This averages 1.22 mass shootings per day. In these shootings, 1,466 people were injured and 441 died, for a total of 1,907 victims."

Friends, this ought not be the case! Images of "sugar plums and fairies," "good tidings and good cheer" would be more appropriate for children to be getting worked up about during the holiday season.

Many of our politicians have refused to step up and lead from a place of valuing children's lives. Job security and greed seem to be more important than keeping

children safe. The Second Amendment has become the gold standard to do nothing, especially since the context is quite different today than it was during the founding of the republic. I'm unable to understand why any weapon of war is bought, sold, or traded outside of the military, especially now that they have been used in many mass shootings in the U.S.

I'm pleading for the right of children and youth to be able to go to school, places of worship, stores, dinner, or a movie and to be as safe as possible from gun violence.

Instead of valuing the Second Amendment over the lives of our children, might we frame our best thinking around the Ten Commandments? The sixth commandment instructs us not to unlawfully kill. More importantly, the first commandment emphatically declares, "Do not worship any other gods (false idols) before me." Perhaps the Second Amendment has become a false idol, more precious to our society than all children who are created in God's image.

Until we accept this value, we are destined to see more loss of life in the headlines when instead, we ought to be celebrating their genius, their brilliance, their laughter, and their light. Then, and only then, our words and our actions will be faithfully congruent.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bentley deBardelaben Phillips is Executive for Administration and Communications, Justice & Local Church Ministries, for the United Church of Christ.

LEARN ucc.org/justice

DONATE ucc.org/donate

ARCHIVE
WFJ 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.