



# YOUTH VIOLENCE SURVEY

The **Metro-Urban Institute** of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, through an informal survey of 455 Pittsburgh area youth ages 9-18 conducted last October, found that 78.9 percent of those surveyed had experienced gun-violence; either a family member or close friend had been shot. Nationally, an average of 61 percent of youth report some form of experience with violence and this figure includes all types of violence, including domestic abuse, bullying, and such.

This survey was prompted by the work of MUI, a program of leadership development for urban ministry, and its collaboration with the Pittsburgh Coalition Against Violence, which is coordinated by the Center Against Violence and Crime (CVVC) and the Black Political Empowerment Program (B-PEP).

The survey was conducted Sept. 29-Oct. 12, 2009 with respondents drawn from several Pittsburgh area after school programs dealing with school-age youth and East End area congregations. Although many church and community groups are concerned about violence among youth and how it affects young people in our city's neighborhoods, too often the ideas and opinions of young people themselves are not included in the dialogue with these groups.

The purpose of this survey was to get some idea of what our young people think concerning violence and what is important to them. The survey also asked other questions about favorite subjects in school, ways to stop street violence, people youth admired, favorite entertainers, and what they pray for the most. Counted responses were grouped by age: 9-11 (16.7 percent), 12-14 (25.1 percent), and 15-18 (58.2 percent). In one subgroup, the 15-18 category, 86 percent of the respondents reported experiences with gun violence.

While this was not a scientific survey, this informal sample of a significant number of school-age children and teens by after-school programs and church groups in the Pittsburgh area represents a significant challenge to the broader Pittsburgh community. This high percentage of youth reporting gun violence in their experience prompts serious concern that should be further investigated and action taken to help our youth. For this reason, the Metro-Urban Institute brings this matter to the public, urging serious attention to the Strategies Document recommendations outlined by the Coalition Against Violence for use by the Pittsburgh Public Schools, all faith communities and congregations throughout the city, and community agencies.

Asked for suggestions to stopping street violence, 18.9 percent thought that banning or reducing access to guns or tightening gun control laws would be helpful. Additionally, 77 percent of those responders reported knowing a friend or family member who had been shot or killed.

When asked about their prayer habits, youth who either indicated that they did not pray or were unable to provide examples of prayer in their everyday lives were most likely to provide no solutions as to how to reduce violence or to indicate that they did not believe it was possible to stop or reduce the violence. All youth who identified a practice of spiritually-rooted prayer provided suggestions regarding how to reduce violence and expressed belief that healing was possible.

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary has been preparing leaders for Christian ministry for more than 200 years. In 1991, the Seminary initiated the Metro-Urban Institute to help churches address growing concerns related to urban living. MUI has become an important resource for those concerned with "the welfare of the city" (Jeremiah 12:7) whether or not they actually live in urban areas.

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary is a graduate professional institution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A). Founded in 1794, the Seminary is located in Pittsburgh, Pa. and approximately 320 students are enrolled yearly in the degree programs. The Seminary prepares leaders who proclaim with great joy God's message of good news in both word and deed. PTS is rooted in the Reformed history of faithfulness to Scripture and commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## **Executive Summary**

## **Full Report**

## **List of Requested Survey Participants**

## **List of Press Conference Speakers**

For more information on this survey and the results, contact the Rev. Dr. [Click to view e-mail](#), Ed.D., director of the Seminary's Metro-Urban Institute at 412-924-1364.

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