



## Wayzata Community Church Statement of Violence

Violence touches all of us. Its roots are deep, and entangled around issues such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religious beliefs and economics among others. Violence pervades our past, shapes our present reality and threatens our future. Violence is not far removed from our lives. It is very close to home, indeed it is often in our homes, our schools, and our communities.

Fundamentally, as Christians, we understand violence against any individual, regardless of their ethnicity, creed or gender, to be a matter of morality. Violence breaks faith with the belief that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. (Genesis 1: 26-27) Therefore, violence against anyone is violence against God.

Recently we have seen an increase in gun violence in our nation and community. We believe this is a matter of moral conscience, not politics. It's about our children and what some have called a 'national epidemic' of gun violence.

When thinking about the problem of violence, Christian faith is both idealistic and realistic. A central text is the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew's gospel, where Jesus instructs his followers to bear violence rather than inflict it. Among His opening beatitudes is the blessing of peacemakers for they will be called "*children of God.*" (Matthew 5:9)

*'You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.... 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you....'* (Matthew 5:38-39, 43-44).

We hold these texts as a call to followers of Jesus into non-violent action. Jesus recognized creative and effective ways of confronting evil, other than responding in-kind. In Christ's time the back of one's hand was used exclusively by "superiors" to punish persons of lower status, such as servants or slaves. When the abused turned the other cheek in resistance, the abuser is forced to recognize the humanity of the other.

Jesus' life also reinforces the argument for nonviolence. Christ's saving love came through his willingness to speak and act for justice and peace, eventually giving his life for the message of love that grounded his ministry.

The gospel calls on each of us to engage in and wrestle with the work of Jesus, take up the cause of peace, and ensure that the voices of people of faith are present in the development of solutions to prevent violence.