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# OPINION

## 10 Steps to Address Gun Violence

### Working together for community-based peace

By **DR. J. W. MATT HENNESSEE**

After a year marking the highest ever number of gun-related deaths in Portland as well as an historic response by local stakeholder groups, it's clear that the work of the Portland Peace Initiative is very much needed. Portland is not unique among American communities suffering from violence and a lack of understanding of the issues faced this past year. What may be unique is how community members have banded together, pooled resources, tapped private funding sources, and launched initiatives in a vacuum of City-led responses to gun violence.

In September, the first community listening sessions of the Portland Peace Initiative were held online. Designed to be small and intimate, each session was attended by approximately eight (8) community members. Similar sessions have been held each month and will continue throughout 2022.

In November, 'The Table' event was held for the first time. More than 120 representatives of the community, local nonprofits, government, foundations, business leaders and the press deepened their commitment to peace in Portland during the virtual event presented by the Portland Peace Initiative and convened by IPAC (Interfaith Peace & Action Collaborative). Since that time, a second, similarly successful 'The Table' event was held December 17th.

Out of all of these efforts are expected to be greater visibility and success of community-led, grassroots, local nonprofits who, through their innovative approaches, are solving unique aspects of the cycle of gun violence in Portland.

But before that can happen, here are 10 steps to immediately address gun violence



Dr. J. W. Matt Hennessee

already identified out of these efforts:

Have the City Council declare that intervening to stop the violence is their number one priority and that they will set aside their differences until the crisis of gun violence has been addressed with active measures.

Convene a City Council working session to hear from California Partnership for Safe Communities and/or similar experts on reducing gun violence to brief the Council on what strategies they recommend to intervene to stop the violence in Portland.

Use an evidenced-based approach to intervening in gun violence that employs strategies proven to be effective, such as engaging California Partnership for Safe Communities with which the City already has a contract.

Have the active engagement of all city bureaus in life-saving initiatives such as the community listening sessions and 'The Table' offered by the Portland Peace Initiative.

Convene a recurring 'Table' event of city, county, state and Federal law enforcement leaders, as well as city council, and county

council staff and media with the charge to meet weekly to identify and continuously recommend immediate action steps to end violence in Portland and adjoining communities, facilitated by a representative from the Portland Peace Initiative.

Have City Council members reach out to the US DOJ for program support and ask to become a part of the Public Safety Partnership program which coordinates Federal agencies for cities experiencing high violence.

Similar to the Office of Violence Prevention's video, launch a separate website that memorializes all gun violence victim deaths and shootings detailing when, where who if known.

Convene a 'Table' event of business and community groups to recommend immediate actions to end gun violence.

Identify the cities in the U.S. today that have been successful in reducing murder and violent crime to understand what they did that worked.

After these initial responses are in place, City Council members can spend more time working on long term strategies to end gun violence—but right now, the focus must remain on stopping the bloodshed on the streets of Portland.

The events of the past year have shaken our city and our souls, according to former Oregon State Sen. Avel Gordly, a long time Black activist and community organizer who is part of the new effort to find solutions because there is clearly no time to waste.

"We're thrilled to have these initiatives come together, and have the guidance of trained professionals to help us achieve the vision we all share. There is hope when we do the work," she said.

The future of Portland depends on all of us coming together.

We thank each and every community member, business leader, elected representative, and appointed official who joined with us in this crucial effort. Now more than ever, this Portland Peace Initiative is how we create a more peaceful

Portland.

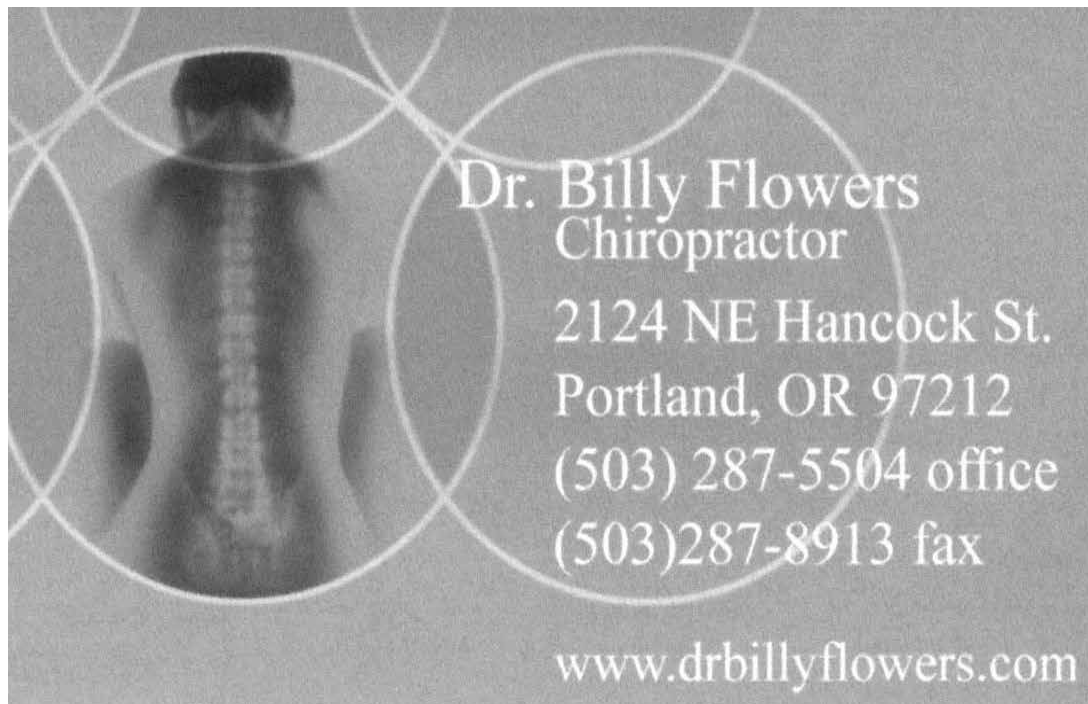
Next steps for 'The Table' include a third event to be held virtually on Thursday, Jan. 27 at 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. with a third report to be published on Feb. 14.

Conceived after over a year of well-documented community violence and high-profile police response in Portland, the Portland Peace Initiative is a series of community-wide listening sessions moderated by professional, trained moderators for the purpose of developing a practical, lasting framework for inclusive community engagement that reimagines public safety in Portland, paying particular attention to communities of color and other historically underrepresented groups.

The mission is to tap into the wisdom in the community to find out what kind of community we want to have, to discover what the community wants in terms of public safety and to elevate the response to reducing gun violence. The results of these sessions will be delivered as a report into the hands of the City and Police Bureau. Outcomes will be measured on an ongoing basis with the hope of measurable improvements in community members' sense of public safety and feeling that the City is responsive to, respectful of, and interested in their needs.

Portland Peace Initiative is the creation of recognized problem-solvers from all backgrounds who seek to unite and elevate as many local efforts of individuals, groups, and organizations that want to participate in building bridges of understanding and healing in Portland. Leading the initiative are Pastor Matt Hennessee, Robert King, Kevin Modica, Deniel Banks, Jan Elfers, and Lisa Broderick of Police2Peace. The Portland Peace Initiative is a multi-organization coalition led by IPAC (Interfaith Peace & Action Collaborative) and supported by Police2Peace. Learn more at <https://portland-peace.org/>

Rev. Dr. J. W. Matt Hennessee, pastor of Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church, is a co-founder and leader of the Interfaith Peace & Action Collaborative.



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