



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Greetings in the precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As Bishop of the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church, I want to express my wholehearted support for the initiative to institute a background check on all gun sales in the State of Maine.

Our United Methodist General Conference voted overwhelmingly to support a resolution that is calling on us to end gun violence. The resolution from General Conference reminds us of Jesus' call to his followers to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9), which echoes God's dreams for peace for all of creation as expressed in Micah 4:1-4. Furthermore, the resolution suggests that one way we prevent gun violence is "for United Methodist congregations to advocate at the local and national level for laws that prevent or reduce gun violence. One of those measures includes universal background checks on all gun purchases."

<http://calms2016.umc.org/Text.aspx?mode=Petition&Number=452>.

United Methodists have a unique opportunity — indeed a responsibility — to work toward reducing gun violence. On Election Day 2016, residents of Maine will be able to vote by referendum in support of background checks. The Maine Background Check Initiative, which is supported by 80 percent of Maine voters, would require criminal background checks for all gun sales in the state, with reasonable exceptions for family, hunting and self-defense. Currently in Maine, criminal background checks are only required for gun sales at licensed dealers. That means that anyone, including people with criminal backgrounds, can easily buy guns anonymously from unlicensed sellers — including at gun shows and from strangers they meet online. The Background Check Initiative would close this loophole by requiring criminal background checks for gun sales in Maine (<http://responsiblemaine.org/>).

Research shows that background checks save lives. In the 18 states that require background checks on all gun sales, there has been a significant decreases in violent crime, including:

- 48 percent fewer law enforcement officers killed with handguns
- 46 percent fewer women shot to death by intimate partners
- 48 percent fewer gun suicides

I encourage the efforts of United Methodist leaders and congregations in Maine, as they work with The General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church, with the Maine Council of Churches, and with other faith groups on the background check initiative. Through our preaching, Bible Study, literature, education, conversation and sharing, we can and should be peacemakers in our world which is too often filled with violence. Too many times, we are reminded of the easy accessibility and of the lethality of guns as we read reports of mass shootings in Orlando, Charleston, and Newtown, as we read about deaths in Chicago, or even as we read about a recent murder suicide in Dexter, Maine. Guns need to become less accessible to people who may harm themselves or others. Let us each do our part to help make this happen.

In Christ's love,

Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar

"If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation."

II Cor. 5:17