

Opinion

Our Turn: Liz Lerner Maclay et al.: A religious movement against guns

By Liz Lerner Maclay et al.

Posted May 4, 2018 at 5:58 PM

The day before the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, a broad, interfaith group of Rhode Island clergy met to plan worship services and action for responsible gun safety legislation throughout Rhode Island. Events the next day in Florida only strengthened our motivation and our congregations.

Together, we are united in our faith and commitment to seeing this done, now, to safeguard our children, our various houses of worship, and all of the citizens of our state. We call for the passage of the Assault Weapons Ban of 2018, the Safe Schools Act of 2018, and the High Capacity Magazine Ban, in this legislative session.

For us, these laws are real-world applications of an age-old Biblical precept found in Isaiah 2:4: “And God shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

This comes from a time when military weaponry was only available for war, not for individuals and private citizens to employ upon each other. Firearms used for war and violence — not shotguns and rifles intended for hunting and sport — need to be banned.

On Mother’s Day weekend, from next Friday to Sunday, across our various faiths, and in the spirit of Isaiah’s command, we will turn our swords into plowshares. In these worship services, a number of us will re-dedicate disabled firearms for a new purpose, then donate them to artists, who will, in turn, transform them into art and gardening tools. After the services, our congregants

will write letters and postcards to our legislators in support of gun safety legislation. Together, on the afternoon of Tuesday, May 15, we will deliver our messages to the State House.

Join us. To do this on Mother's Day weekend will be poignant and hard and right, in honor of all the parents, and all the children, lost to gun violence.

We are grateful for the strong support and advice of the Providence Police Department, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Gun Violence and the Rhode Island chapter of Moms Demand Action. Most of all, we are grateful for each other and for this strong and deep community of faith that is so unwaveringly committed to this goal: we will not be a state that provisions itself for mass murder, that preys upon any of our people, least of all our children, with assault weapons to empower the disgruntled, the vengeful, the mentally ill, or anyone at all. We do not want, and will not accept, armed educators, armed and armored classrooms in universities and colleges, armed student bodies, or any other proposal that further normalizes and enshrines a ubiquitous culture of guns.

We believe in promoting and facilitating public health and safety through sensible gun safety measures. This is not complicated. Guns and schools must be mutually exclusive. Civilians have no reason to own or possess an assault weapon, nor do they have any reason for a high capacity magazine. This is simply not negotiable. Work together with us to pass reasonable gun safety legislation so that our children, and all people in Rhode Island, will not only feel safe, but be safe.

The Rev. Liz Lerner Maclay is minister of the First Unitarian Church in Providence. This piece was also signed by the Rev. Kurt A. Walker, of Lincoln; the Rev. Jamie Washam, minister of the First Baptist Church in America; Rabbi Howard Voss-Altman, senior rabbi of Temple Beth-El; and Abdelnasser Hussein, principal of the Islamic School of Rhode Island.