

**Statement of the Religious Leaders Council of Greater Philadelphia  
on Illegal Possession of Guns  
(Adopted March 2012)**

We are religious leaders of many faith traditions, and we hold in common the sanctity of human life proclaimed by God. We believe violence between individuals is an offense against God and a rejection of God's will. We are dismayed by the violence that devastates so many individuals, families, and neighborhoods throughout the Philadelphia area.

While there are many factors contributing to gun violence, and recognizing that gun ownership is generally accepted in our society, we regard the illegal sale, illegal possession and illegal use of firearms as one of the most important contributors to that violence and one of our most serious social and spiritual challenges. We look to ourselves, our religious institutions and all people of faith to seek ways to diminish violence brought on by illegal sale, illegal possession and illegal use of firearms and to take active roles in ending gun violence.

Above all, we are not content that this statement exists only as a record of - or even as an expression of - our views. Many of our religious and civic institutions have made powerful statements in the past decrying the level of gun violence and calling for legislative and cultural changes to reduce it. Yet our nation, and especially our city, continues to suffer from unacceptable levels of gun violence. Becoming desensitized to the intolerable numbers injured and killed regularly by illegally owned guns is a spiritual problem. Therefore, we fervently hope this statement will serve as a catalyst to prayer and action by the Greater Philadelphia religious community to stop the carnage on our streets. Last year, 244 individuals in Philadelphia alone were killed by gun violence, most from the use of illegally-owned guns. Even one is too many. It is time to act.

We therefore:

1. Encourage people of faith in the Greater Philadelphia area to form coalitions with one another across the lines that divide us, and work to reduce the illegal sale, illegal possession and illegal use of firearms.
2. Commit to bringing this issue of critical concern back to our own communities for dialogue and action at regional gatherings, and encourage preaching and prayer in our local houses of worship.
3. Support religious communities that engage in symbolic actions that bear witness to the terrible consequences of violence and to the potential of peacemaking.
4. Call on houses of worship, schools, and other organizations to recognize and become Zones of Peace, carrying out projects designed to reduce the root causes of violence in their own neighborhoods. ([www.interfaithcenterpa.org](http://www.interfaithcenterpa.org), Zones of Peace).
5. Invite people to join us, the members of the Religious Leaders Council, in pledging to be an instrument of God's peace, to make their homes and neighborhoods zones of peace, free from fear, filled with respect, and marked by deeds of kindness, and to work against the illegal sale, illegal possession and illegal use of firearms.

We solemnly commit to these undertakings in the name of the One we worship, and pledge ourselves to prayer and action to protect the lives of all residents of Greater Philadelphia and work against the proliferation of illegally-owned guns.