



HONPA HONGWANJI MISSION OF HAWAII

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*Joint statement by Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii's
Office of the Bishop and Committee on Social Concerns on*

Gun Violence and Mass Shootings

We extend our deepest sympathies and condolences to the victims of the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, their families, and the entire school community. As senseless gun violence continues to claim thousands of lives annually in the United States and cause untold grief and suffering, we are moved to contribute perspectives on this critical issue as Buddhists and as followers of the Jodo Shinshu faith tradition.

We begin by acknowledging our necessarily limited and imperfect understanding. Like any institution or individual in a position to address gun violence even indirectly, we need guidance. In Buddhism, we seek guidance from the Buddha, the Dharma (teachings), and the Sangha (our extended community of fellow travelers). We hereby share some of the guidance we find for addressing the issue of gun violence and offer some recommended actions.

Causes and conditions. The Buddha taught that everything that exists and occurs arises from prior causes and conditions. Acts of gun violence arise out of complex sets of causes and conditions rather than from some inexplicable evil. This concept gives hope that with right understanding and action, we can affect causes and conditions in ways that will reduce gun violence.

We are encouraged by the commitment and initiative of young students across the country who are insisting that our government institutions address the crisis of gun violence. Their actions are already creating conditions more favorable to enacting sensible and responsible restrictions. May they find the guidance and strength they need to maintain poise, eloquence, and determination in pursuit of change.

Right understanding. The Noble Eightfold Path is the Buddha's prescription for liberation from suffering, and right understanding is one of the eight components. We must seek to understand why the epidemic of gun violence in the United States

is occurring. To this end, we support lifting restrictions that prevent the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from studying gun violence. We urge Congress to provide funding for the CDC to do this work.

The Middle Path. A related Buddhist teaching that is likewise helpful to consideration of gun violence and how our society might respond is the Middle Path. This is a path that avoids extremes, allowing a dispassionate vantage point from which to better observe opposing sides and grow our understanding. Between extremes of absolute control and absolute freedom lies a middle path of practical reality.

A convincing case may be made that the United States has strayed from the middle path when it comes to guns, veering to an extreme of permissiveness. We support pursuing corrective measures by our elected representatives and other officials to restore balance. Among such measures may be reenacting a ban on assault rifles, raising the age minimums for gun purchases, strengthening background checks, and removing loopholes that allow gun sellers and buyers to bypass checks. Gun laws in the state of Hawaii provide good examples in some areas.

While sensible gun regulations are a key element of addressing gun violence in this country and should be pursued immediately, addressing root causes is fundamental to achieving lasting peace in our communities.

Amida Buddha's Wisdom and Compassion & thoughts and actions. The roots of our actions are in our thoughts. If our minds are consumed with thoughts and feelings of alienation, rejection, anger, and misguided notions of gender and power, our actions may be antisocial and possibly violent. Conversely, if our minds are awakened to the oneness of existence and the all embracing Wisdom and Compassion of Amida Buddha, our mental orientation is one of gratitude, appreciation, acceptance, and helping. In this case, there is less chance of violent thoughts taking root and being expressed in actions.

Interconnectedness. Buddhism teaches that we are all connected to each other through a vast web of connections. This means that each one of us can help to bring about peace through our thoughts, words, and actions wherever we may be — for example, our schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods. It is up to us to observe where the societal net is fraying and where individuals may perceive that their connection has been lost. In these cases, we can reach out to those who are suffering. Through our smile, kind words, deep listening, and/or counsel, we can help manifest the compassion that embraces them.

Deep self-reflection and deeper insight. Let us all try to connect with people who are feeling rejected, ignored, or bullied. Let us all reflect upon our attachment to the "rightness" of our views and seek to understand other points of view. Let us all help each other adjust to change in a constantly changing world. Let us all strive to strengthen our society by better balancing freedom with responsibility. Guided by deeper insight, let us all improve our communities.

Gomonshu Kojun Ohtani is the spiritual head of our Jodo Shinshu tradition. On the final day of a series of services in 2017 marking his accession to the role, the new Gomonshu said, "The sense of security of being embraced in the Buddha's compassion becomes the support in our daily life and empowers us to become actively engaged in society." It is in this spirit that we offer this statement on gun violence.

Namo Amida Butsu

Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii is the umbrella organization for Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in the islands. Our mission is to share the living Teachings of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism so that all beings may enjoy lives of harmony, peace, and gratitude.