



# Heeding God's Call A Gathering on Peace

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **DEL VAL FAITH LEADERS MET WITH PROPRIETOR OF COLOSIMO'S GUN CENTER; SOUGHT COLLABORATION ON ILLEGAL GUNS**

#### **Faith Leaders, Called on Gun Seller to Take Historic Collaborative Step to Reduce Flow of Handguns to Streets, Encountered Receptivity**

**Philadelphia:** A delegation of Delaware Valley faith leaders met on December 18, 2008, with James Colosimo, proprietor of Colosimo's Gun Center, on Spring Garden Street in Philadelphia. The delegation was made up of the supporters of "Heeding God's Call, A Gathering on Peace", which will take place in Philadelphia between January 13 and 17, 2009 (see <http://www.peacegathering2009.org/>).

Philadelphia and the Delaware Valley are beset by gun violence that devastates families, neighborhoods and cities. Gun crime and violence are fueled by the illegal trade that moves handguns from legal sale at PA gun stores to illegal street sale. Straw buying is the linchpin of this illegal trade, whereby stand-ins make bulk handgun purchases for gun traffickers.

The faith leaders requested the meeting with Mr. Colosimo to express their heart-felt views on this ongoing handgun carnage that devastates cities and towns in the region and across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and entire country, and, especially, to seek the adoption by Colosimo's Gun Center of a 'code of conduct,' identical to the Responsible Firearms Partnership Agreement between Wal-Mart, America's #1 gun seller and the Mayors Against Illegal Guns Coalition (see <http://www.mayorsagainstilllegalguns.org/html/partnership/partnership.shtml>).

Reverend Isaac Miller, Pastor of the Church of the Advocate in North Philadelphia, expressed the view, shared by his colleagues in the delegation, that there is need for the faith community to take a leading role in acting to seek solutions to the prevalence of gun violence, and that the culminating Saturday (January 17) Program of Heeding God's Call, represents an encouraging start.

The Saturday program "Heading God's Call" will begin with a morning of prayer, education and action at ten churches, synagogues and mosques. Forty faith communities are collaborating in the planning of these events, which are open to the public. Later, morning program participants will be joined by many others, for an inter-faith service at a large centrally-located church. Participants will include 500 or more delegates at the preceding four days of "Heeding God's Call" and community organizations from across the Delaware Valley. They will then march from this church to Colosimo's Gun Center to either celebrate adoption of the "code of conduct", or to demand in dramatic fashion that Colosimo's and every gun shop in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania adopt the "code" to diminish the illegal hand gun trafficking that fuels gun crime and violence. (see <http://www.peacegathering2009.org/saturday-witness/take-action>).

Rev. Miller said: "Too many of us as pastors have buried too many young people over these last few years. Too many families--mothers, sisters, brothers, grandparents of both victims and perpetrators--have had hearts broken by grief. It is time for those who are part of communities of faith to say 'enough!' It is time for all of us to reach out to say that this deadly madness must end."

"It's fair to say," said Rt. Rev. Allen Bartlett, Assisting Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Philadelphia, "we believe progress may well have been made at our meeting. It is clear to us it would not be burdensome

for Colosimo's Gun Center to adopt the code of conduct we presented. After all, Mr. Colosimo claims his current procedures approach compliance with the code. We believe that if he signs on, it will warn away straw buyers and encourage his fellow gun dealers to join this effort to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people."

Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell, Regional Director, Pennsylvania Council, Union for Reform Judaism, said: "We're looking to create some partnerships between some unlikely partners, clergy and gun shop owners, and Mr. Colosimo seemed cognizant of the important role he can play in diminishing the flow of handguns to Philadelphia's streets by adopting our code. We emphasized the historic nature of such a benign undertaking and assured him Philadelphians will join him in celebration if he his adopts the code. He seemed genuinely receptive."

It has proven exasperatingly difficult to get the Pennsylvania Legislature to enact legislation to ameliorate the problem. So, faith leaders and their followers came together to seek the adoption by PA gun stores of a non-legislative, non-burdensome 'code of conduct,' identical to the existing Agreement between the Mayors Against Illegal Guns Coalition, of which Mayor Nutter and ten other Pennsylvania mayor are members, and Wal-Mart, who sells more guns than any other retailer in the country.

Bryan Miller, Executive Director of Ceasefire NJ, said: "If Wal-Mart can do it, so can all Pennsylvania gun dealers, for the sake of their fellow citizens. We believe broad adoption of the code would dramatically diminish bulk straw buying of handguns and, therefore, the illegal trade that puts guns in the hands of those we agree shouldn't have them. This would, then, lead to fewer illegal handguns on our streets and far less carnage."

Bishop Bartlett, Rev Miller, Rabbi Elwell and Bryan Miller were joined by:

~Msgr. Michael Carroll, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia;

~ Imam Jamil Abdullah, Masjid Muhammad (Germantown)

~Thomas Swain, Clerk, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Religious Society of Friends; and

~Kemah Washington, Father Paul Washington Committee.

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