



Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii

HEADQUARTERS UPDATE

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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

March 14, 2018

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 deep self-reflection, let us all work to bring well-being and peace to 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.

[http://hongwanjihawaii.com/blog/2018/03/14/statement-gun-violence/.](http://hongwanjihawaii.com/blog/2018/03/14/statement-gun-violence/)

JINJI – MINISTERIAL ASSIGNMENTS

- **REV. SHINGO FURUSAWA**, currently serving at Honokaa Hongwanji Mission as its Resident Minister as well as Kamuela Hongwanji Mission, Kohala Hongwanji Mission, and Paauilo Hongwanji Mission as their Oversee Minister, will be assigned to HQ as the Office of Buddhist Education Assistant as of April 1, 2018. Further, as of July 15, 2018, Rev. Furusawa will continue to be OBE Assistant at Headquarters half-time, and half-time assigned to Honpa Hongwanji Hawaii Betsuin as an Associate Minister.
- **REV. KAZUNORI TAKAHASHI**, currently serving at Lihue Hongwanji Mission as its Resident Minister, will be assigned to HQ as the Executive Assistant to the Bishop as of July 1, 2018.
- **REV. ARTHUR KAUFMANN**, currently serving at Honpa Hongwanji Hawaii Betsuin as its Associate Minister, will be assigned to Lihue Hongwanji Mission as its Resident Minister as of July 15, 2018.

ALL BUDDHIST GATHERING 2018

Submitted by Pieper Toyama

On March 10, fifty participants representing 24 Buddhist denominations and groups from across the state gathered at the Pacific Buddhist Academy to share and discuss their challenges. Included were special participants from New Mexico and Uganda, Africa. This historic event was the inspiration of Bishop Eric Matsumoto. Two years ago, he shared with me his dream of assembling representatives of all of the Buddhist denominations in Hawaii, and by partnering with BDK Hawaii, he realized his dream on March 10.



This historic event seemed to be a natural step in the Hongwanji's long history of working to bring together the various Buddhist denominations in Hawaii. In 1929, inspired by His Eminence Tai Hsu, a Chinese Abbot of the Mahayana School, Bishop Imamura inaugurated the Hawaiian Branch of the International Buddhist Institute. One of the aims of the Hawaiian branch was to "cooperate with all other Buddhist societies irrespective of sect or school in any undertaking that will directly or indirectly reform the thought and therefore the attitude of mankind toward the problems of life."

In 1948, the 15th Annual Territorial Conference of the YBA passed a resolution that sought the U.S. Army's recognition of the Buddhist religion. The resolution led to the U. S. Army's acceptance of the Buddhism. In 1950, at the World Buddhist Conference in Burma, Sunao Miyabara of the Hawaii YBA led the successful effort to have the Dharmachakra, the Dharma Wheel, become the official international, world-wide symbol of Buddhism. It was subsequently adopted by the Army and from then on marked the graves of all Buddhist veterans.

Through these efforts led by the Hongwanji, Buddhism came to be "recognized as an accepted part of America's religious mosaic."

March 10 was another step to insure the vitality of Buddhism in our island state to address "the problems of life." Dr. George Tanabe spoke of the challenges facing Buddhism in Hawaii and suggested pathways to

energize our efforts. The highlight of the day was the breakout groups in which individuals representing different Buddhist traditions discussed how each was addressing the future. For me it was remarkable to see the theme of the gathering, "Unity in Diversity," come so alive in the discussions. We were all so different and yet so very much alike. It was refreshing and nurturing to have witnessed the spirit of the group.

To seal the theme in the minds and hearts of the participants, we ended the day with the various denominations singing and reciting the Ti Sarana, the Three Treasures, according to their tradition and practices. It was truly a day to embrace Unity in Diversity.

PAT MASTERS PRESENTS HER BOOK "SEARCHING FOR MARY FOSTER" AT PBA

Patricia Masters, a longtime friend of Pacific Buddhist Academy and Buddhists around the world, was honored at an event hosted by PBA last weekend for her book, *Searching for Mary Foster*.

Mary Foster was a 19th-century Native Hawaiian Buddhist, philanthropist, and social activist whose history intertwines with that of Honpa Hongwanji Mission in Hawai'i (HHMH).

About 80 attendees including HHMH Bishop Eric Matsumoto, former Bishop Rev. Yoshiaki Fujitani, and Maya Kasandra Soetoro-Ng, President Barack Obama's sister, joined Pat for a book signing that also featured a discussion about Pat's interest in Mary Foster and a Q&A for the audience.

Pat Masters earned her Master's degree in Asian Religions from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and a PhD in Political Theory and Philosophy at the University of Hawai'i.

Pat taught Buddhist Studies in India and Japan for 20 years. She was ordained as a Buddhist nun in India in Bodh Gaya in the Burmese tradition and her sangha is based in Kathmandu, Nepal, Sagaing Hills and Rangoon, Burma. She also created a Buddhist Studies program in Kyoto, Japan.

Pat's many achievements include serving as President of the Hawaii Association of International Buddhists; teacher of meditation for Vipassana Hawaii and Bodhi Tree Meditation Center; and Associate Director of Student Equity, Excellence, and Diversity at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. She has over 40 years of meditation experience in Vipassana, Zen, and Tantric forms of Buddhism.

Searching for Mary Foster was published by the American Buddhist Study Center in New York in partnership with the Buddhist Study Center in Honolulu. It is available for purchase by writing Pua888@yahoo.com.

(By Rüdiger Rückmann, Pacific Buddhist Academy Director of Advancement)

