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Life or Death

Many families in the United States (U.S.) own guns because they are fearful of their surroundings, and they want to feel as if they are protected. As a result, many households have guns in their possession. Whereas they are usually used for recreational purposes such as hunting, often times they end up being used for other purposes. Too often they are left in places of easy access so that criminals and young children end up with a gun in their hand.

Unfortunately, this leads to both unintentional deaths and intentional deaths such as suicides (“Guns in the Home”). Whereas one should be able to have a gun for recreational purposes, there should be stricter regulations as well as background checks when purchasing a gun, which is made possible through the use of technology. We, as Christians, also need to realize that our hope and trust should lie in God, not our material needs. By doing this, crime rates have the potential to decrease, and homes can be made safer.

In the United States, nearly thirty-five percent of all homes own at least one firearm, and almost one out of every four homes owns a handgun (“Factsheet: Guns in the Home”). The National Rifle Association (NRA) claims that owning a gun will make your home safer, but public health research has shown that “the person most likely to shoot you or a family member with a gun already has the keys to your house” (“Guns in the Home”). Along with that, the U.S. Bureau of Justice statistics studies estimates that “there is an average of about 108,000 defensive uses of guns each year compared to about one million crimes committed with guns” (“Factsheets: Guns in The Home”).

Besides hunting, the reason most people own a gun is so that they feel they are then able to protect themselves. Usually a gun does not end up being used for that purpose. In households with guns, the homicide and suicide rates are higher (“Factsheets: Guns in the Home”). In fact, the risk of suicide increases by nearly five times (“Guns in the Home”). Accidental shootings are also a negative result to having a hand gun in the house. Too often adults leave a handgun loaded in areas where children can easily get a hold of them. “The unintentional firearm-related death rate for children ages one to fourteen years old is *nine* times higher in the U.S. than in the twenty- five other countries combined” (“Guns in the Home”). These numbers show just how dangerous guns in the home can be without the correct precautions.

Guns are also often stolen. “Surveys on gun owners suggest that approximately 500,000 guns are stolen each year from private citizens. In addition, in 1998 and 1999, more than 27,000 firearms were reportedly stolen from licensed gun dealers” (“Factsheet: Guns in the Home”). These guns often end up in the hands of criminals. Researchers found that “in places with the most comprehensive regulation of firearm sales, crime guns were most likely to have first been sold out of state” (Webster “The Importance of”). The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) started a combined effort with cities all over the country to trace the origins of all guns used by criminals. Through the data they find, officials believe questions will be answered which would help keep guns out of the hands of criminals (Webster “The Importance of”).

Making it mandatory for you to report if your gun has been stolen would be helpful, too (“Factsheet: Stolen Guns”). Maryland has adopted a couple of laws that places “limits on handgun sales to one per month, handgun registration, and a requirement that a private handgun sellers must ensure that the prospective buyers pass the same criminal background check required of licensed dealers” (“Factsheet: Stolen Guns”). Pittsburgh is also trying to pass a law

which would “require anyone whose gun is lost or stolen in the city to tell police within twenty-four hours or potentially face a \$500 fine. Failure to report the loss of a second gun would result in a \$1000 fine with the possibility of ninety days in jail” (Webster “How Cities Can”).

Despite such high death rates due to guns, guns still happen to be a consumer product that goes virtually unregulated. According to Consumer Federation of America Foundation (CFAF) “regulating guns as consumer products is the most effective way to reduce gun deaths, injuries, and crimes in America” (“Licensing and Registration”). Unfortunately, the Congress has forbidden the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission, which has the right to control the safety of most other products in your house, to have authority over firearms (“Guns in the Home”). The Firearms Safety and Consumer Protection Act is in the process of passing a law which “would subject the gun industry to the same safety standards as virtually all other products sold in America” (“To Regulate the Manufacture”). It makes no sense that guns cannot be regulated for health and safety, especially because in America, guns are the second-leading cause of product-related death (“To Regulate the Manufacture”).

Since there does not seem to be any changes to solve such a drastic problem, we could use technology. The Bloomberg School of Public Health says that we need to be educating our researchers, policy makers, and the public of the benefits to using personalized guns (Webster, “How Cities Can”). “Personalized guns are designed to prevent shootings, both intentional and unintentional, by children and other unauthorized users. A 2003 study analyzing data from seven years of unintended firearm deaths or deaths of undetermined intent found that twenty-seven percent of the deaths could have been prevented by a personalized gun” (“Personalized Firearms”). These guns, also called “smart guns,” would use fingerprint recognition devices or locking mechanisms that would require a personal code, therefore making it impossible for

anyone but the person who owns it to shoot it (Webster “How Cities Can”). With the use of these guns it would not only help with unintentional shootings but it would also make it near pointless for someone to steal a gun because they would not be able to use it.

As Christians, it is important for us to live our lives the way the Bible tells us. Too often we conform to what the world wants us to be and give into fear. Zephaniah 3:17 reminds us that “the Lord your God is with us, and He is mighty to save.” Psalms 44:6-7 gives us hope that God will always be there for us, “I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; but you give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame” (NIV Study Bible). Jesus’s lessons in the New Testament also encourage a life of peace. Luke 27-28 says, “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (NIV Study Bible). 1 Peter 3:8-9 adds, “Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessings, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing” (NIV Study Bible).

As Anabaptists, and Christians, we are clearly called to live peaceful lives. Some may interpret this to mean that we do not raise a gun, but others will believe that it goes way beyond that. A realization needs to be made that violence is not the way to solve conflict. It has been proved in our history that nonviolence works, so why can we not strive for it now? If you want your problems to be solved you must first take the time to figure what the problem is. You must also realize no matter the size of your ‘problem,’ fighting, whether verbally or physically will not solve it. Listening and talking your problems out on the other hand, will.

In the United States people own guns for recreational purposes and to protect themselves from harm. Unfortunately, they are not always used for these purposes. Too often people end up

killing others, even themselves, either unintentionally or intentionally. By having both stricter regulations, better background checks, and “smart” guns there is the potential for decreasing gun deaths in the home.

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