

Breaking the cycle of gun violence

Guest post by [Henry Johnson](#)

September 12, 2016

(This is a guest post from Hank Johnson, a local pastor and friend in the city of Harrisburg. You can follow him on twitter [@hank259](#)).

Pastor Hank Johnson

Away from home, I woke up to a series of texts from my wife a few weeks ago, highlighting what looked to be an overnight scene of gun violence. Increasing gun violence is our present national reality (30,000 deaths from firearms each year; 30 people murdered by guns each day^[1]). It is a seemingly everyday nightmare. Here in Harrisburg our nightmare was recently magnified by the tragic death of young Earl “Shaleek” Pinckney^[2], which has left us with opposing tales.^[3]

In 2014, our murder rate more than doubled Philadelphia’s.^[4] According to the UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) two-thirds of U.S. homicides occur due to firearms. Here in Harrisburg, 67% might be our “best” year...ever.

On a personal level, I have lost family members to gun violence – a coup d’état, assassinations, and inevitably a decade plus generation(s) stealing Civil War(s) in Liberia. I have lost friends to gun violence in Philadelphia. I have wept with families of acquaintances we’ve buried together due to suicides.

In ministry here in Harrisburg, in the past five years, our congregation has lost eight sons—all murdered in cold blood.^[5] Gun violence is a national nightmare, experienced locally, and felt personally for so many of us. It should be a Civil Rights issue of our day.

Now for some, when we talk about gun violence (they choose to only focus on urban homicides and not suburban/rural suicides). However, even more damaging is the false critique that we need to address our own inner-city violence instead of police violence. “What about black on black crime?” is their refrain. This is damaging because it ignores that people in our community are actually leading many anti-crime organizations and initiatives^[6]. It also ignores that crime isn’t about skin color but proximity (i.e. some quick FBI stats on “white on white” crime^[7]). So supporting say #BlackLivesMatter and addressing police brutality and violence is not mutually exclusive to trying to stop all senseless gun violence.

One way we are working to break the cycle is by partnering with other faith groups here in the Harrisburg region to take a more active membership in the Harrisburg chapter of Heeding God’s Call (<http://heedinggodscall.org/content/about-us>). Our Sr. Pastor Woody Dalton sits on the National Board, and I attend and sometimes help lead as many of the prayer vigils for sisters and brothers who are victims to

gun violence here in the city. This has also led us to “lobby” local and Washington D.C. politicians to help overturn loose gun laws that are directly leading to more death in our families and on our streets.

We fight gun violence because we have chosen to heed the advice to God’s people in the Pentateuch (choose life *Deut. 30:19*) while centering and submitting to Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. If Christ is indeed the One who has come to give abundant life, we believe that working to curb and end gun violence and giving more of our kin the chance to breathe and walk, and live and love – is a journey we have to take and a challenge we have to meet.

Choose life. Walk in the light of Christ the Son, the Author and Finisher of our Faith. And by the Spirit’s help and work, we can all please God our Father, by working for life over death in this our country, our states, and our homes.

[1] http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr64/nvsr64_02.pdf

[2] http://www.pennlive.com/news/2016/08/harrisburg_police_shoot_man_kn.html

[3] http://www.pennlive.com/news/2016/08/police_shooting_harrisburg_ear.html

[4] <http://www.city-data.com/crime/crime-Harrisburg-Pennsylvania.html> and
<http://www.city-data.com/city/Philadelphia-Pennsylvania.html>

[5] <http://www.inpart.org/feature/peacemakers>

[6] <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/06/opinion/black-activists-dont-ignore-crime.html?smid=nytcore-iphone-share&smprod=nytcore-iphone&r=1>

[7] <http://usuncut.com/black-lives-matter/black-on-black-crime/>