



May 24, 2011

Members of the Legislature,

We write jointly on behalf of the religious groups we represent to share our concerns with the various legislative proposals pending that legalize the carrying of concealed weapons in Wisconsin. At a minimum any bill that passes should prohibit concealed weapons in churches, synagogues or other houses of worship.

Some of our religious groups oppose the bills in general because there is no compelling evidence that our state is unsafe, despite being only one of two states that do not permit concealed weapons in public. The fact so many law enforcement agencies oppose these bills should give us all pause as to whether a change in the law is necessary.

If, however, you choose to enact such legislation, all of us believe that at a minimum you should follow the lead of more than a dozen states in banning concealed weapons from places of worship.


Though we represent different faith traditions, we hold in common the conviction that our places of worship are islands of peace in a troubled world. Those who come to our churches, parishes and synagogues do so to place their trust in God and to witness to their conviction that our human inventions and earthly devices are not the ultimate source of our safety or security. Houses of worship are places where we don't trust in "might makes right."

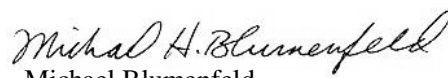
Indeed, the very presence of concealed weapons would help to undercut one of the primary objectives of religious institutions, namely the fostering of peaceful relations among people of all backgrounds. Preventing weapons in our houses of faith is one way we give witness to our commitment to nonviolent coexistence. A policy that permits weapons sends another message, that our expectations of one another are so low that we cannot imagine the existence of public spaces, such as houses of worship, as oases of peace.


Some suggest we can keep churches weapons-free by posting signs. That is not adequate. Their very presence defaces the environment of peace and serenity we try to cultivate when we gather faith communities. We are especially concerned that the proposed law allows concealed weapons to be carried in day care centers, health facilities, social services agencies, and other agencies serving vulnerable populations, as well as in houses of worship.


Just as these bills ban weapons from City Hall and the State Capitol, so should they bar them from houses of worship. When it comes to guns, God's house deserves the same consideration as Caesar's house.

Sincerely,


Scott Anderson
Executive Director
Wisconsin Council of Churches


Michael Blumenfeld
Executive Director
Wisconsin Jewish Conference


John Huebscher
Executive Director
Wisconsin Catholic Conference


Amy Johnson
Executive Director
Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin.