

Gun Violence Prevention



Congregational TOOLKIT

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship
2024 Edition

Cover photo, Guns to Gardens volunteer uses a chop saw to dismantle unwanted guns to be transformed into garden tools and art. In 2022, the 225th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) became the first major religious body to support Guns to Gardens as a way for congregations to take action to prevent gun violence. See Action Section. Used by permission of La Mesa Presbyterian Church, Albuquerque, NM.



Photo, In 2013, the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill in Philadelphia took one of the very first gun violence prevention public actions by a Presbyterian congregation. Church members planted 331 crosses with tee shirts bearing the names of those killed in Philadelphia by guns in 2012. Many were killed with illegal guns. A large sign urged the mayor to act against gun violence. Thousands of residents witnessed the memorial on the busy street. Used with permission of Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill.

Photo: Rev. Paul Kang and members of the Korean Hosanna Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles, a *Matthew 25 Congregation*, "Wear Orange" on Gun Violence Awareness Sunday. As part of the **Presbyterian Decade to End Gun Violence**, the Matthew 25 Initiative now includes Gun Violence Prevention among faithful actions. Used with permission of Korean Hosanna Presbyterian Church.



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www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence gvp@presbypeacefellowship.org
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Introduction

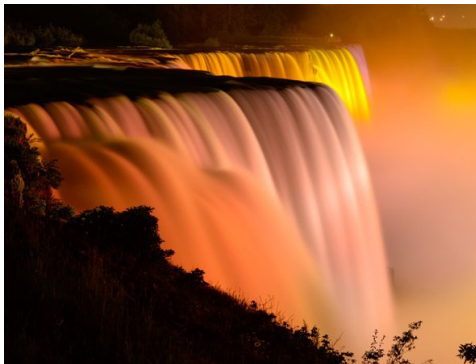
2024 Edition Dedicated to Rev. Jim Atwood & Rev. Deanna Hollas

Photo: Niagara Falls on Wear Orange Weekend <https://wearorange.org/>

Since the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship launched this **Gun Violence Prevention Congregational Toolkit** in 2017, over 2,500 Presbyterians have acquired it in all 50 states. With each new edition, we can chart the growth of the movement to prevent gun violence: from a time when very few congregations offered anything but “thoughts and prayers” to a time when the prayers of congregations are leading them into courageous action, from public witness to legislative advocacy to direct action like Guns to Gardens—all to save lives.

As part of the Peace Fellowship’s support for the **Presbyterian Decade to End Gun Violence**, **the purpose of this Toolkit is to keep encouraging and equipping local churches to take holy action.** With nearly 43,000 Americans taken from us by gun violence in 2023, including over 650 mass shootings, the church of Jesus Christ cannot stand idly by. Thank you for daring to explore how you and your congregation are called to help prevent gun violence. And thank you to all who have shared content, resources, stories, photos and faith to inspire others.

How to use the Toolkit? We suggest that your church have both versions: the print version for easy browsing, plus the online version for easy use of links and copying pages to share. With an explosion of new research and resources, we selected **Educational Resources** most helpful for congregations, updating resources for personal study, small group study, and the Peace Fellowship’s new curriculum, **Courageous Conversations on Gun Violence Prevention.**



We expanded the section on **Pastoral Resources**, including links to PPF’s Emergency Response Kit for times of gun violence and other worship and pastoral aids. The sections on **Action** and **Connecting with Others** reflect the compassion, outrage, determination and practicality that we see in the actions of Jesus. We give thanks for every citizen who takes action for life by writing a letter, securely storing a gun, posting on social media, embracing those who grieve or voting as if our children’s and grandchildren’s lives depended on it.

As we go to press, the effort to prevent gun violence is growing and making significant progress, such as the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act and the proposed new rule to close the gun show/online loopholes with background checks. States from coast to coast are enacting gun sense legislation and the rate of gun violence is decreasing in those states (see page 61). Losing some of its political power, the gun lobby is now turning to the US Supreme Court as a way to overthrow gun sense regulation. This new era of court cases will require sustained action. We hope that this Toolkit inspires and equips **your church** to act.

Who are we? The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship is an independent nation-wide community of Presbyterians who trust in the nonviolence of Jesus Christ. Since 1944, we have promoted the practical search for peace, including steps to prevent gun violence. Please join us in this search. We give permission for you to re-print and make multiple copies of this Toolkit for your use in churches and communities. **Send us your ideas, stay in touch, be bold and keep the faith.**

Rev. Dr. Laurie Lyter Bright, Executive Director, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

Rev. Jan Orr-Harter, Editor, Gun Violence Prevention Congregational Toolkit

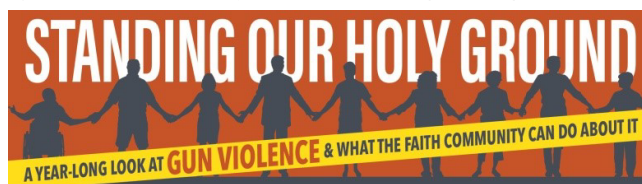
<https://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/> or @presbypeace or gvp@presbypeacefellowship.org

Section 1 Educational Resources

Overview of Gun Violence & the Work of Prevention

Courageous Conversations on Gun Violence Prevention Six Session Study for Congregations, p. 11

Standing Our Holy Ground: A Comprehensive Look at Gun Violence and What the Faith Community Can Do About It. Created by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), in collaboration with the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. Each one hour webinar features a range of participants and comes with a study guide. Sample topics: Youth Standing Up to Gun Violence, the Racial Divide in Gun Violence, theology, law enforcement, mental health, domestic violence and much more. <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/standing-our-holy-ground/>



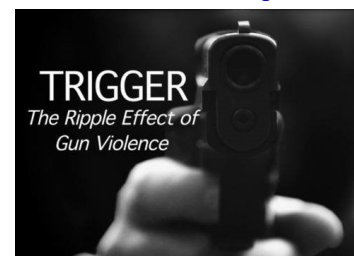
Revisionist History Podcast by Malcolm Gladwell, Pushkin. Series covers doctors' perspectives, gun rights, the impact of TV westerns, assault weapons and more. <https://www.pushkin.fm/podcasts/revisionist-history>

Mass Shootings in the United States, Everytown Research, 2023. <https://everytownresearch.org/mass-shootings-in-america/>

Gun Violence Archive Nationwide gun violence data, recorded daily. www.GunViolenceArchive.org

The Trace Independent news source on gun violence. www.thetrace.org

Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence Award-winning film by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance frames gun violence as a disaster and a public health issue, moving the conversation away from the polarizing extremes. It lifts up the voices of those who seek common ground and a new way forward. There is a Trigger study guide and bulletin insert. A sequel to **Trigger** will be produced by PDA.



<https://www.pcusastore.com/AdvancedSearch/DefaultWFilter.aspx?SearchTerm=trigger>

Emergency Response See Pastoral Section 2 for “Emergency Response” p. 32

Congregational Action Resources

From Despair to Hope: Mobilizing Your Church to End Gun Violence, Rev. Deanna Hollas, *Presbyterian Outlook*. <https://pres-outlook.org/2023/05/from-despair-to-hope-mobilizing-your-church-to-end-gun-violence/>

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Video: the example of two Chicago congregations working to prevent gun violence, recipients of PPF’s Peaceseeker Award, 8 Minutes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBKK9qfbZm0>

The Intersection of Faith and Gun Violence PC(USA) Office of Public Witness webinar, uniting public health, theological and action aspects of gun violence prevention. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-9KI0vTXt8>

If You are Interested in Gun Violence Prevention, Just Start Somewhere Interview with Presbyterian pastor Harry Eberts, Co-President of New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence, PPF Peaceseeker Awardee. <https://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/if-you-are-interested-in-gun-violence-prevention-start-somewhere/>

Turning Faith into Action Interfaith Toolkit to Engage the Faith Community on Gun Violence Prevention, from Pax Christi and the DC Interfaith Gun Violence Prevention Network. <https://paxchristimdc.org/storage/app/media/Interfaith%20GVP%20Toolkit.2023-10-28%20update.pdf>

Impact of Gun Violence

Ricochet: An American Trauma PBS News Hour Special Report on a nation in trauma, 55 minutes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLfWagzcee0>

Beyond the Bullet: The Cost of Gun Violence – A documentary by WXYZ Detroit about the impact of gun violence on survivors and families, 26 minutes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZ2KQhJX1cQ>

Behind the Bullet Award-winning film on the impact and aftermath of gun violence for those commit it. <https://behindthebulletfilm.com/>

A Survivor Shares her Story and Witness. <https://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence/katiewoodall>

The True Cost of Gun Violence in America by Mark Follman, Julia Lurie, Jaeah Lee, James West, looks at human and economic costs of gun violence. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/04/true-cost-of-gun-violence-in-america/>

Resources on Race, Racism & Gun Violence

The Bodies Keep Coming: Dispatches from a Black Trauma Surgeon on Racism, Violence, and How We Heal by Dr. Brian Williams, Broadleaf Books, 2023. Williams explains why Black and brown bodies will continue to be wracked by all types of violence until we transform policy and law with compassion and care.

The Second: Race and Guns in a Fatally Unequal America by historian Dr. Carol Anderson, Winner of the 2022 CHOICE Outstanding Academic Titles, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/second-9781635574258/>

The Racial Divide in Gun Violence Part of the Presbyterian “Standing Our Holy Ground” Webinar Series (above). <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/videos/the-racial-divide-in-gun-violence/>

Conversation Models

Living Room Conversations: Guns & Responsibility A model that brings Americans of different perspectives together to talk about the difficult issues surrounding gun violence. <https://livingroomconversations.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Guns-and-Responsibility.pdf>

Common Ground: Talking about Gun Violence in America by Donald Gaffney, a Disciples of Christ pastor from Newtown, CT who attended Sandy Hook Elementary School as a child. A resource for conversation across perspectives on guns and gun violence. Westminster John Knox Press.

Resources for Gun Owners

Panel of Gun Owners discuss their role in advocating for gun violence prevention efforts: <https://www.bradyunited.org/blog/gun-owners-for-gun-violence-prevention>

End Family Fire Program <https://www.bradyunited.org/program/end-family-fire>

The Case for Secure Gun Storage ATF Report. <https://www.npr.org/2023/02/10/1153977949/major-takeaways-from-the-atf-gun-violence-report>

Hate Crimes and Gun Violence

The Disarm Hate Act Would Prevent Hate-Motivated Gun Violence, Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-disarm-hate-act-would-help-prevent-hate-motivated-gun-violence/>

Impact of Gun Violence on Historically Marginalized Communities, Everytown Research. <https://www.everytown.org/issues/impact-of-gun-violence-on-historically-marginalized-communities/#:~:text=In%20an%20average%20year%2C%20more,legally%20buy%20and%20have%20guns.>

Youth & Child Resources

Statewide Youth Summit on Faith and Gun Violence, WI Council of Churches, Storytelling and Action. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flroRlaw6rE&list=PLlj3ygl_K23WiKg_wPg5xSwsvs3dRYeTA&index=2

Us Kids Documentary on students from Margery Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL and the March for Our Lives Movement over several years. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11394198/>

For Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe in a Better World Michael W. Waters, illustrated by Keisha Morris, Flyaway Books. A children's book with an honest look at one family's response to racism and gun violence. Activity and discussion guide to use with children by the Muhammad Ali Center. <https://www.pcusastore.com/Products/1947888080/for-beautiful-black-boys-who-believe-in-a-better-world.aspx>

Children's Response to Trauma <https://everytownsupportfund.org/everytown-survivor-network/resources-for-victims-and-survivors-of-gun-violence/childrens-responses-to-trauma/>

Helping Children with Tragic Events, Fred Rogers Productions. https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/helping-children-with-tragic-events-in-the-news?utm_campaign=&utm_content=1653430501&utm_medium=pbsofficial&utm_source=twitter&fbclid=IwAR1XjAX-u2Bt7Mo-5PPBKorNFtNzE1TWwswSzRSiFAyvgAPVYx3GJouhLZI

Community Action Resources See also Section 4, Connecting with Others

New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence Toolkit 77 pages on how to organize your community or your state for education, advocacy, direct action such as Guns to Gardens, and effective involvement of volunteers, youth and artists in gun violence prevention. Learn from the best! <https://www.gvptoolkit.org/>

Organize, Learn and Organize Again Lessons from the Gun Violence Prevention Movement. Interview with Miranda Viscoli, Co-President of New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence, PPF Peaceseeker Awardee. <https://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/organize-learn-and-organize-again-lessons-from-the-gvp-movement/>

The Gun Lobby

The Price of Freedom HBO film on the out-sized influence of the NRA and its relation to gun violence. View on HBO Max, available free for community groups. <http://www.bravenewfilms.org/makingakilling>

The Gun Machine: How America Was Forged by the Gun Industry by The Trace and WBUR. Podcast on the 250 year history of the US government and gun industry connections. <https://www.wbur.org/podcasts/short-run>

Not Your Grandparents' NRA: How the Leadership of the NRA Puts Americans at Risk
The history of how the NRA changed from a hunting/sporting organization to the lobby for the gun industry. <http://www.everytown.org/reports/not-your-grandparents-nra/>

The Gun Industry Created a New Consumer. Now It's Killing Us Originally published in *The Atlantic* by former gun industry executive Ryan Busse. <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/183553>

Unmasking the Powers Rev. Deanna Hollas speaks at Grace Presbyterian Church, Springfield, VA on the gun lobby's role in creating conditions for a gun violence epidemic. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWQCHsWN-OU>

Making a Killing: Guns, Greed and the NRA, Brave New Films. <https://www.bravenewfilms.org/makingakilling>

Church Security

Whom Shall I Fear? by Ohio Episcopal Priest Rev. Rosalind Hughes, covers the biblical and practical basis for a nonviolent plan for church security. <https://upperroombooks.com/book/whom-shall-i-fear/?cn-reloaded=1>

Community Safety for All Toolkit
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScWv3Qu7bRwY4Hn2r0u0yzQX77SMk--i4tO6twyUUyebTeaZA/viewform>

Fear Not - Mennonite Central Committee curriculum to address church security questions. <https://mcc.org/resources/fear-not-creating-plan-respond-active-violence>

Developing a Plan for Violence on Church Property, Presbyterian Mission Agency.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/legal-resources/creating-safe-ministries/developing-an-emergency-plan-for-violence-on-church-property/>

DC Peace Team: De-Escalation Training for Congregations <https://www.dcpeaceteam.org/>

Gun Violence as a Public Health Crisis

Changing the Conversation: America's Gun Violence Epidemic Produced for high school, college classrooms and broad community settings, this film shifts the conversation from strictly Second Amendment rights to a broader focus on preventing a public health epidemic of gun violence. While statistics are outdated, this video helped introduce gun violence as a public health issue. <http://www.changeunviolence.com>

A Public Health Approach to Preventing Violent Crime – an academic program for students of public health and medicine. <https://www.publichealthdegrees.org/resources/public-health-and-violence-prevention/>

Second Amendment & The Courts

Giffords Law Center, <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/second-amendment/>

The Volunteer Moms Poring Over Archives to Prove Clarence Thomas Wrong by Mark Joseph Stern. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2023/08/moms-demand-action-gun-research-clarence-thomas.html>

Theological & Biblical Resources

See Section 2 Pastoral Resources

For Such a Time as This: Hope and Forgiveness after the Charleston Massacre, by Rev. Sharon Risher and Sherri Wood Emmons, Chalice Press, 2019.

Kingdom Dreams: Violent Realities: Reflections on Gun Violence from Micah 4:1-4, a three session Bible Study from the United Methodist Church. <https://www.umcjustice.org/news-and-stories/kingdom-dreams-violent-realities-bible-study-412>

Each Other's Keeper Congregational study on violence from a biblical, faith and social perspective, Episcopal Diocese of Missouri. <https://www.eachotherskeeper.org/>

Beating Guns Documentary film reflecting on faith and action in the face of gun violence, featuring Shane Claiborne and Mike Martin, co-founders of Guns to Gardens. <https://www.beatingguns.com/documentary>

Proposals for Responding to and Reducing Gun Violence

Evidence-Based Solutions, Everytown for Gun Safety <https://www.everytown.org/solutions/>

Nine Strategies to Guide Efforts to Reduce Youth Gun Violence, The Urban Institute.

<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Nine%20Strategies%20to%20Guide%20Efforts%20to%20Reduce%20Youth%20Gun%20Violence.pdf>

The Uvalde Report: A Path Forward for a Community –and Nation –Struggling to Heal, from Giffords, a comprehensive look at what the Uvalde school shooting teaches us about steps to reduce gun violence and to care for traumatized communities, 2023. <https://giffords.org/report/the-uvalde-report>

The Violence Project: How to Stop a Mass Shooting Epidemic <https://www.theviolenceproject.org/>

Solutions to Gun Violence, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Policy Proposals.

<https://publichealth.jhu.edu/departments/health-policy-and-management/research-and-practice/center-for-gun-violence-solutions/solutions>

PC (U.S.A.) Gun Violence Prevention Policy & Resources



For over 50 years, Presbyterians have addressed gun violence through the actions of many General Assemblies. Beginning in the late 1960's, in response to the assassinations of public leaders, the General Assembly called for "...control [of] the sale and possession of firearms." Similar resolutions were passed again in 1976, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1996, 1998, 2008, 2010, 2014, 2018, 2020 and 2022. These resolutions have called on the church to be involved in education and advocacy at the federal, state, and community level to prevent gun violence, as well as to offer pastoral care for the victims of gun violence. The Assembly has never advocated for the elimination of guns typically used in hunting or shooting sports.

Rather, the actions of the denomination call forth faithfulness, love and moral courage by congregations in ways that can prevent tragedy and save lives. In 2022, the 225th General Assembly launched **The Presbyterian Decade to End Gun Violence**, ten years of concerted effort by the whole church to help our nation heal from the pain of gun violence.



The Decade will unite Presbyterians at all levels of the denomination and many national agencies such as the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/> and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance <https://pda.pcusa.org/>

GRANTS- Decade grants are available for congregations to take specific action to prevent gun violence. The Decade is not just about the national denomination taking action; it is an invitation for all of the faithful, everywhere, to discern and take creative and effective action to end gun violence. Learn about the Decade, the grant application process and more, at: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/gun-violence-resources/>

Learn more about PC(U.S.A.) General Assembly actions here:

2022 Gun Violence Action by the 225th General Assembly

Updates prior actions and launches the Presbyterian Decade to End Gun Violence.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/Gun-Violence-An-Action-of-the-225th-General-Assembly-2022.pdf>



2022 Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Video

Reviews all of the gun violence prevention actions of the General Assembly in 2022, including a new protocol to prevent domestic gun violence and support for the new Guns to Gardens movement. *12 minutes.*

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gjXUFBfgbNbZ6RQhTrWfR0on9tIToY4w/view?usp=sharing> See: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gjXUFBfgbNbZ6RQhTrWfR0on9tIToY4w/view?usp=sharing>

2014 Action by the 221st General Assembly

Provides specific legislative/advocacy focus for the Presbyterian Office of Public Witness and calls upon individuals and congregations to become involved in advocacy and action, suggesting that churches could post signage as "gun-free" zones.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/Gun-Violence-Prevention-221st-GA-Actions.pdf>

2010 Gun Violence, Gospel Values 219th General Assembly

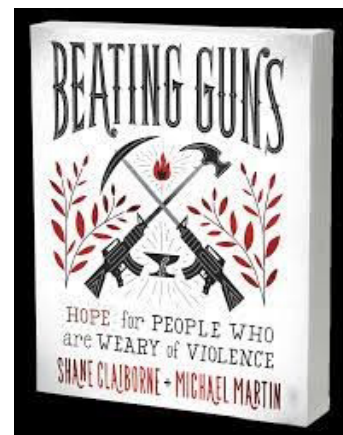
While the statistics have changed drastically, this 2010 landmark study remains one of the most comprehensive examinations of the biblical, theological and social implications of gun violence by the PC(USA) or any other major religious body.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/gun-violence-gospel-values-mobilizing-response-god/>



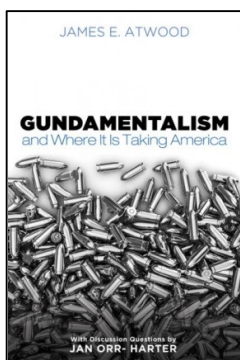
Faith-Based Resources for Small Group/Congregational Study

Beating Guns: Hope for People Who are Weary of Violence, by Shane Claiborne and Michael Martin, the theological and foundational book for the Guns to Gardens movement, calls for a nation-wide grassroots action to turn unwanted guns into garden tools. Claiborne and Martin weave together scripture and reflection with photos, stories and history of how we got to where we are with gun violence and how we can move in a new life-giving direction. Practical, inspirational and easy to navigate, Brazos Press, 2019.



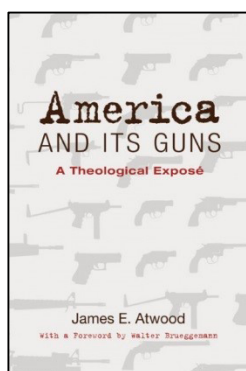
Gun Violence: How People of Faith Can Stop this Uniquely American Epidemic *Presbyterian Outlook* Special Issue, June 2023. Multiple articles offer a range of perspectives and action steps. Design your own study of this special issue with a pdf download or by ordering back copies. <https://pres-outlook.org/product/june-2023/>

Collateral Damage: Changing the Conversation about Firearms and Faith by James Atwood, Herald Press, 2019. In Atwood's final book, this prophet of the gun violence prevention movement looks at the many ways that gun violence changes our culture and impacts human life, all through the lens of collateral damage. As a southerner, he examines the legacy of the Civil War and racism in our current gun violence epidemic and the tremendous cost being paid for that epidemic by America's children and youth. He brings the evidence of how much gun violence costs us in our humanity, in our economy and for our future. He closes with imagining: "Wouldn't it be great if the church of Jesus stepped out front to stop the killing?" Find a six session Peace Fellowship Study Guide at <https://bit.ly/gvpatwood2>



Gundamentalism & Where It Is Taking America

by James Atwood, Cascade Books, 2017, Small Group Discussion Questions Included. *Gundamentalism and Where It Is Taking America* offers an immensely readable overview of the issue of gun violence. James Atwood was a Presbyterian pastor and an avid deer hunter for half a century. He was at the forefront of the faith community's fight for two constitutional rights: the right to keep and bear arms and the right to live in domestic tranquility, free of gun violence. Atwood explains why guns mystically control so many of us, verging on a form of gun worship. Chapters include: How Did We Get Here?; Straight Talk to Anyone Buying a Gun for the First Time; Can Guns be Made Safer? The book will provoke honest reflection and discussion for the building of a safer and saner America. <http://wipfandstock.com/gundamentalism-and-where-it-is-taking-america.html>



America and Its Guns: A Theological Exposé

by James E. Atwood, Foreword by Walter Brueggemann, Cascade Books, 2012. In his landmark first book, James Atwood, *right*, cautioned that absolute trust in guns turns easily into idolatry. Having spent 45 years as a Presbyterian pastor fighting against the easy access to firearms, one of which took the life of a church member, he uses his biblical and theological understanding to graphically portray the impact guns have on our society. He documents how we have been deceived into believing that the tools of violence will provide our ultimate security. He closes with a wake-up call to the faith community, "God's spiritual alarm clock." Find a six session PPF Study Guide at <https://bit.ly/gvpatwood1>



Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Gun Violence Curriculum

A Six Session Study for Congregations

Courageous Conversations about Gun Violence Prevention

How to Use this Six-Session Study: The purpose of this “Courageous Conversations” curriculum is for Americans to learn about and talk together about gun violence prevention and about how God is calling the church to respond. It is not a debate. A conversation Covenant created by the study group ensures that each person’s experience and opinion is equally respected. The Covenant is a part of each session. Some churches may move to an action step after the study and some may not. We hope that the Courageous Conversation model will help your church find areas of mutual concern, compromise, perspective and a sense of mission.

The curriculum does not require reading a book or much outside preparation. It works for an adult or young adult Sunday School or weekly gathering. The study is designed for in-person small groups, but can be adapted for on-line groups. A small group could be two or 20. If you have more than 20, consider two groups. Two or more congregations could do the study together.

Leadership: One person can lead each session or it can be rotated among several leaders. The leader guides the group through the material and the courageous conversation questions in the time frame allowed, with respect for the Courageous Conversation Covenant created in Session 1. You’ll need a poster, blackboard or other visual record to review the Covenant each week. The structure of each session offers these steps: an opening “Breath Prayer,” reviewing the Covenant, exploring information, sharing, action and closing.

Printouts: Each participant will need a printout of each session, unless they wish to access it on-line. You could print out the entire six sessions at once, or you could do it week by week.

Timing: Each session can be done in 60-75 minutes. It doesn’t work well for less time than that. Ask folks to be on time for each session. The role of the leader is to pace each session to get through all or most of the material. If conversation bogs down or there is no response to a question, move on to the next step. If there is a protracted argument, this may contradict the Courageous Conversation Covenant. The leader needs to intervene and gently remind the group of the Covenant. The goal is for everyone to feel free to share without being on the defense or verbally attacked. Try for a generosity of listening and moving forward.

Technology: If done by an in-person group, the curriculum requires very little technology. The leader needs to carefully prepare for each session by noting what technology may be needed, such as smart phones to read the “Survivor Stories.” You might invite folks as they gather, or ahead of time, to find the story on their phone and read it. Or you could print them out.

There is an important short video in Session 6. Try to arrange a larger screen for this video. Perhaps someone in the group can set this up ahead of time. Some sessions will need a Bible.

Group Dynamics: The leader maintains forward momentum through the process. However, there may be moments of intense grief or painful sharing, particularly around our own fears and experiences of gun violence. We encourage you to honor these moments. We have seen that participants do not tend to break down emotionally in a setting unless they perceive that the group is able to minister to them. You are the church. You will know how to help.

Action: Before closing, lift up the suggested action and sources/resources to learn more.

Follow Up: The goal of the study is to bring congregation members together to share and learn about gun violence prevention and to identify interested individuals and action ideas for next steps. As part of the **Presbyterian Decade to End Gun Violence**, we hope that every congregation will find something that they can do or contribute toward saving lives. Please stay in touch! gvp@presbypeacefellowship.org

Session 1: Courageous Conversations about Gun Violence

Opening: Leader welcomes everyone and shares that our purpose in this series is to learn more about gun violence in America and to discern how the church may be called to address it.

Leader introduces the Breath Prayer: Talking about gun violence can activate our nervous system and cause anxiety. That's why we will begin each of our sessions with a Breath Prayer to center our spirits, minds and bodies in God's presence. Relax. Breathe deeply, in and out, all the way down into your belly.

Leader: Breathe in....Welcome, Holy Spirit (hold for a few seconds)

Leader: Breathe out... Hold all with compassion. (Repeat slowly 6 more times.)

Introductions: Share your name and how guns or gun violence have been a part of your life. What motivates you to be part of this study group?

Covenant for Courageous Conversations: Invite the group to create their own Covenant for how to have courageous conversations about gun violence. The Covenant will guide the group in each session. Write down the Covenant in a form that you can review at the beginning of each session. Ideas: Don't interrupt, be on time, speak from your experience, give everyone a chance to share if they wish, listen carefully and with respect... Include in the Covenant the ideas that everyone in the group can agree to. The Covenant will build trust.

Presenting & Exploring:

1. Stories: Assign participants with smart phones or laptops to read aloud these stories:

<https://momentsthat survive.org/tribute/in-honor-and-memory-of-jojo/>

<https://momentsthat survive.org/tribute/sedona/>

Prayer: Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy, Amen

2. The Citizen's Test on Gun Violence in America

Share copies of the Citizen's Test and give time for participants to mark their own answers.

Take turns reading the test answers, giving time for any comments or questions.

• Courageous Conversation: Invite participants to lift up one new thing they learned in this session.

Action: Learn more. See below to pick at least one more source to study in the next week.

Closing: This is difficult information. Ask each person to bless the group with a word or phrase that emerges from their faith as we study this issue. Response to each word: *Amen*

Learn More/Pick One for Further Study:

ABC News Special: Gun Violence: An American Epidemic? 2022 (11 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6-QDdPx0KI>

Kaiser Family Foundation Research on Gun Violence 2023

<https://www.kff.org/other/poll-finding/americans-experiences-with-gun-related-violence-injuries-and-deaths/>

Readers Digest: Guns in America: 16 Charts You Need to See 2022

<https://www.rd.com/article/gun-violence-statistics/>

CITIZEN'S TEST ON GUN VIOLENCE IN AMERICA

Created by Jim Atwood Updated 2024, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

1. The Presbyterian Church (USA), most faith communities, and gun violence prevention groups are opposed to hunting and target shooting, and are determined to ban all guns used in self-defense.
True _____ False _____
2. Since 1968, more Americans have died by gunfire within our own country than all servicemen and women killed in battle in all US wars since 1775.
True _____ False _____
3. After 9/11, it became impossible for those on the "no fly list" to legally buy guns.
True _____ False _____
4. Over the last four years, an average of _____ persons are killed by guns in the US:
a. 17,000 b. 28,000 c. 52,000 d. 43,000
5. The most frequently used murder weapon is a:
a. handgun b. assault rifle c. shotgun d. knife
6. The annual overall cost of firearms violence for the US economy is:
a. \$876 million b. \$128.5 billion c. \$250.4 billion d. \$557 billion
7. The highest homicide rates per 100,000 population are in the
a. South b. West c. Midwest d. Northeast
8. Americans are more likely to be murdered or assaulted by
a. A friend, acquaintance, or family member b. A person of another race or religion
c. A person with a criminal record.
9. The Second Amendment guarantees *law-abiding American citizens* the right to own any type of firearm with no restrictions.
True _____ False _____
10. Americans are deeply divided on issues of gun regulation.
True _____ False _____
11. The Consumer Product Safety Commission is prohibited by law from examining the safety of any gun or piece of ammunition.
True _____ False _____
12. A majority of gun owners lock up their firearms at home.
True _____ False _____
13. The NRA consistently supports the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives.
True _____ False _____
14. Thirty eight states have some form of Stand Your Ground Laws which gives the right to use a gun against another without retreating if one "feels threatened."
True _____ False _____
15. When New York City Police Officers fire their guns in shootouts with criminals or public offenders, they hit their targets what percent of the time?
a. 50% _____ b. 45% _____ c. 18% _____ d. 72% _____
16. Regulating guns for public safety is impossible until we have finance reform for elections.
True _____ False _____
17. The United States has been prone to mass shootings since the Civil War.
True _____ False _____

ANSWERS FOR CITIZEN'S TEST

Updated January 2024

1. False: These entities never express opposition to hunting, sports shooting, or gun ownership. Their mission is to keep dangerous weapons out of the hands of dangerous people. The Presbyterian Church and many other faith groups do call for re-instating the ban on assault weapons and for restricting large magazine clips.
2. True. From the American Revolution to Iraq/Afghanistan, approximately 657,860 Americans died in battle. From 1968 to 2022, gun violence killed approximately 1,808,821 Americans.
3. False. Individuals on the FBI's Terrorist Watch List may legally buy guns from licensed dealers, if they pass the National Instant Criminal Background Check System database. If they cannot pass, they can buy guns from private sellers in 30 states and at 5,000 gun shows in the USA. (Twenty states, so far, have background checks on all gun sales.)
4. D. On average from 2019 to 2023, 43,084 Americans are killed by guns each year. More than half of these deaths are by gun suicide.
5. A. Handgun.
6. D. \$557 billion. While no price can be put on lives taken, studies by the National Institutes of Health and Everytown for Gun Safety show that the economic cost of gun violence is \$557 billion per year, or 2.6% of our gross domestic product. This includes first responders, hospital costs, police, funerals, survivor long-term medical costs, lost wages and productivity, court costs and incarceration, and quality of life costs for surviving families. Local, state and federal governments are spending \$35 million every day to deal with the aftermath of gun violence. <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/>
7. South. The highest murder rates per person in 2022 were in Mississippi and Louisiana. www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/26/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths
8. A. a friend, acquaintance or family member. FBI Uniform Crime Report, Expanded Homicide Data Table 10, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2014/crime-in-the-u.s.-2014/offenses-known-to-law-enforcement/expanded-homicide>
9. False. In 2008 the Supreme Court interpreted the Second Amendment as an individual right, overturning 200 years of judicial history regarding militias. Justice Antonin Scalia, writing for the 5-4 majority stated, "Like most rights, the Second Amendment right is not unlimited. It is not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose: For example, concealed weapons prohibitions have been upheld under the Amendment or state analogues. The Court's opinion should not be taken to cast doubt on longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill, or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings, or laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms." <http://www.scotusblog.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/07-290.pdf>
10. False. Over 97% of Americans, including gun owners, support universal background checks, as well as 80% of NRA members. <https://poll.qu.edu/Poll-Release-Legacy?releaseid=2521>
11. True. CPSC can regulate toy guns, but not real firearms and ammunition. Due to the lobbying success of the NRA, guns makers were shielded from product liability by the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, which was signed into law in 2005 by President George W. Bush.
12. False. A study of gun owners showed that 58% did not use trigger locks or securely store weapons. An Assessment of Firearm Storage Practices in the US, 2022, JAMA Medical News <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2801915#:~:text=Among%20the%202152%20firearm%20owners,1%20firearm%20unlocked%20and%20unhidden.>

13. False. For decades, the NRA drafted legislation to decrease the authority, budget, leadership and manpower of the ATF. For example, in 1972, the ATF had 2,500 agents charged with inspecting 60,000 dealers. An inspection was likely only every 8 years. Agents today are still at 1972 levels for the entire nation. By comparison, the New York City Police Dept. has 35,000 officers for the city.

14. True. In 38 states one is not obliged to retreat if one's home is attacked. Most states have expanded the law to assert that a person has no duty to abandon a place where he has a right to be. These laws have given rise to a shoot-first-ask-questions-later mindset. <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/guns-in-public/stand-your-ground-laws/>

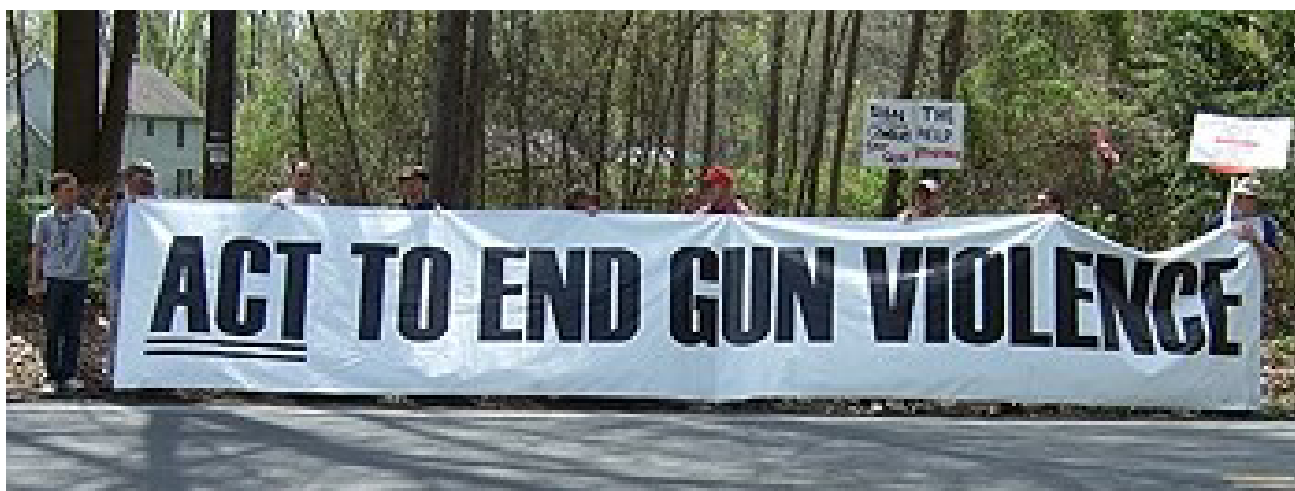
15. C. 18 %. An analysis by the Rand Center on Quality Policing found that the average NYC police hit ratio was 18% when a subject fires back and 30% when a subject does not fire at police. Similar hit rates exist for highly-trained US military. This casts concern on strategies like arming teachers and community volunteers. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9655518/

16. False. Though financial incentives to lawmakers by affiliates of the NRA have impeded most gun-sense legislation, citizen advocacy did lead to a ten year ban on assault weapons in 1994 until it expired in 2004. Twenty years later, many more citizens are concerned about gun violence and more NRA members and former members support reasonable gun safety laws. In 2022, the year of the highest gun violence on record, Congress passed the **Bipartisan Safer Communities Act**, the first major gun safety legislation in nearly 30 years. Among many steps, it provides funding for violence intervention programs and encourages states to adopt "Red Flag" laws to keep guns out of the hands of those who are a danger to themselves or others. This is not the end-all action to save lives. It's a beginning. <https://www.sandyhookpromise.org/blog/news/the-bipartisan-gun-safety-reform-bill-whats-next/>

17. False. Mass shootings are a more recent part of our history. Defining a mass shooting as one in which four or more persons are killed, not counting the shooter, in the first 100 years after the Civil War, the U.S. had ten mass shootings. The next 50 years, 1966-2016, saw 23 mass shootings. In contrast, in the single year of 2022 there were 646 mass shootings and in 2023 there were 656 mass shootings. Today most mass shooters use a semiautomatic assault style weapon, designed to kill as many people as possible in a short amount of time. While most gun violence consists of suicide, community violence, domestic violence, police shootings and unintentional shootings, mass shootings cause widespread fear and trauma, especially for children, students and parents. <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org> <http://behindthetower.org/a-brief-history-of-mass-shootings>

For they sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.

Hosea 8:7



Session 2: Getting Real about Suicide and Gun Violence

Goals & Objectives: To explore the relationship between suicide and guns. Participants will learn about myths that prevent us from acting to reduce gun suicide and discuss a taboo topic from the perspective of experience, faith and practical steps to reduce gun suicide.

Opening: Leader welcomes all and leads the Breath Prayer
Breathe in...Welcome, Holy Spirit.... (hold) Breathe out...Hold all with Compassion (6 times)

Covenant: Read the Courageous Conversation Covenant aloud to guide this session.

Presenting and Exploring:

1. Stories: Assign participants with smart phones or laptops to read aloud these stories:

<https://momentsthat survive.org/tribute/anna-3/>

<https://momentsthat survive.org/tribute/marit-brock/>

Prayer: Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy, Amen

2. Courageous Conversation: Leader asks each question separately.

- Did you ever think you would talk about the issue of suicide in church? Why or why not?
- What personal connection have you had to the issue of guns and suicide?

3. Handout: "Myths & Realities about Suicide and Gun Violence" (Below) Using Screen Share or with printed copies for each person, take turns reading aloud the **introduction and first five myths and realities**.

When these five have been read, ask these courageous questions separately:

- Was there anything that surprised you in these myths and realities?
- How does your Christian faith speak to you about suicide and gun suicide prevention?

Continue taking turns reading Myths & Realities 6-7. Ask these questions one at a time:

- Among all of the steps suggested to save lives, which one do you think would have the greatest impact on reducing gun suicide and why?
- Has anything in this conversation changed your understanding of gun violence prevention?

Action:

Leader offers this action request: If you or a loved one has a gun in your home or vehicle, consider steps to store it as safely as possible.

For everyone, look at the **Resources/Learn More** section at the bottom of this session. Take time to learn about resources for suicide intervention, safe gun storage and about the laws in your state on Background Checks, waiting periods, Extreme Risk Protection Orders and other steps to save lives.

Closing: Someone in the group reads Romans 8:35-39

Closing Prayer: God of mercy, teach us to pray for all lives touched by suicide, for loved ones lost, for loved ones left behind, for the rawness of pain and unanswered questions. We pray for those in turmoil and despair today everywhere in the world. God of healing, teach us to act for healing. Teach us to hold all with compassion and to turn compassion into change. Amen.

Myths and Realities about Suicide & Gun Violence

Introduction: Suicide is the area where responsible gun safety and common sense gun laws can make the biggest impact in reducing gun violence. Though there is little media reporting on suicide, nearly two thirds of all gun deaths are from suicide. Firearms are used in more suicides than homicides. Death by firearm is the fastest growing method of suicide in the United States.¹ Suicide is a painful issue and we use various myths to try to explain and cope with it. These myths are not always based on reality.

1. Myth: “Suicide is planned in advance.”

Reality: According to the Harvard School of Public Health, nearly half of suicide-attempt patients reported that there were less than 20 minutes between their first thought of suicide and their suicide attempt and for 24% there were only five minutes. Suicide is often impulsive, especially in young people. Easy access to a gun makes acting on this impulse far more likely and much more likely to be lethal.²

2. Myth: “If someone wants to kill themselves, they will find a way to do it.”

Reality: According to the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence and the Giffords Law Center, 90% of people who attempt suicide and survive do *not* go on to kill themselves. Rather, their attempt is a cry for help. The problem is that those who attempt suicide with a gun rarely get that chance for help. Of gun suicide attempts, 85% end in death while only 5% of other methods succeed. Reducing access to such a lethal means is a key to saving lives.³

3. Myth: “Suicide is a problem of the young. There is little that can be done about it.”

Reality: Yes, suicide is the second leading cause of death among those 15-24 years old. But the number of people who kill themselves is much greater in the older population, with gun suicide highest among older white men. According to the Giffords Law Center, the suicide rate among veterans is more than twice the rate of the general population. Over 6,000 veterans die each year by suicide and over 70% of those deaths involve firearms.⁴

4. Myth: “Guns are not the problem. Mental health is the only problem.”

Reality: For *interpersonal* gun violence, including murders and unintentional shootings, mental health plays a role in only 4% of these shootings.⁵ In fact, persons with mental illness are far more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators. But among those who die from suicide, most suffer from either major depression or alcoholism, both treatable diseases. This is often compounded by life events such as job loss, divorce and other crises. Access to mental health treatment is key. However, easy access to a gun can make a temporary crisis or a treatable problem into a permanent tragedy. Reducing gun violence requires both access to mental health services and limiting access to guns for persons who may be a danger to themselves.

5. Myth: “Suicide and mental health are universal problems with no discernible solution.”

Reality: Yes, the risk of suicide is widespread. In the USA approximately half of all Americans will experience mental illness in their lifetimes.⁶ Other nations have similar levels of mental illness but far lower levels of gun suicide because they have limited the access to guns. While levels of mental illness are similar, Americans are ten times more likely to die from gun suicide than citizens of other developed nations.⁷ Among US states, the states with the weakest gun laws and the most guns per person experience the highest levels of gun suicide per person.⁸

6. Myth: “Background Checks already keep those who are suicidal from buying a gun.”

Reality: Yes, since federal background checks were begun with the Brady Act of 1993, these background checks have blocked over 3 million attempted gun purchases or transfers to individuals who could not pass a background check, while still approving 98.5% of background check inquiries. Some states also have their own stronger Background Check rules.⁹

Still, there are many ways that people with diagnosed suicidal tendencies can acquire a gun:

1. A gun at home or one owned by a relative. A home with a gun is three times more likely to experience a gun suicide than a home next door, in the same neighborhood, without a gun. Nine out of ten suicides by children and youth are committed with a gun from their own home.¹⁰
2. Buying a gun at a gun show or a private sale that does not require a background check.

3. Delay or failure to report mental health issues to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). (Historic bipartisan legislation has encouraged prompt NICS reporting.)
4. Technical delays or understaffing at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) to promptly conduct background checks. If the check is not completed within three days by the ATF, a gun sale can proceed without a completed background check, except for buyers age 18-21. Thanks to citizen advocacy, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act by Congress in 2022 now provides for enhanced background checks for these younger buyers.

7. Myth: “Gun suicides are something we just have to accept because of the Second Amendment.”

Reality: There are many ways to prevent gun suicides right now:

- 1. Gun Safe Storage** If you own guns, store them safely so that children, teens, the elderly, friends, neighbors and anyone in crisis cannot get to the gun and ammunition. See gun safe storage steps at www.everytown.org/solutions/responsible-gun-storage/
- 2. Research** Gun suicide is a complicated issue. Urge your legislators to support top-quality research to address gun suicide as a public health issue.
- 3. Legislation** Urge your federal and state officials to support comprehensive background checks on all gun sales, as well as Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs) and waiting periods between the purchase and acquisition of a gun. Background checks can identify persons with serious mental health problems and make acquisition of a gun more difficult for them. This often allows the impulse of suicide to pass. Extreme Risk Protection Orders or “red flag laws” allow a court and law enforcement to remove guns from a person who is suicidal. Family members, doctors, other caregivers and law enforcement can work together to prevent a gun suicide and intervene with immediate help. While a slight inconvenience for gun buyers, waiting periods have proven to reduce impulsive gun suicides in the states that have such laws.¹¹ The combination of all these steps can save lives.
- 4. Love** Continue all that you do to help each person know of God’s love for them. Strengthen your capacity to help persons in crisis find immediate help. See below for suggestions.

How to Get Help

National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:
Call 988 or Text or Chat at 988

If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal, get help. Listening is not enough. Get professional help. Individuals contemplating suicide often don’t believe they can be helped, so you may have to be actively involved in helping them find a mental health professional or treatment facility and take them there.

In an acute crisis, do not leave the person alone. Remove any firearms, drugs or sharp objects. Take the person to an emergency room or clinic at a psychiatric hospital or a general hospital. If these options are not available, call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800-273-TALK (8255) or text **TALK** to 741-741

Resources/Learn More:

1. Look up the rules in your state and nearby states to see if they include Universal Background Checks, waiting periods or Extreme Risk Protection Orders. See www.lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws
2. First-ever broad-based study: **Convergence Dialogue on Guns and Suicide Prevention:**
https://reports.convergencepolicy.org/?utm_source=The+Trace+mailing+list&utm_campaign=ccba25d53c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_08_29_06_04_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f76c3ff31c-ccba25d53c-112532633
3. Learn about special programs to prevent suicide among the most vulnerable groups:
For **veterans**, see the Veterans Crisis Line <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/> or call 988 and then press 1
For **LGBTQ persons**, see the National LGBT Hotline at 888-843-4564 or help@LGBThotline.org
For **LGBTQ youth**, see The Trevor Project at www.thetrevorproject.org or text 678-678

4. Download pdf or order packs of the **Gun Safety Card** at www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence
5. Go deeper into the issues raised in this session through this report from the Brady Campaign, **The Truth about Suicide and Guns** at <https://www.bradyunited.org/reports/suicide-prevention-report-2018>

Sources:

- 1 “The Truth about Suicide and Guns” www.bradyunited.org/reports/suicide-prevention-report-2018
- 2 “Duration of Suicidal Crises,” Harvard School of Public Health, accessed May 1, 2019 www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/duration/
- 3 www.lawcenter.giffords.org/facts/gun-violence-statistics/#suicide
“The Truth about Suicide and Guns” www.bradyunited.org/reports/suicide-prevention-report-2018
- 4 <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/veteran-suicide-on-the-rise/>
- 5 “The ‘Mental Health Myth’ – The Role of Mental Health in Gun Violence and How the Media Often Gets it Wrong, Part Two” with Dr. Beth McGinty, Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, as part of the webinar series, “Standing Our Holy Ground,” produced by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program in partnership with the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship.
<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/videos/the-mental-health-myth-the-role-pt2-of-mental-health-in-gun-violence-and-how-the-media-often-gets-it-wrong/>
- 6 Centers for Disease Control www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm
- 7 Grinshteyn E, Hemenway D. Violent Death Rates in the US Compared to those of the Other High-income Countries, 2015. *Preventive Medicine*. 2019;123:20–26.
- 8 www.lawcenter.giffords.org/facts/gun-violence-statistics/#state
- 9 www.lawcenter.giffords.org/browse-gun-laws/
- 10 <https://www.srkd.org/research/access-firearms-increases-child-and-adolescent-suicide>
- 11 www.lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/gun-sales/waiting-periods/



Photo: Bethany Presbyterian Church, San Bruno, CA

“ People have told us that if Arlyn had not taken the gun, she could have killed herself another way. That’s possible. It’s also possible that the delay as she looked for another way would have given her mind time to move out of the suicidal trance she was in at the moment. That lost opportunity took away our chance to help and save her.”

—KARYL, ARLYN’S MOTHER

Session 3: Guns & Domestic Violence, A Taboo Topic

Goals: Discuss the taboo topic of family violence and guns, and how the church can address it.

Opening: Leader welcomes all and leads the Breath Prayer
Breathe in...Welcome, Holy Spirit.... (hold) Breathe out...Hold all with Compassion (6 times)

Covenant: Read the Courageous Conversation Covenant aloud to guide this session.

Presenting and Exploring:

1. Share this story aloud: <https://momentsthatsurvive.org/tribute/kaylas-momma/>

Prayer: Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy, Amen

2. Take turns reading aloud these sections:

The tragedy of domestic violence and guns- The minute a perpetrator brings a firearm into an abusive relationship, the victim is 500% more likely to die. While men can be victims of domestic abuse, women are the primary victims of domestic gun violence. Every 16 hours, an American woman is fatally shot by her partner, an average of 70 women each month. And 53% of all murdered women are killed by intimate partners or family members. Women who acquire a gun for protection die at twice the rate of women who do not, often being killed with their own gun. In cases where the authorities intervene in an abusive relationship, the presence of a gun greatly increases the chances that a police officer will die responding to domestic violence.

Over two-thirds of parents worry that a shooting could happen at their child's school. But home is a far more dangerous place for kids. In the five years ending in 2022, at least 866 kids ages 17 and younger were shot in domestic violence incidents and 621 of them died. In that same timeframe, 268 children were shot at school, 75 of them fatally. Even if the gun isn't ever used, introducing a firearm to an abusive setting has the potential to worsen PTSD symptoms in domestic violence victims of all ages, according to new research coming from Yale University.

92%

92 percent of all women killed with guns in high-income countries in an average year were from the United States. Everytown.org

Domestic Gun Violence and Mass Shootings - More than just escalating an abusive relationship to life-threatening status, owning a gun allows abusers to take their violence outside the home. Almost 70% of mass shootings (killing four or more) are related to domestic violence or are committed by someone who has been an abuser. The shooter in the mass shooting at the Sutherland Springs, Texas church, which left 26 people dead, had a previous domestic violence conviction that should have prevented him from owning a gun. In mass shootings such as the Orlando Pulse shooting, the Planned Parenthood shooting, and the shootings at Sandy Hook and Uvalde Elementary Schools, the perpetrator committed domestic violence against family members or romantic partners prior to the mass shooting. This is a clear pattern.

The Current Law- As federal law stands, anyone who has been convicted of the felony or misdemeanor crime of domestic violence towards a spouse, former spouse, cohabitating intimate partner, or person with whom the offender shares a biological child, or anyone with a permanent restraining order, cannot possess firearms. This federal law succeeds in banning domestic abusers from gun ownership by requiring background checks and creating processes that ensure abusers and stalkers must surrender the guns in their possession. This law has disarmed thousands of abusers, saving many lives, evidenced by the fact that in all states that require background checks for *all* handgun sales, there are 38% fewer women shot to death by intimate partners. Due to citizen advocacy, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022 and the Violence Against Women Act tighten the "boyfriend loophole" by including some dating partners and stalkers in the restriction. These laws also provide incentives to the states to enact "Red Flag" laws (ERPOs-Extreme Risk Protection Orders) to complement the federal law.

The Challenge of Enforcing the Law- To save lives and to be fair, current laws need clearer definition and more consistent enforcement. Also, even if abusers are legally prohibited from owning a gun, they can evade the law. An abuser can easily escape gun law prohibitions by purchasing guns from unlicensed, private or

online sellers, who may not conduct background checks. Offenders may also be able to pass a background check and purchase a gun because their local records do not provide enough information to flag them as abusers, or their records are spread across multiple states. Due to citizen advocacy, bipartisan legislation has accelerated reporting to the background check system and expanded background checks overall.

Enforcing these laws is difficult. While federal law bars convicted abusers from having guns, there are not enough matching state or local laws, preventing local authorities from finding effective ways of disarming those found or alleged to have done their partners harm. In 2022, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) endorsed a new **Gun Relinquishment Protocol** for clarifying, coordinating and enforcing current laws to prevent domestic gun violence. This protocol, among other steps, allows abusers an opportunity to surrender a gun without that action being used as a gun or parole violation against them in court. It prioritizes the lives of women and children by making gun surrender not a potential legal penalty for abusers. To learn how this protocol could apply in your state or city, see the Resources/Learn More section below.

Courageous Questions to Discuss:

- Does your church talk about domestic violence? Why or why not?
- Was there anything in this material that surprised you?
- What kinds of limits on gun ownership are appropriate for revoking access to buy guns? To having guns in one's possession removed? Should these limits be temporary or permanent?
- Does your state have a Red Flag law? See <https://americanhealth.jhu.edu/implementERPO>
- How can the church take better care of families and victims of abuse?

Action: • Study the Red Flag/Extreme Risk Protection Order laws in your state, if they exist.

- In states without such laws, learn who is working in your state to prevent domestic gun violence? Start with <https://momsdemandaction.org/about/chapters/>
- Consider how you can support passage of ERPOs and other life-saving laws.
- Consider how your church can provide help to people suffering from domestic violence, both in terms of how the laws work, and what services/organizations exist in your area to aid victims.

Closing:

The leader reads this story: <https://momentsthatsurvive.org/tribute/lashea-cretain/>

After a moment of silence, have a volunteer read aloud Leviticus 19:16:

"You shall not stand idly by when your neighbor's life is at stake. I am the LORD."

Let us pray:

Gracious God, We grieve the pain and fear that is experienced by those in violent domestic partner relationships. We thank you for what we've learned today about the work many are doing to create legal protections that can save lives. Bless us as we strive to support and care for our sisters and brothers at risk, and to find and create resources that can be helpful and healing. As we seek to be your hands and feet in the world, we pray with hope in your name, Amen

Since the introduction of the FBI's NICS in 1998, more than 500,000 firearm sales to domestic abusers have been blocked.

NICS: National Instant Criminal Background Check System processes background checks for gun sales at federally-licensed gun stores or dealers. A proposed new rule will expand requirements for background checks to gun shows and online sales. Private sales will require no checks.

Sources for this Session:

How Gun Violence Influences Abuse <https://hawcdv.org/how-gun-violence-influences-abuse/>
Domestic Violence Child Deaths <https://www.thetrace.org/2023/03/guns-domestic-violence-child-deaths/>

Guns Do Damage in Abusive Relationships Even When They Don't Go Off, *The Trace*
<https://www.thetrace.org/2017/04/guns-intimidation-domestic-violence-relationships-ptsd/> *

Guns and Violence Against Women <https://everytownresearch.org/report/guns-and-violence-against-women-americas-uniquely-lethal-intimate-partner-violence-problem/>

The Role of Domestic Violence in Fatal Mass Shootings
<https://injejournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40621-021-00330-0>

Resources/Learn More:

Standing our Holy Ground Webinar on Guns and Domestic Violence, the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program & the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmpWqaRD-Q0>

Gun Relinquishment Protocol, *National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Firearms*
https://bwjp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Firearms_Report.pdf

Facts that Show How Guns Make Domestic Violence Even Deadlier, *The Trace*.
<https://www.thetrace.org/2016/08/15-facts-that-show-how-guns-make-domestic-violence-even-deadlier>

Ending Gun Violence and Domestic Violence A Campaign and Toolkit to raise awareness of the impact of gun violence and domestic violence in Black, Indigenous/Native, other communities of color, and rural communities. <https://endinggv.org/>

Five Awake. Film about a group of women in Louisiana who pursue federal law on domestic violence.
<https://www.unitedwaysela.org/five-awake>

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic abuse, use a safe computer or phone to get help. Clear your browser after use. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800.799.SAFE (7233) or text "Start" to 88788 or visit www.thehotline.org



Homicide is the **leading cause of death** for pregnant and postpartum women. **81%** of these homicides **involved a gun**, and the majority of them occurred at home.

EVERYTOWNRESEARCH.ORG/DOMESTIC-VIOLENCE

Photo left: Rep. Gwen Moore (WI) speaks on Nov. 7, 2023 while the Supreme Court heard gun lobby arguments to overturn laws that restrict guns from domestic abusers. Photo: Alex Wong/Getty *Right:* Everytown.org

Session 4: Gun Violence, Race and Racism

Goals: Explore the intersection of gun violence, race, and racism. Learn what is working to transform tragedy.

Opening: Leader welcomes all and leads the Breath Prayer

Breathe in...Welcome, Holy Spirit.... (hold) Breathe out...Hold all with Compassion (6 times)

Covenant: Read the Courageous Conversation Covenant aloud to guide this session.

Presenting and Exploring:

1. Share these stories aloud:

<https://momentsthatsurvive.org/tribute/jenifer-redmond/>

<https://www.momentsthatsurvive.org/tribute/juwan-small/>

Prayer: Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy, Amen

2. Perspectives Take turns reading these sections aloud. Then ask questions for each section.

• **Our History** The intersection of gun violence and race has a history. It started with the early armed militias to enforce slavery. When the US Constitution was being ratified, James Madison offered a first draft of the Second Amendment. It gave only to the federal government the right to raise armed militias for “a free country.” Many Virginia slaveholders threatened to vote against the Constitution because they felt that the federal government might abolish slavery. They also wanted to continue their armed militias as patrols to prevent slave rebellions. As a compromise, James Madison, a slaveholder, changed the wording of the Second Amendment to: “A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free *state*” (italics added). The purpose of the Second Amendment was to allow the states to have armed militias to prevent slave rebellions.¹

Courageous Conversation Questions: Were you aware of the racial history of the Second Amendment and do you think that racism has anything to do with the proliferation of guns to over 400 million firearms in America today? Why or why not?

• **Where are We Now?** Today, Black men, women and children make up about 14% of the U.S. population, but over 50% of the victims of gun violence. Guns take the lives of ten times more Black children than white children.² Black men commit about 50% of gun homicides and make up over 50% of the victims.³ Black Americans have committed almost no mass shootings and have a low rate of gun suicide, though that increased during the pandemic, especially suicide among Black children and youth.

Gun violence in Black communities is very concentrated in urban hotspots, only about 1,200 census tracts nationwide, in the same spots over and over. In Oakland, CA, a study shows that just .3% of the population is involved in 60% of homicides. But four and a half million Americans live in the cross-fire of these hotspot neighborhoods in a devastating sea of death, fear, injuries, and generational and community-wide PTSD.⁴

Courageous Question: What do you feel as you hear these statistics?

• **The Roots of Violence** The American philosopher Dr. Rollo May defined violence: “Violence is an eruption of pent-up passion. When a person or group of people have been denied legitimate rights over a period of time, when they are continuously burdened with feelings of impotence which corrode self-esteem, violence is the predictable end result.”⁵

In the Presbyterian webinars⁶ on “**The Racial Divide in Gun Violence**” and “**The Ripple Effects of Gun Violence in Urban Contexts**,” the presenters ask and seek to answer: *What are the issues that cause someone in this context to pick up a gun in the first place?* They list: segregated neighborhoods abandoned by resources, investment and cohesion; failed education systems; poverty; gangs; 50% unemployment in many such areas; the trauma of children who are exposed to gun violence as a norm; missing fathers due to mass incarceration; the cyclical nature of violence; overwhelming numbers of guns and easy access to obtain guns.

Courageous Questions: *How do we determine who is a criminal?* When a white person commits gun violence, there is often an assumption of mental health issues. But when a Black person commits gun violence, there is

often an assumption of criminal issues. Why is this? What have been the implications of labeling gun violence by Black Americans as predominantly criminal and not rooted in mental health issues?

• **Police and Gun Violence** From 2013 to mid-2023, police killed 11,774 Americans. Black Americans are nearly three times more likely to be killed by police than white Americans, many of them unarmed youth.⁷ *Los Angeles Times* reporter Jill Leovy embedded with detectives investigating homicides in the more violent precincts of LA. She found that these communities suffered from the racism of both excessive policing for small issues and indifferent policing for an epidemic of gun violence, with 70% murders unsolved in some areas.⁸

Courageous Questions: What is needed to reduce police violence against people of color and what role can police best offer to reduce gun violence in hotspot areas?

• **Seeking Healing – Three Approaches**

(Take turns reading all 3 examples aloud and then ask the questions)

1. Violence Intervention: Community organizations, faith-based coalitions and state-funded programs such as CeaseFire, CURE Violence and Ten Point Coalitions work to intervene in gun violence in poor pockets of urban cities across America. They see gun violence as a contagious disease that requires direct intervention and can be treated as a public health issue. They build relationships with youth who are most at risk of falling into gun violence, often through engaging past gang members who can meet these kids in their reality and in their spaces. They sponsor mentoring programs, neighborhood Peace Walks and provide gang mediation. They work with families who have been traumatized by gun violence. They work to help rebuild lives of youth who have been incarcerated and stigmatized. They build partnerships for more neighborhood resources, cohesion and vitality.⁷ Due to the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022, more funds are now available to states and cities for Violence Interruption projects.



Over 200 people walk on St. Mary's Street Peace Walk in Detroit
Photo: The Detroit News

2. Collaboration: The most dangerous city for gun violence for Black Americans, per person, was once Omaha, NE. In 2009 seven people came together to form Omaha 360, now a 500-entity collaboration of nonprofits, neighborhood groups, churches, law enforcement and others. They meet every Wednesday to review gun violence from the past week and to share where intervention is needed. Week by week, Omaha 360 has built a bridge between the community and law enforcement so that enforcement is now one tool among many more tools, such as jobs creation, education, housing, mental health staff on police teams, re-entry support, and de-escalation tactics adopted by police. Now the police offer this de-escalation training in the community, especially for youth. Omaha 360 focuses on addressing immediate threats of gun violence as well as the root issues that contribute to it. They also successfully supported state legislation to require background checks and a permit to purchase handguns, the weapon used most frequently in homicide. With community help, homicide case-clearance rates grew to 87% and gun violence dropped by half by 2022. Other cities are studying the Omaha model.

<https://empoweromaha.com/omaha-360/> <https://apple.news/AiBwbuhaBToi2PqiYInfWNq>



Omaha 360
weekly meeting.
Photo:
Willie Barney

3. Investment in Neighborhood Resources: Former Housing and Urban Development Deputy Secretary Maurice Jones now works on community re-investment. He writes: “Since violent crime tends to bunch in discrete locales, flooding particular areas with services and investments that align with local needs and priorities provides the preventive medicine to staunch the flow of violence. Blight, vacant land, access to transportation all have a bearing on how a place might drive crime. We’ve seen the positive effect of place-centric efforts on public spaces when residents and law enforcement join forces to shut down crime hotspots – a nightclub with a history of violence or an abandoned property where drug dealers set up shop – and replace them with new affordable homes, an active community garden or a community center.

....Neighborhoods with access to work and transportation, with strong community cohesion, quality housing and schools simply do not suffer from high rates of gun violence. Still, each year hundreds of billions of dollars go into running the criminal justice system, much of that on incarceration. But barely a fraction goes toward rebuilding neighborhoods to offer tangible benefits to the people who live there.”⁹

Courageous Conversation Questions on these 3 Approaches:

- Please share if you have any personal experience with or have been involved with approaches similar to those described. Is there a way to find out if there are any of these types of projects in your city or town?
- What aspects of these approaches do you feel are most likely to prevent gun violence? Why?

Action: Learn more about this issue. Explore one of the sources or webinars below. Or research programs in your local community that address gun violence against people of color.

Closing: from Psalm 122

*Insert the name of a town or neighborhood that bears extreme gun violence day in, day out.

Gather in a moment of silence.

One: Pray for the peace of _____*! May they prosper who love you!

All: Peace be within your walls and shalom within your towers!

One: For my brothers and sisters and companions’ sake, I will say: Peace be within you!

All: For the sake of the home of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.

One: Lord, we scarcely know how to approach the seeds of racism and the fruit of violence.

All: But we know that we trust in you.

One: We trust you to pursue us with truth; we trust you to prune and nurture us to grow.

All: We trust you to open the eyes of the blind and strengthen the hearts of the fearful.

One: Teach us, Lord, to see you where you are truly found, in the midst of your people, all of your people. Amen.

Sources for this Session/Learn More:

1 Second Amendment Ugly Origins: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FcOScwmQOo>

2 Fowler, K. A., Dahlberg, L. L., Haileyesus, T., Gutierrez, C., & Bacon, S. (2017). Childhood Firearm Injuries in the United States. *Pediatrics*, 140, e20163486.

3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2014-2018 data.

4 Want to Fix Gun Violence in America? Go Local, The Guardian, January 9, 2017.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2017/jan/09/special-report-fixing-gun-violence-in-america>

5 Quoted in *Violence* – A biblically-based PowerPoint presentation by Rev. Alonzo Johnson, Self-Development of People, PC(USA) that relates gun violence to issues of poverty and race.

<https://www.drive.google.com/open?id=1hMY1hzEcPhstGFLn2-lpfa1pxQ09mvPMwmD9yCmeAxl>

6 These webinars are part of the series, **Standing Our Holy Ground**, produced by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program in partnership with the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship:

The Racial Divide in Gun Violence Pittsburgh Theological Seminary professor Dr. R. Drew Smith and Rochester pastor Rev. Robert Hoggard explore the racial divide in gun violence and what churches can do about it, while lifting up the voices of those who experience it the most.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/videos/the-racial-divide-in-gun-violence/>

The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence in Urban Contexts –Baltimore residents, clergy, police and activists discuss how they are working to prevent gun violence. <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/videos/the-ripple-effect-of-gun-violence-in-urban-contexts/>

7 www.mappingpoliceviolence.org

8 www.cureviolence.org

9 From “What Have We Learned Since Rodney King? An interview by Bill Keller with Jill Leovy, author of “Ghettoside” <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2016/03/03/what-have-we-learned-since-rodney-king>

10 *Anti-crime Strategies Should Try to Fix What Makes Hotspots Prone to Violence*

<https://www.themarshallproject.org/2017/03/13/crime-hotspots-need-investments-not-just-policing>

More Resources:

The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy by Philip S. Gorski and Samuel L. Perry, Oxford University Press

What Kind of Christianity: A History of Slavery and Anti-Black Racism in the Presbyterian Church by William Yoo, <https://www.pcusastore.com/Products/0664264670/what-kind-of-christianity.aspx>

We need to allow for the work of the Holy Spirit to intervene and disrupt all of our lives, including those who might be on a path that is headed toward destruction....

Cease Fire [a Violence Interruption program] is a model. These are folks who have been on the front lines, in relationship with those who may be prone to or on the verge of violence, to disrupt that pattern. It needs to be replicated much more widely.

--Dr. R. Drew Smith,
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary,
in the webinar, **Standing Our Holy Ground: The Racial Divide in Gun Violence**⁶

Session 5: Unmasking the Powers: Guns and Money

Goals: Discuss the economic and spiritual impact of the gun industry, the NRA and power.

Opening: Leader welcomes all and leads the Breath Prayer
Breathe in...Welcome, Holy Spirit.... (hold) Breathe out...Hold all with Compassion (6 times)

Covenant: Read the Courageous Conversation Covenant aloud to guide this session.

Presenting and Exploring:

This session has a lot of information and reading. Take turns reading aloud these paragraphs:

1. History of the Gun Industry: Early guns were made individually by gunsmiths until about 1800 when Eli Whitney opened the first gun factory in the US, mass-producing firearms with standardized parts. During the Civil War, the gun industry expanded rapidly, contracting at the end of the war. To survive, the industry developed generations of campaigns to sell guns to civilians, such as “The Boy Plan,” which defined a gun as an essential step to manhood. When hunting declined in the 1970s, the industry began to promote handguns. After the Iraq war and the expiration of the original assault weapons ban, semiautomatic assault style weapons were featured, with an estimated 25 million sold so far.



The gun and ammunition manufacturing industry has grown to a \$21 billion business in 2023.¹ While ammunition is consumed or can degrade, gunmakers must sell a non-consumable product that rarely wears out. With over 400 million guns in private hands, the industry has been relentlessly creative in using *fear* as a prime incentive for consumers to buy more and more guns and ammunition. The strategic use of fear has ensured that gun sales always surge after mass shootings and during years of presidential campaigns, as well as a historically-high surge during the Covid pandemic.

The firearms industry, alone among all US industries, has been protected for many decades by Congress from liability for the use of its product. However, recent lawsuits by families of children killed at the Sandy Hook and Uvalde schools, among others, have shown potential to hold companies accountable for violations of marketing laws. The AR-15-style rifle used at Sandy Hook was marketed not as a hunting rifle, but to “reissue your man card.” This resulted in a settlement, with Remington required to pay the families \$73 million.² The then-bankrupt Remington was the first gunmaker held partially responsible for a mass shooting.³

In 2020 there were 52,799 federally-licensed gun dealers, 16,586 gun stores and pawn shops, plus about 5,000 gun shows per year. The full cost of gun violence to US society is now an estimated \$557 billion.⁴

Courageous Questions for Conversation:

- Even though most Americans do not own guns, the gun industry has been extremely successful in terms of the proliferation and “normalization” of its product.
- What role do you think that fear plays in the business model of this industry?

2. The National Rifle Association (NRA): For over 100 years, the NRA was a sporting, hunting and gun safety group, supportive of gun regulation. In 1977, as hunting gun sales declined, the NRA convention faced a *coup*, with gun industry representatives taking over the NRA board.

Since then, the NRA has been the key lobby group for the gun industry, with a political action arm that rewards and punishes state and federal candidates based on their opposition or support for gun regulation. For decades, NRA success led to: historic highs of gun sales and proliferation; complete opposition to compromise; difficulty in passing common sense federal or state gun regulation and liberalization of existing gun laws; prohibition on federal funding for research on gun violence; prohibition on gun industry liability; often preventing Congress from approving a director for Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, or from funding it at a level to conduct its work. The NRA also scuttled gun industry initiatives to make guns safer with new technology. The political power of the NRA has been such that Warren Cassidy, a past NRA

executive said, “You would get a far better understanding if you approached [the NRA] as if you were approaching one of the great religions of the world.”⁵

A recent investigation shows that elected officials of both parties collaborated with the NRA since 1975 by serving on its board of directors and providing access and strategy for controlling the Congress on gun regulation.⁶ While still extremely active in elections and legislation, recent years have seen challenges to the NRA, including: extensive lawsuits; internal divisions; alleged financial corruption; a drop in membership; the formation of competing Second Amendment groups; and the growth of a vibrant grassroots gun safety movement. In 2022 the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act withstood NRA pressure to become the first gun safety legislation in nearly 30 years.

Courageous questions:

- Does anyone in the group have a family heritage of membership in the NRA? What has that relationship meant for your family?
- The NRA claims that guns rights are “God-given.”⁷ How do we determine if gun rights are “God-given?” What is the relationship between “Christian nationalism” and gun regulation?
- Have someone read Ephesians 6:12 in the King James or RSV. Paul says that we struggle with “principalities and powers,” unseen forces that compel us away from the plan of God. Looking back on all the sessions about gun violence in this study, where do you see this spiritual struggle with principalities and powers? (Suicide, Domestic Violence, Gun Violence and Race, Guns and Money)
- What is the underlying spiritual struggle in our current epidemic of gun violence?

Closing Prayer: ⁸

One: Gracious God,

All: whose mercy never ends, whose Spirit brings the Kairos moment for change:

One: We confess our willingness to abide the deaths of one million, eight hundred thousand souls taken by gun violence in our country since 1968:

All: the children, the parents, the distraught,

One: as well as millions more injured, ruined,

All: orphaned, widowed, broken.

One: We call upon you, Lord; we have nowhere else to turn.

All: Wake us up in our pews and our lives; do not let Christ find us asleep on this watch.

One: Rather, at all the places where you are proclaimed,

All: give us courage to stand against principalities and powers.

One: Grant us the joy of using the gifts that you provide –

All: energy,

One: intelligence,

All: imagination

One: and love

All: to help our communities and our nation heal from this tragedy and sorrow.

One: In Christ's name we pray,

All: Amen.

Action:

Find out if your federal and state elected officials/candidates receive funding from NRA affiliates: See

<https://www.opensecrets.org/orgs/national-rifle-assn/recipients?id=d000000082>

Sources/Learn More:

1. <https://www.ibisworld.com/united-states/market-research-reports/guns-ammunition-manufacturing-industry/>

2. The Challenge of Holding the Gun Industry Accountable, New Jersey Bar Foundation.

<https://njsbf.org/2023/03/27/the-challenges-of-holding-gun-manufacturers-accountable/>

3. Sandy Hook Lawsuit, Fox Business. <https://www.foxbusiness.com/politics/sandy-hook-lawsuit-remington-settlement>
4. Everytown Research & Policy, "The Economic Cost of Gun Violence," July 19, 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/>
5. NRA Insiders on the Politics of Guns <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/nra-insiders-on-the-politics-of-guns/>
6. Mike McIntire, The Secret History of Gun Rights: How Lawmakers Armed the NRA, 2023 <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/30/us/politics/nra-congress-firearms.html>
Podcast version: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/01/podcasts/the-daily/nra-gun-rights.html?showTranscript=1>
7. Jessica Dawson, Shall Not be Infringed: How the NRA Used Religious Language to Transform the Meaning of the Second Amendment <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-019-0276-z>
8. Responsive prayer, adapted from the 223rd General Assembly, PC(USA)

Long before the National Rifle Association tightened its grip on Congress, won over the Supreme Court and prescribed more guns as a solution to gun violence - before all that, Rep. John D. Dingell Jr. had a plan.

First jotted on a yellow legal pad in 1975, it would transform the NRA from a fusty club of sportsmen into a lobbying juggernaut that would enforce elected officials' allegiance.... [and] derail legislation behind the scenes....

To understand the ascendancy of gun culture in America, the files of Mr. Dingell, a powerful Michigan Democrat who died in 2019, are a good place to start. That is because he was not just a politician --- he simultaneously sat on the NRA's board of directors, positioning him to influence firearms policy as well as the private lobbying force responsible for shaping it.

And he was not alone. Mr. Dingell was one of at least nine senators and representatives, both Republicans and Democrats, with the same dual role over the past half century ---lawmakers who helped the NRA accumulate and exercise unrivaled power.

Their actions are documented in thousands pages of records obtained by The New York Times.... The files, many of them only recently made public, reveal a secret history of how the nation got to where it is now.

---Mike McIntire, The Secret History of Gun Rights: How Lawmakers Armed the NRA, 2023



Photo: Tech Times

Session 6: Action – Creating a New World

Goals: Reflect on how this Courageous Conversations series might lead to congregational and individual action to prevent gun violence ---and what the next step would be.

Opening: Leader welcomes all and leads the Breath Prayer
Breathe in...Welcome, Holy Spirit.... (hold) Breathe out...Hold all with Compassion (6 times)

Covenant: Read the Courageous Conversation Covenant aloud to guide this session.

Presenting and Exploring:

1. Read aloud this story: <https://momentsthatsurvive.org/tribute/a-mom/>

Prayer: Lord of mercy, bring change. Bring change. Bring change. Amen

2. Courageous Questions for reflection:

- In the sessions that we have shared, what session spoke most directly to you? How does your Christian faith relate to that particular topic?

Sessions:

- 1 Sharing our experience and knowledge about gun violence and prevention
- 2 Suicide and Gun Violence
- 3 Guns and Domestic Violence
- 4 Gun Violence, Race and Racism
- 5 Guns, Money and Power

3. Exploring Action: Presbyterian Decade to End Gun Violence

Take turns reading aloud:

In 2022, the General Assembly of the PC(USA) set into motion a “Presbyterian Decade to End Gun Violence,” calling on every congregation *to do something* to save lives. God is already at work doing this through many groups, churches and individuals. Learn about two creative action ideas and watch the video about two courageous congregations:

Guns to Gardens: Inspired by Isaiah 2:4 to “turn swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks,” the Guns to Gardens movement transforms unwanted guns into garden tools and other life-affirming items. Using procedures from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Guns to Gardens is a direct action to reduce the number of unwanted guns in homes and communities. Church parking lots, chop saws, blacksmiths, artists and trained church volunteers combine to provide a practical service to help Americans responsibly dispose of guns that they no longer want, without returning them to the gun market where they could do harm.

Often sponsored by a coalition of churches, this project also offers pastoral support and healing to persons and communities that have been traumatized by gun violence. Find a Guns to Gardens brochure and Action Circle learning options at www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence

Secure Gun Storage: Directly prevent gun violence by promoting secure gun storage and other steps to thwart easy access to guns and ammunition. These steps reduce gun suicide and unintentional shootings by children and others, as well as preventing gun theft and access to guns by potential mass shooters. Learn about “gun smart” technology and how guns could be made safer so that only the owner could fire the gun. Provide free or low cost gun locks at community events. Learn about a nationwide campaign to promote securing guns from child and teen access at www.besmartforkids.org Some churches combine Guns to Gardens with sharing a “Gun Safety Card” for gun owners. Others use the Gun Safety Cards in school backpack campaigns or to disseminate throughout a community. Find these cards as a pdf or as packets to order at www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence

Video: Watch the short video on the two Chicago congregations who received the Peace Fellowship’s 2019 Peaceseecker Award. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBKK9qfbZm0>

4. Gun Violence Prevention and Your Congregation:

Courageous Questions for Conversation:

- What do you think it will take to effectively prevent gun violence in America?
- What is the role of the church in this movement?
- Without feeling rushed to a particular project, are there any action steps here or elsewhere that you are beginning to feel called toward for yourself and/or your congregation? Any you want to explore further? Are there any that make particular sense for your context and congregation?

Share each person's response. After all who wish have shared, you may want to share again, looking for any areas of mutual sense of call or interest. It's ok to need to more time to keep thinking and praying about this.

Action:

For those who are ready to do so, what would be the next step in exploring action? Who else needs to be brought into the discussion? Are you called to meet again and when?

Seek to plan a next step in the near future.

Closing: Stand in a moment of silence. The leader invites everyone to lift up any prayers arising from our experience together in this series. Response to each prayer: Amen.

Benediction --from Mark 10:46-52:

One: As Jesus was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a large multitude, a blind beggar, Bartimaeus, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out,

All: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

One: And many rebuked him, telling him to be quiet, but he cried out all the more,

All: "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

One: And Jesus said to him, "**What do you want me to do for you?**"

All: And the blind man said to him, "Master, let me receive my sight."

One: Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well."

All: And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the way.

One: Lord, in your courageous mercy, we ask you to do this for us in our time of need:

All: Have mercy on us all and take away our blindness.

One: Lord, restore our faith and our vision. Show us the steps to follow you.

All: Go in faith and in peace, serving the Lord, Amen.

Resources/Learn More:

Gun Violence Prevention Congregational Toolkit, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship & Monthly Congregational E-News 80 pages of education, pastoral and action resources, plus groups at work in every state. The Toolkit includes receiving updates in the monthly E-News for Congregations.

<https://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence/>

New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence Toolkit 77 pages on how to organize your community or your state for education, advocacy, direct action such as Guns to Gardens, and effective involvement of volunteers, youth and artists in gun violence prevention. <https://www.gvptoolkit.org/>

God has provided us with the elements to be agents of change in the world. The change needs to be comprehensive: we need to address the idolatry of guns, the violence that permeates our culture, our obsessions with personal rights over public responsibility, the practices of widespread and indiscriminate sale of military style weapons... We must keep our "eyes on the prize," of preventing gun violence and the unnecessary deaths and injuries that result. Enough blood has been spilled. We affirm that through good organizational effort, animated by the passion for justice that comes to the people of God through the Holy Spirit, gun violence can be dramatically reduced.

On Gun Violence Prevention, 221st General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Section 2 Pastoral Resources

Emergency Response Kit: Resources for Times of Gun Violence

<https://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/PPFGVPEmergencyResponseKit.pdf>

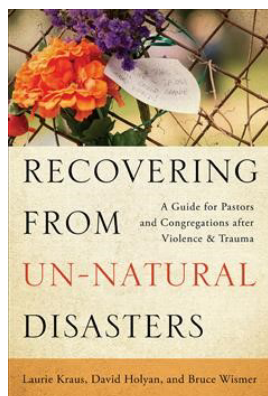
Presbyterian Disaster Assistance & Recovery Resources

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/How-PDA-Responds-to-Public-Violence.pdf>

Tapestry: Reweaving the Fabric of Community After Public Violence The *Tapestry* film looks at the effects of public violence on congregations and the communities, framed through the lens of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance National Response Team members who have responded to public violence and supported communities of faith as they walk through the valley of the shadow of trauma and its aftermath to begin the process of healing. 21 minutes. <https://vimeo.com/104653754>

Tapestry Study Guide: http://pma.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/pda/pdfs/tapestry_study_guide.pdf

For additional PDA resources and downloads: <http://pda.pcusa.org/situation/hcd/>
<https://pda.pcusa.org/pda/resource/gun-violence-packet/>



Recovering From Un-Natural Disasters: A Guide for Pastors and Congregations After Violence & Trauma by Laurie Kraus, David Holyan & Bruce Wismer

A handbook for pastors and church leaders of communities who could or perhaps already have experienced an un-natural disaster, such as gun violence, suicides, or sexual abuse. Readers will explore the four phases of human-caused disaster — Devastation and Heroism, Disillusionment, Reforming, and Wisdom — and receive step-by-step suggestions to use with their faith community during the recovery process. Example worship resources, including prayers, music suggestions, and sermons that are appropriate to use during periods of trauma and recovery, are included.

<http://www.wjkbooks.com/Products/0664262155/recovering-from-unnatural-disasters.aspx>

Ecumenical Pastoral Resources

Worship Resources for Use in the Wake of Gun Violence, Bishops United Against Gun Violence

<https://bishopsagainstgunviolence.org/resources/liturgical-resources/>



Vigil candles with labels like:
 Victims of drive-by shootings,
 Young people in a movie theater.....
 from First United Church of Oak Park, IL in Chicago. See sample list of labels for a Vigil in this section.

Scripture Passages for Addressing Gun Violence

These texts certainly do not exhaust the Biblical witness against humanity's capacity for violence or God's compassion for those who suffer. Again and again, the Bible presents God's call for us to love mercy and do justice and to fight against violence, injustice and exploitation as we trust in the ultimate victory of God over all that negates and degrades human life.

In the midst of tragedy, the Bible brims with hope because God is sovereign. "Though the wrong seems off so strong, God is the ruler yet." God's word encourages us to be a reconciler, a peacemaker, to love neighbors, to do justice, to build shalom, which is the well-being of all people in human society. * from "This is My Father's World"*

OLD TESTAMENT

- **Genesis 1:27** - We are created in the image of God
- **Exodus 20:13** - Thou shall not kill
- **Leviticus 19** - God's shalom to reign in all aspects of life
- **Deuteronomy 21:1-9** - Take responsibility for a murder
- **Deuteronomy 30:11; 19-20** - Choose life that you may live
- **Isaiah 2:3-4** - Beat swords into plowshares
- **Isaiah 9:5-7** - Unto us a child is born
- **Isaiah 11:1-9** - A vision of peace
- **Isaiah 30:9ff** - Those who spurn God's call to righteousness
- **Isaiah 40: 1-11** - Comfort for God's people
- **Isaiah 58:12** - Being a repairer of the breach
- **Jeremiah 29: 1ff** - Seek the welfare of the city
- **Zechariah 8:1ff** - Zechariah's vision of new Jerusalem

NEW TESTAMENT

- **Matthew 5:9** - Blessed are the peacemakers
- **Matthew 5:13ff** - You are the salt of the earth, light of world
- **Matthew 6:10** - Thy Kingdom come on earth
- **Matthew 19:19** - Love your neighbor as yourself
- **Matthew 26:52** - Those who live by the sword die by it
- **Luke 10:25-28** – The commandment to love your neighbor
- **Luke 22:47-53** - Jesus and violence
- **I Corinthians 13** - Greatest of these is love
- **II Corinthians 5:16ff** - God gave us the ministry of reconciliation
- **Galatians 6:7-10** - Don't lose heart
- **Ephesians 6:10ff** - Wrestling against a gigantic evil
- **Philippians 2:1ff** - The mind of Christ
- **Revelation 5:9-13** - The victor over evil is the Lamb who was slain
- **Revelation 11:15** - Kingdoms of this world become kingdoms of Christ
- **Revelation 19:6** - God's certain victory over evil

Sample Sermon – **Inaction is an Action (And Silence Speaks)** by Rev. Dr. Ben Trawick,
Grace Presbyterian Church, Springfield, VA <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFjlxCH65E8>

HYMNS Relating to Gun Violence

Gun Violence Prevention Hymns by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette www.carolynshymns.com
All Rights Reserved. Permission Given for Worship/Action Use:

I Cried to God Tune: Finlandia
https://www.carolynshymns.com/i_cried_to_god.html

If We Just Talk of Thoughts and Prayers* Tune: O Waly, Waly (See Below)
https://www.carolynshymns.com/if_we_just_talk_of_thoughts_and_prayers.html

God of Mercy, You have Shown Us Tune: Beach Spring
https://www.carolynshymns.com/god_of_mercy_you_have_shown_us.html

God, We Have Heard It Tune: Ah, Holy Jesus
https://www.carolynshymns.com/god_we_have_heard_it.html

From *Glory to God* Hymnal:
77 Isaiah the Prophet has Written of Old
87 Comfort, Comfort You My People
100 My Soul Cries Out/Canticle of the Turning
175 Seek Ye First
307 God of Grace and God of Glory
343 Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life
372 O for a World
373 O Day of Peace
753 Make Me a Channel of Your Peace
757 Today We All Are Called to be Disciples of the Lord
759 O God, We Bear the Imprint of Your Face
772 Live into Hope
836 Abide with Me

If We Just Talk of Thoughts and Prayers

Tune: O WALY WALY 8.8.8.8
Hymn text by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette
All rights reserved. Church use granted.

If we just talk of thoughts and prayers
And don't live out a faith that dares,
And don't take on the ways of death,
Our thoughts and prayers are fleeting breath.

If we just dream of what could be
And do not build community,
And do not seek to change our ways,
Our dreams of change are false displays.

If we just sing of doing good
And don't walk through our neighborhood
To learn its hope, to ease its pain,
Our talk of good is simply vain.

God, may our prayers and dreams and songs
Lead to a faith that takes on wrongs —
That works for peace and justice, too.
Then will our prayers bring joy to you.

From the blue *Presbyterian Hymnal*:

401 When Will People Cease Their Fighting
407 When a Poor One
527 Near to the Heart of God
530 O Lord of Life, Where'er They Be

Other: Let There be Peace on Earth

God, Our Nation Feels the Loss

Tune: PILOT 7.7.7.7.7 ("Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me")
Hymn text by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette
Written for the Children Taken by Gun Violence in
Uvalde, TX. All rights reserved. Church use granted.

God, our nation feels the loss
as our children pay the cost
for the violence we accept,
for the silence we have kept.
Rachel weeps for children gone;
God of love, this can't go on!

Jesus, Lord, we hear you say,
"Don't turn little ones away!"
May we build a kinder land
where our children understand:
Every child here matters more
that the guns we clamor for.

Holy Spirit, wind and flame,
send us out in Jesus' name.
May we shout and say, "Enough!"
May we build a world of love —
till the sounds of weapons cease,
till our young can grow in peace.

Tune: John Edgar Gould, 1871.

Author's Note: "A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her
children; she refused to be consoled, because they
are no more" (Matthew 2:18). We are called to do
more than pray and sing. Please act for gun safety in
your community and state.

Worship Resources

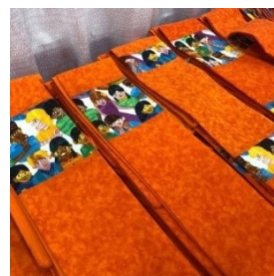
Stoles Orange is the color of the gun violence prevention movement. Wearing an orange stole in worship, for a choir, or in public witness sends a message that God is on the side of saving lives. Read why orange stoles matter at

<https://sojo.net/articles/why-ive-made-100-orange-stoles-addressing-gun-violence>

See a stole pattern at: <https://paulabehrens.com/page/clergy-stole-pattern>

Learn about stoles that you can purchase from Fruit of the Vine at:

<https://www.facebook.com/EpiscopaliansAgainstGunViolence/photos/a.485863311469687/3116205588435433/?type=3>



Bulletin Inserts - Download PDFs from the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship:

Ten Ways to Save Lives Bulletin Insert: <https://bit.ly/GVPbulletin>

Gun Violence Prevention & Suicide Bulletin Insert <https://bit.ly/gvpsbi>

Commemorative Dates for Services

Consider including gun violence prevention in worship on commemorative days, such as:

January: National Youth Day, Martin Luther King Day, Celebration of Life Day to Honor Children

February: Universal Day of Prayer for Students, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Shooting (2/14/18)
National Family Day (2/21/22), Gun Violence Survivors Week

March/April: Lent/Ash Wednesday/Holy Week, International Women's Day (3/8), March for Our Lives Anniversary (3/24/18), World Health Day, National Public Health Awareness Week, Injury Prevention Month

May: National Day of Prayer, Mothers' Day, National Trauma Awareness Month, Buffalo, NY Tops Market Shooting (5/14/22), Robb Elementary School Shooting, Uvalde, TX (5/24/22)

June: Gun Violence Prevention Month, National Safety Month, Wear Orange Days/Gun Violence Awareness, National Safety Day, Child Safety Week, Orlando FL Night Club Shooting (6/12/16), Fathers' Day, World Youth Day, Charleston, SC Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church Shooting (6/17/15)

July: Independence Day, Highland Park, IL Parade Shooting (7/4/22)

August: El Paso Walmart Shooting (8/3/19), National Grief Awareness Day (8/30)

September: National Suicide Prevention Month and Day, PCUSA Season of Peace, Campus Safety Awareness Month, International Peace Day (9/21)

October: World Communion Day, Las Vegas Concert Shooting (10/1/17), Domestic Violence Awareness Month, International Day of Nonviolence, Pittsburgh Tree of Life Synagogue Shooting (10/27/18)

November: All Saint's Day, Sutherland, TX Church Shooting (11/5/17), National Injury Prevention Day

December: Advent, Sandy Hook School Shooting (12/14/12), Gun Violence Awareness Sabbath early Dec.

Children & Youth

Prayer Flags Borrowing from the Tibetan Buddhist prayer flag tradition, invite children and youth in worship to draw or write a prayer-message for victims of gun violence. Use pieces of fabric (5 x 7) in different colors. Participants can use permanent markers to send a short symbol or prayer. Attach the flags to a string or ribbon to make a banner. At times of a mass shooting, you can send the flags to the Presbyterian Church or Presbytery office nearest the gun violence attack, inviting them to hang the flags outside their building, as a sign of our mutual grief and support.



Prayers – Children and youth can lead us all in praying the pain and hope in our hearts. Every day they are aware of gun violence and may appreciate a chance to bring their anxieties and prayers to God. See the next section for sample prayers by the Middle and High School Youth Groups at First Presbyterian Church of Yorktown, NY, shared with permission.

Litanies and Prayers

Prayer of Confession

Gracious God,
 You are generous in forgiveness
 You are with us, lovingly guiding us
 You encourage us to be our best

We confess that we have not done our best in protecting our children.
 Lockdowns in school put students in a negative, stressed, and pressured environment;
 they distract them from their education and goals.

Gun laws could improve a lot,
 yet lawmakers seem more concerned with money than people's lives.

Mental Health, too, is not being addressed in schools;
 students are suffering in silence.

Yet, you, O God, call us to do right and create a world at peace.

To do so:

We should create a culture where peers can talk to each other without fear of being judged.

Group discussions should be the norm, and not the exception.

Teachers should also be trained in facilitating such conversations.

Schools should have more accessible therapists;

ones who make the first move in talking with students;

ones who are authentic and genuine.

We should educate others on how guns should not be used for clout
 and the danger of these weapons.

May we strive to live without fear and strife.

God, grant us a good and fresh start. Amen.

- Joshua, Grade 6; Lionel, Grade 9; Marina, Grade 9; Tiffany, Grade 11

Prayer of Confession

Almighty God,

We confess that we can't solve the problem of gun violence, that we started,
 and we aren't ready for anything that is to come.

All of our "solutions" are just avoiding the *real* problem.

We ask for forgiveness, for instead of finding solutions for gun violence,
 we practice non-effective lockdown drills.

This is not good enough and it keeps happening.

We hope that we can find permanent solutions to stop gun violence,
 such as having a better understanding of mental illnesses;

figuring out where the guns are going,

who has them and what they plan to do with them.

We hope we can convince people to stop using guns for violence. Amen.

-Anthony, Grade 9; Brynne, Grade 7; Jonathan, Grade 9; Kithara, Grade 6

Psalm of Lament

Dear God,

Students everywhere are suffering

Bullets are raining down on them and nothing is changing.

We have faith that through your work in the world, things will get better.

We have faith that you will end the cycle of gun violence.

Please help our leaders to create sensible gun laws

and bring safety into our hallways and classrooms.

We praise you in our everyday lives and give thanks for your never ending love.

-Ben, Grade 9; Emma, Grade 9; Ethan, Grade 10; Julia, Grade 7

Litany of Remembrance and Advocacy

Let us remember our fellow students
who have fallen to people with malcontent in their hearts and guns in their hands.

We will stand up against gun violence.

Let us remember the teachers, school administrators and others
who have died trying to keep kids safe.

We will stand up against gun violence.

Let us remember the innocent people who die every day from needless gun violence.

We will stand up against gun violence.

Let our students go to school without fear of violence or lockdown drills
that don't solve anything.

We will stand up against gun violence.

Let us take a stand and get guns out of the hands of people who could abuse them.

We will stand up against gun violence.

Let us take action against racism,
a primary cause of unreasonable police shootings of young people of color.

We will stand up against gun violence.

Let us take *real* action and stand behind our "thoughts and prayers" instead of speaking
empty words. Let this be a call to all people in the community to work
for a new era of gun laws.

We will stand up against gun violence.

-Faith, Grade 9; Luke, Grade 11; Natalie, Grade 12; Sam, Grade 7



A Lenten Prayer of Confession by Rev. Rachel Sutphin, Charlottesville, VA

O Lord, at times, we feel overwhelmed by the brutality and pain we see and hear. In our lament, we cry out: "how long?" How long will war ravage the world? How long will our country value guns over lives? How long will your people choose violence and fear over peace and love?

If we are honest, we know that we have contributed to the suffering we lament. You call us to be your people, sending prophets, teachers, and even your Son to instruct us in your ways of justice and peace. Yet, we constantly turn away from your call and choose our own way. We have feared vulnerability, distrusted our neighbors, and idolized weaponry. We have added to the pain of the world by purchasing guns and tuning out the cries of gun violence survivors. We have sinned against you and are in need of your mercy.

A time of silence may be held for the private confession of sins.

Confident in your abounding mercy that covers all our sins, we seek to answer your call. Empower us, Lord, to learn, advocate, and teach so that we may answer your call to participate in your movement of resistance and peace. Let us break down systems and firearms that harm your beloved people and build up, together, a community dedicated to ensuring the end of gun violence.

May we answer questions of "how long?" with "soon," declaring that the in-breaking reign of your kin-dom is coming soon through the movement and cries of your people. Amen.

A Presbyterian Prayer for Action

Sent to all Congregations by the 223rd General Assembly, PC(USA), June 2018, Marking 50 Years of General Assembly Calls to Prevent Gun Violence

Gracious God,
whose mercy never ends,
 whose Spirit brings
the Kairos moment for change:

We confess our past willingness to abide the deaths
of over one million, six hundred thousand souls
 lost to gun violence in the last 50 years:

the children,
 the parents,
the distraught,
 as well as millions more injured,
ruined,
 orphaned,
widowed.

Help us to comprehend this carnage
and not become numb.

We give thanks for the long witness of the General Assembly
and all Presbyterians who are already engaged in preventing gun violence.

We thank you for raising up the students to lead us
 with marches, walk-outs and a passion born of pain.

We call upon you, Lord;
 we have nowhere else to turn.
Galvanize all of us,
 every congregation in the Presbyterian Church.
Wake us up in our pews and our lives;
do not let Christ find us asleep on this watch.

Rather, Lord, grant to our church members, both
 those of us who own guns and those of us who do
 not, a unity of purpose to change the national debate
 on gun violence.

Show us the path.

At all the places where you are proclaimed,
**give us courage to stand against principalities
 and powers.**

Grant us the joy
of using the gifts that you provide –
 energy,
intelligence,
 imagination
and love—

to help our communities and our nation heal from this
 tragedy and sorrow.

In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

*Responsive Prayer Adapted by
 Cheryl and Doug Hunt, Stockton, CA*

A Prayer by Robert Williamson Jr. after the
 Parkland, FL school shooting

O merciful God,
 You who shatters the spear and breaks the bow
 You who beats swords into plowshares
 and spears into pruning hooks
 You who received in Your body
 the death blows of the Empire
 Hear us, we pray.
 The forces of evil rage in our midst
 Those who wield weapons against innocent
 children
 Those who profit from the manufacture of death
 Those who placate with hollow prayers and
 platitudes
 Those who line their pockets with blood money
 Those who imagine it could be no different
 Discomfort us with the violence done in our
 name
 Heal us of our addiction to power
 Cure us of our enthrallment with weapons of
 war
 Restore our sense of common humanity
 Give us the courage to protect our children
 Make our feet tireless in the streets
 Steady our voices in the town halls
 Steel our resolve at the ballot box
 Until every feckless legislator has been voted
 out of office
 Until the profiteers of death have been silenced
 Until our children no longer fear for their lives
 Until our lust for violence has been transformed
 into a passion for peace
 We long for the day when death will be no more
 When there will be dancing instead of mourning
 When there will be joy instead of ashes
 When you will wipe every tear from every eye
 When mourning and crying and pain will be no
 more
 But until that day, O Lord,
 Make us tireless in the struggle for justice
 Make us relentless in the pursuit of peace
 Make us fearless in speaking to power
 For it is in the name of the Christ,
 the Lion of Judah, slain like a Lamb,
 that we pray. Amen

A Litany of Remembrance

Leader 1: Let us remember all who have been harmed by violence. We acknowledge the strength of those who survive and of those struggling to heal. For their sake and for ours, we commit ourselves to building each other up and to healing – together.

Leader 2: *Let us remember the families and loved ones of those who have died from gun violence. We acknowledge their pain and their deep grief. They too, are part of our community, and need our love and help towards healing.*

Leader 3: Let us remember the perpetrators, and the families of those who commit violence. We acknowledge that their lives, too, are devastated and their hopes dashed. For their sake and for ours, we remember that pain goes in many directions from each act of violence.

All: We will stand up to violence. We stand together expressing our unity, our connection to each other and to the divine; our hope for healing and for transformation. Let the Spirit of our Creator move through us. Help us to transform and heal our communities. And let us begin by transforming ourselves. Amen.

(from *Vigils Against Violence* by Pat Long and Vandy Bradow)



Orlando, FL, a Senior Community near the Pulse Nightclub remembers each person lost in one of the largest gun mass murders in America, June 2016

An Intercessory Prayer about Gun Violence

Shared by Phillip Swank, Laceyville, PA

Gracious God,
We hear your call to confront the bloodshed caused by guns in our community and throughout the nation. Open our hearts to your compassion and to share your grief over violence. Open our eyes to catch a vision of your coming kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven". Open our minds to understand what you are calling us to do and to be.

We pray, O Lord, for the power of your Spirit to take our faltering witness and:
Expose the evil of the trafficking and improper use of firearms;
Break the grip of violent myths that fuel the appetite for weapons;
Unmask the idolatry of those who promote guns as the answer to worldly problems; and,
Challenge those who profit from the blood of innocent people and creatures.

We also recognize, O Lord, the violence in our own hearts. May your peace may take root deep in our lives. We lift up to you those prone to violence against others or themselves and those involved in illegal gun trafficking, knowing, that they too, are your beloved. Open their ears and hearts, we pray, to the things that make for peace.

May our petitions and our witness, O God, be in consonance with your boundless grace and your uncompromising truth. Amen.

A Litany for Worship – The Witness of a Gun Violence Survivor

One: On October 1, 2017, Katie Woodall, a Pre-K teacher, football mom and country music fan, survived the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival shooting in Las Vegas, which killed 60 people and physically wounded 863, the deadliest shooting by a single gunman in American history. Hear her words:

In my story, there were four individuals who risked their lives to help my husband get me to safety that night. Like so many other survivors, you try to find mechanisms to cope.

All: I felt that I had to be grateful to be alive and that I did not have a right to be angry or question the gun violence in our society. I felt I just needed to be thankful for being alive.

One: And that worked for a while. But after a few years, every time I would turn on the news and hear a story about another mass shooting or other gun violence, it became harder and harder to make the place of gratitude be enough. I needed to get involved in the conversation and in organizations that could help me find a voice to try to stop this madness in our country.

All: My soul needs to be doing things where I'm making a difference. This is the task of our generation.

One: It will always be part of me. The AR-15 bullet lodged near my ribs is a daily reminder. And I will never forget the screams of women realizing that the husbands who were lying on top of them to protect them were dead. Their screams, their blood-curdling screams will forever be in my head. Everyone who was there that night had emotional trauma, psychological trauma that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. Every person in our family is dealing with some sort of trauma from what happened to us at the Route 91 mass shooting - my mother, my boys.

All: Gun violence is not just the physical wounds. Gun violence is not just about the person who is shot.

One: That night, strangers did everything they could to try to save lives. There wasn't trampling. There were people running in to help. I saw so much humanity that night. I don't know why we have the courage to do those hard things, yet we don't have the courage to hold our lawmakers accountable. My hope as a survivor, and I am hopeful, is that so many people are tired of this. More people are saying: this is just not ok.

All: This is a uniquely American epidemic and we have the means to stop it.

One: I want to thank everyone who is doing all that they can to make a difference. If you're not in the work, I encourage you to get involved. There are so many ways. This is the task of our generation.

All: My soul needs to be doing things where I'm making a difference. This is the task of our generation. Amen.



Find Katie's story at <https://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/KatieWoodall.pdf>

A Litany on the Tragedy of Gun Violence

Written for Martin Luther King Day by Rev. Mark Koenig for the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, with updates 2022

One: We celebrate and give thanks for the life and witness of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Many: Who proclaimed a vision of all people living together, and bore witness to the power of nonviolence,

One: We gather, to remember his words, his commitment, his life and to rededicate ourselves to addressing the evil of gun violence,

Many: which claimed his life and which continues to plague our country and the world.

One: Over 40,000 people die by guns each year in the United States.

Many: And we grieve.

One: An average of 120 people are killed by guns every day, including fifteen children.

Many: And our hearts break.

One: Guns kill some 1,000 people each day in the developing world.

Many: And we mourn.

One: A child in the United States is twelve times more likely to die by a gun than are the children who live in all twenty-five other industrialized nations combined.

Many: And we weep.

One: The annual economic cost of gun violence in our nation is estimated to be at over \$557 billion. Medical costs, decimated families, the court system, our jails and prisons, and security measures in airports, schools, and public buildings all contribute to this sum.

Many: And sorrow sweeps over us.

One: Since John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, more U.S. citizens have died by gunfire within our own country than U.S. servicemen and women who were killed in all our wars of the 20th century.

Many: And we pray.

One: Faced with gun violence,

Many: We grieve for those are killed and those whose lives are forever changed; We seek to be a comfort for those who have lost loved ones; We pray for a change of heart for those who resort to violence.

One: Faced with gun violence, may we

Many: Educate; Organize; Advocate;
And in all the ways we can, work for that day when guns and weapons of destruction are transformed into instruments of healing.

One: May it be so.

Many: May we do so. Amen.

Sample Litany for Peace Vigil from Chicago Churches (see below for memorial candle list)

Welcome

Opening Sentences

(from Psalm 43)

We need you, God, to rescue us all.

Send out your light and your truth; let them lead us.

When will you come? We need you, O God.

Send out your light and your truth; let them lead us.

Our refuge and strength, where have you gone?

Send out your light and your truth; let them lead us.

Broken, we turn now to you, our exceeding joy.

Send out your light and your truth; let them lead us.

Bring us to where you abide.

Send out your light and your truth; let them lead us.

We put our hope in you, Lord, so yet will we praise.

Send out your light and your truth; let them lead us.

Song

Come and fill our hearts with your peace; you alone, O Lord, are holy.

Come and fill our hearts with your peace. Alleluia.

Procession with Lit Candles

(please form a circle around the center table)

Reading: Isaiah 65: 17-25

Candles of Remembrance

(as the group represented by your candle is called, please place the candle around the center table)

Silence

Reflection

Litany

Response: Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

In peace let us pray to the Lord:

For dear ones lost to us through mass shootings at Sandy Hook, Las Vegas, Sutherland Springs, and other sites, hear our prayer and our commitment:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For the men, women, and children of _____ (town) whose lives have been prematurely ended by gun violence, hear our prayer and our commitment:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For countless numbers of individuals who have died through self-inflicted gun wounds, hear our prayer and our commitment:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For communities and families torn apart by gun violence, hear our prayer and our commitment:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For all who live this night in danger or in fear, hear our prayer and our commitment:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For the integrity and courage of elected officials, police officers, EMTs, and others who serve our communities, hear our prayer and commitment:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For activists who work to rid our streets and homes of guns, hear our prayer and commitment:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For the creation of your beloved community, where no one dies prematurely or bears children for calamity, and where lamb and wolf abide peacefully, hear our prayer and our commitment:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For sustained hope and strength, as we wage peace, hear our prayer and our commitment:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Invitation to Action

Songs

Sending

A Franciscan Blessing

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for God's justice, God's freedom, and God's peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and violence, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them, and to turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

And the blessing of God, Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit be upon you, those you love, and those for whom you pray this day and forevermore. Amen.

CANDLE MEMORIALS

Each glass contains a candle with these labels taped on the front:

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Children in their classrooms | 20. Children shot by other children |
| 2. People in their homes | 21. Adults working to bring about change |
| 3. Children at play | 22. Community leaders standing up to forces of evil |
| 4. Young people at a movie theater | 23. People of color killed by police over-reaction |
| 5. Young people on a college campus | 24. Daughters, sisters, wives and mothers killed by gun violence |
| 6. Young people at a party | 25. Sons, brothers, husbands and fathers killed by gun violence |
| 7. Victims of carjackings | 26. Police officers providing security |
| 8. Parents at work | 27. Victims of home invasions |
| 9. Parents caring for family needs | 28. People killed at concerts |
| 10. Parents attending their children's activities | 29. People at coffee shops |
| 11. Young people at work | 30. Elijah Sims and other people with dreams |
| 12. Young people hanging out together | 31. People worshipping at church |
| 13. Family members gathered on a front porch | 32. Teachers at school |
| 14. Men and women at Bible studies | 33. Victims of drive-by shootings |
| 15. People in military recruitment centers and bases | 34. People killed while protecting others |
| 16. People at shopping malls | 35. Victims of mass shootings |
| 17. Victims of domestic abuse | 36. Over 28,000 people injured by guns this year in our city |
| 18. Victims of accidental shootings | |
| 19. Victims of gang violence | |

A Sample Vigil to Support those who Grieve

This vigil worship service was created by Rev. Margery Rossi and has been used to remember and grieve after many incidents of gun violence. Some of these worship resources come from the "God Not Guns" program of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence www.bradycampaign.org



Prayer Vigil To Stand with Victims of Gun Violence

_____ Presbyterian Church

We grieve with you, _____ (i.e. Buffalo, Uvalde, Dayton).

May God be with you in your grief,
that you may know consolation.

May God be with you in your anger,
that you may receive peace.

May God be with you in your confusion,
that you may be led to truth.

And may God be with you in your fear,
that you may delivered into surpassing love.

We Grieve...

Call To Worship

Leader: Come let us go to the mountain of the LORD,
that we may walk the path of the Most High.

**People: That we may beat our swords into plowshares,
and our spears into pruning hooks.**

Leader: We gather today in remembrance of all those killed or harmed by gun violence in _____ just this week.

**People: We mourn the loss of over 40,000 of our brothers and sisters,
killed by guns in our country this year.**

Leader: We are a nation at war with ourselves,
a people who have forgotten who we are.

People: We gather today to remember

that we are each a child of God.

**We gather to claim our belonging to each other
and our commitment to living the way of God's peace.**

Leader: Come let us go to the mountain of the LORD,
that we may walk the path of the Most High.

**People: That we may beat our swords into plowshares,
and our spears into pruning hooks.**

Leader: Neighbor shall not lift up gun against neighbor.
Neither shall they learn violence any more.

**All: And none shall be afraid,
for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken.**

Opening Prayer

Gracious God,

Inspire us with the gift of shalom,
the gift of wholeness and the promise of your presence.

Give us wisdom to seek nonviolence
as an answer to the violence of our lives and world.

Give us courage to seek wholeness in a fractured and divided world,
to find reconciliation rather than revenge,

to abandon the instruments of violence and death
and entrust our lives, our homes and our families to you.

May your presence fill us and others with the thirst for unity,
wholeness, and the desire to see all people valued
as created in your image.

May we and others receive your Shalom
that we might be faithful instruments of your love. Amen.

(Adapted from Episcopal Peace Fellowship, "Gift of Shalom")

Hymn: God of Mercy *A Hymn Lamenting Gun Violence*

Scripture Reading

Psalm 46

God is our refuge and our strength,
a very present help in trouble.

Therefore we fear nothing –
even if the earth should open up in front of us
and mountains plunge into the depths of the sea,
even if the earth's waters rage and foam
and the mountains tumble with its heaving.

There's a river whose streams gladden the city of God,
the holy dwelling of the Most High.

God is in its midst, it will never fall –

God will help it at daybreak.

Though nations are in turmoil and empires crumble,
God's voice resounds, and it melts the earth.

The God of Hosts is with us –
our stronghold is the God of Israel!

Come, see what Yahweh has done –

God makes the earth bounteous!

God has put an end to war,
from one end of the earth to the other,
breaking bows, splintering spears,

and setting chariots on fire.
 “Be still, and know that I am God!
 I will be exalted among the nations;
 I will be exalted upon the earth.”

The God of Hosts is with us –
 our stronghold is the God of Israel!

Hymn: Amazing Grace

We Remember...

Time of Reflection and Remembrance

During this time, you may offer a brief reflection or remembrance.

Litany of Remembrance

Leader 1: Let us remember all who have been harmed by violence.
 We acknowledge the strength of those who survived
 and of those still struggling to heal.
 For their sake and for ours, we commit ourselves
 to building each other up and to healing – together.

*Leader 2: Let us remember the families and loved ones
 of those who have died from gun violence.
 We acknowledge their pain and their deep grief.
 They too, are part of our community,
 and need our love and help towards healing.*

Leader 3: Let us remember the perpetrators,
 and the families of those who commit violence.
 We acknowledge that their lives, too, are devastated
 and their hopes dashed.
 For their sake and for ours, we remember
 that pain goes in many directions from each act of violence.

All: We will stand up to violence.

**We stand together expressing our unity,
 our connection to each other and to the divine;
 our hope for healing and for transformation.**

Let the Spirit of our Creator move through us.

Help us to transform and heal our communities.

And let us begin by transforming ourselves. Amen.

(Written for Vigils Against Violence by Pat Long and Vandy Bradow)

We Hope...

Scripture Reading

Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on the mountainside,
 and after he sat down and the disciples had gathered around,
 Jesus began to teach them. He said:
 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
 for they will be filled.
 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.



Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
 for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you
 and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.
 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven,
 for in the same way they persecuted the prophets
 who were before you.

We Pray...

Closing Prayer

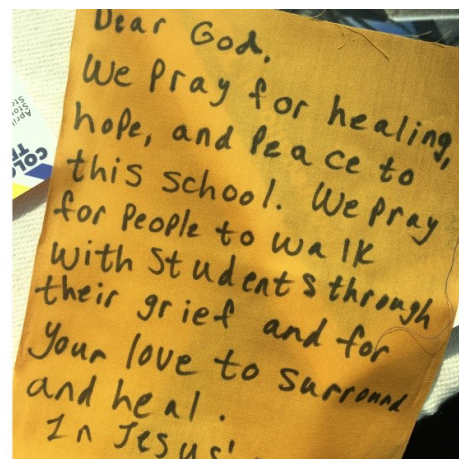
Let us be at peace with our bodies and our minds.
 Let us return to ourselves and become wholly ourselves.
 Let us be aware of the source of being,
 common to us all and to all living things.
 Evoking the presence of the Great Compassion,
 let us fill our hearts with our own compassion –
 towards ourselves and towards all living beings.
 Let us pray that we ourselves cease to be the cause of suffering
 to each other. With humility, with awareness of the existence of life,
 and of the sufferings that are going on around us,
 let us practice the establishment of peace in our hearts and on earth.

-- Thich N'hat Hanh

Hymn: The Canticle of the Turning

We Act...

Write a message on a prayer flag,*
 soon to be sent to the people of _____.
 Sign letters to our legislators.
 Join us as we mobilize in response to God's call.



** The prayer flags are pieces of fabric, (5 x 7) in different colors. Participants can use permanent markers to send a short symbol or prayer. Attach the flags to a ribbon and send to the Presbyterian church or Presbytery office nearest the gun violence attack, inviting them to hang the flags outside their building, as a sign of our mutual grief and support. In using prayer flags, we deeply appreciate their Tibetan Buddhist origins.*

When You Fear Someone May Take Their Life**

***This section is not offered as medical advice or to replace professional medical intervention and help. These are suggestions from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.*

Most suicidal individuals give some warning of their intentions. The most effective way to prevent a friend or loved one from taking his or her life is to recognize the factors that put people at risk for suicide, take warning signs seriously, and know how to respond.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - Call or Text **988**

Know the Facts

PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS

More than 90 percent of people who kill themselves are suffering from one or more psychiatric disorders, in particular:

- Major depression (especially when combined with alcohol and/or drug abuse)
- Bipolar depression
- Alcohol abuse and dependence
- Drug abuse and dependence
- Schizophrenia
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Eating disorders
- Personality disorders

Depression and the other mental disorders that may lead to suicide are -- in most cases -- both recognizable and treatable. Remember, depression can be lethal.

The core symptoms of major depression are a “down” or depressed mood most of the day or a loss of interest or pleasure in activities that were previously enjoyed for at least two weeks, as well as:

- Changes in sleeping patterns
- Change in appetite or weight
- Intense anxiety, agitation, restlessness or being slowed down
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Decreased concentration, indecisiveness or poorer memory
- Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, self-reproach or excessive or inappropriate guilt
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

PAST SUICIDE ATTEMPTS

Those who have made suicide attempts are at higher risk for actually taking their own lives.

Availability of means: In the presence of depression and other risk factors, ready access to guns and other weapons, medications or other methods of self-harm increases suicide risk.

Recognize the Imminent Dangers

The signs that most directly warn of suicide include:

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself
- Looking for ways to kill oneself (weapons, pills or other means)
- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide
- Has made plans or preparations for a potentially serious attempt

Other warning signs include expressions or other indications of certain intense feelings in addition to depression, in particular:

- Insomnia
- Intense anxiety, usually exhibited as psychic pain or internal tension, as well as panic attacks
- Feeling desperate or trapped -- like there's no way out
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling there's no reason or purpose to live
- Rage or anger

Certain behaviors can also serve as warning signs, particularly when they are not characteristic of the person's normal behavior. These include:

- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities
- Engaging in violent or self-destructive behavior
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends or family

Take it Seriously

- 50-75% of those who take their own lives give some warning of their intentions to a friend or family member.
- Imminent signs must be taken seriously.

Services for Vulnerable Groups:
 For veterans, see the Veterans Crisis Line <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/> or call 988 and then press 1
 For LGBTQ persons, see the National LGBT Hotline at 888-843-4564 or help@LGBThotline.org
 For LGBTQ youth, see The Trevor Project at www.thetrevorproject.org or text 678-678

Be Willing to Listen

- Start by telling the person you are concerned and give them examples.
- If they are depressed, don't be afraid to ask whether they are considering suicide, or if they have a particular plan or method in mind.
- Ask if they have a therapist and are taking medication.
- Do not attempt to argue someone out of suicide. Rather, let the person know you care, that they are not alone, that suicidal feelings are temporary, and that depression can be treated. Listen more, talk less.

Seek Professional Help

- Be actively involved in encouraging the person to see a physician or mental health professional immediately.
- Individuals contemplating suicide often don't believe they can be helped, so you may have to do more.
- Help the person find a knowledgeable mental health professional or a reputable treatment facility, and take them to the treatment.

In an Acute Crisis

If a friend or loved one is threatening, talking about or making plans for suicide, these are signs of an acute crisis.

- Do not leave the person alone.
- Remove from the vicinity any firearms, drugs or sharp objects that could be used for suicide.
- Take the person to an emergency room or walk-in clinic at a psychiatric hospital.
- If a psychiatric facility is unavailable, go to your nearest hospital or clinic.
- If the above options are unavailable, call 911 or:

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – Call or Text 988

Follow-up on Treatment

- Suicidal individuals are often hesitant to seek help and may need your continuing

support to pursue treatment after an initial contact.

- If medication is prescribed, make sure your friend or loved one is taking it exactly as prescribed. Be aware of possible side effects and be sure to notify the physician if the person seems to be getting worse. Usually, alternative medications can be prescribed.
- Frequently the first medication doesn't work. It takes time and persistence to find the right medication(s) and therapist for the individual person.

Talking about Suicide

Give accurate information about suicide

- Suicide is a complicated behavior. It is not caused by a single event such as a bad grade, an argument with loved ones, or the breakup of a relationship.
- In most cases, suicide is caused by an underlying mental disorder like depression or substance abuse. Mental disorders affect the way people feel and prevent them from thinking clearly and rationally. Having a mental disorder is nothing to be ashamed of, and help is available.
- Talking about suicide in a calm, straightforward manner does not put ideas into other people's minds, adults or kids.
- Address blaming and scapegoating. It is common to try to answer the question "why?" after a suicide death. Sometimes this turns into blaming others for the death. Ultimately, this question is impossible to answer.
- Do not focus on the method or graphic details. Talking in graphic detail about the method can create images that are upsetting and can increase the risk of imitative behavior by vulnerable individuals.
- If asked, it is okay to give basic facts about the method, but don't give graphic details or talk at length about it. The focus should be not on how someone killed themselves but rather on how to cope with feelings of sadness, loss, anger, etc.
- Address anger. Accept expressions of anger at the deceased and explain that these feelings are normal.
- Address feelings of responsibility. Reassure those who feel responsible or think they could have done something to save the deceased.
- Encourage help-seeking. Encourage individuals to seek help from a trusted family and a counselor if they or a friend are feeling depressed or suicidal.

Find a Bulletin Insert on **Suicide and Gun Violence Prevention** from the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship at:
<https://bit.ly/gvpsbi>

Photo: "Let us Love not just with Words or Speech but in Truth and Action."
 Presbyterians
 Rhonda Kruse,
 Eugene and
 Jeannette McGrath,
 Margery Rossi,
 Hudson River
 Presbytery



Supporting Those Who Grieve

1. Coping with Loss

Survivors, the ones left in the wake of death, often experience a wide range of grief reactions, including some or all of the following:

- Shock is a common immediate reaction. You may feel numb or disoriented, and may have trouble concentrating.
- Symptoms of depression, including disturbed sleep, loss of appetite, intense sadness, and lack of energy.
- Anger towards the deceased, a perpetrator, another family member, a therapist, or yourself.
- Relief, particularly if there was a suicide following a long and difficult mental illness.
- Guilt, including thinking, "If only I had...."
- These feelings usually diminish over time, as you develop your ability to cope and begin to heal.

WHAT DO I DO NOW?

- You may find that it helps to reach out to family and friends. Because some people may not know what to say, you may need to take the initiative to talk about the suicide or gun violence, share your feelings, and ask for their help.
- Even though it may seem difficult, maintaining contact with other people is especially important during the stress-filled months after a loved one's death.
- Keep in mind that each person grieves in their own way. Some people visit the cemetery weekly; others find it too painful to go at all.
- Each person also grieves at their own pace; there is no set rhythm or timeline for healing.
- Anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays may be especially difficult, so you might want to think about whether to continue old traditions or create some new ones. You may also experience unexpected waves of sadness; these are a normal part of the grieving process.
- Children experience many of the feelings of adult grief, and are particularly vulnerable to feeling abandoned and guilty. Reassure them that the death was not their fault. Listen to their questions, and try to offer honest, straightforward, age-appropriate answers.
- Some survivors find comfort in community, religious, or spiritual activities, including talking to a trusted member of the clergy.
- Be kind to yourself. When you feel ready, begin to go on with your life. Eventually starting to enjoy life again is not a betrayal of your loved one, but rather a sign that you've begun to heal.

“One learns to live with the loss, the tragedy, the waste, and the gaping hole in the fabric of one’s life.

There is no closure, nor would I want one. I want to remember him all my life, vividly: his laughter, the smell of his sneakers under his bed, his moments of joy, his humility, and his integrity.”

—from Surviving Suicide Loss: A Resource and Healing Guide

2. Practical Coping Strategies

Encourage survivors to think about specific things they can do when intense emotions such as worry or sadness begin to well up, including:

- seeing a therapist or a group for survivors

- thinking about how they've coped with difficulties in the past and reminding themselves that they can use those same coping skills now
- for survivors of loss to gun violence, participating in relationships and shared concerns with other gun violence survivors for support and action groups
- simple relaxation and distraction skills, such as taking three deep slow breaths, counting to 10, or picturing themselves in a favorite calm and relaxing place
- exercising, journaling
- writing a list of people they can turn to for support
- writing a list of things they're looking forward to
- focusing on individual goals, such as returning to a class or church, or spending time with mutual friends

3. Being Present With Those Who Grieve

Suggestions for writing a note:

- Keep it brief and simple
- Communicate your support and care
- Share memories of the bereaved
- and/or communicate appreciation for their life
- Affirm the grieving process
- Write what you are feeling in your heart.



EXAMPLE:

Dear _____,

I was so sad to learn about your loss of _____. I can't imagine your pain right now. I hope that with time memories of warmth and joy may rise to the forefront of your mind. Please know that my heart and prayers are with you during this emotional time. If you need any help cooking, answering the phone, helping with the kids, or anything else, please don't hesitate to call. I'll call you in a couple weeks when things have calmed down.

With love, _____ Your phone number _____

4. Reminders about being with those who grieve:

- Be a good listener and affirm the feelings of the bereaved—if they are sad, angry, or happy
- Silence is okay.
- Let them guide you in their needs—they might want to tell a story, hear a joke, or have some-one sit with them while they cry. People grieve differently and they may grieve differently than you. In the grief in the aftermath of gun violence, some may want to join in a gun violence prevention group and some may not. Some may later.
- Offer practical help.
 - It doesn't all depend on you—the blessing of living in community is that different people can offer care in different ways.
 - Be patient!—everyone goes through their own process in their own time.
 - Remember that holidays are hard, as is the first anniversary of the death. Keeping checking in with them in the months ahead.

Dealing with Conflict in the Church over this Issue

Seeking to be Faithful: Guidelines for Presbyterians in Times of Disagreement

Download at <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/seeking-to-be-faithful-together-guidelines-for-presbyterians-in-times-of-disagreement/>

Section 3: Take Action

There are Many Ways to Take Action to Save Lives

1. Find Local Actions Near You: www.everytown.org/act

Everytown for Gun Safety is the national organization that sponsors Students Demand Action and Moms Demand Action, with chapters in all 50 states. See also “Contacts in All 50 States” in this Toolkit.

2. Memorials Remembering Victims: Create a public display to symbolize gun victims: empty chairs, pairs of shoes or tee-shirts with names of victims or the **Soul Box Project**, for one gun violence event or for all victims in your city/state over a period of time. Contact local media and officials for outreach. See examples in Case Studies.

3. Outreach and Witness: Help grow and deepen this movement through projects such as **Wear Orange Days** in June <https://wearorange.org/> or the **Count Me In** campaign or the **Sign Project** or **Open Candidate Forums** in election years or a conference for your community or presbytery. When public rallies or marches occur, organize a faith contingent to participate. See examples in Case Studies plus this Virginia congregation’s public event: Christians Responding to Gun Violence: What’s Faith Got to Do with It? <https://www.gracepresby.org/gun-violence-prevention/>

4. Direct Action: Many churches want to focus on how local communities can *directly* prevent gun violence, such as **Violence Interruption Programs** to intervene in disputes and to help young people turn away from guns.

Other direct actions in the following pages include **Secure Gun Storage** campaigns, the **BeSMART for Kids Campaign** and steps to hold the gun industry and retailers accountable.

The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship works to equip and support congregations for the citizen movement, **Guns to Gardens**. This is a form of direct action to show that the American people are ready for change and that we will take the initiative by turning unwanted guns into garden tools in our church parking lots. See the next pages and www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence

5. Advocacy: Gun Sense laws save lives. While the gun lobby has dominated elected officials for decades, the movement for gun violence prevention has made important progress in recent years in new rules and laws. Join the nationwide community of **Gun Sense** advocates. In this Section, see the steps for an Offering of Letters Service to include advocacy in worship. Use **Social Media** to call out your officials for timely action.

6. E-News Learn what other congregations are doing in the monthly Peace Fellowship Gun Violence Prevention Congregational E-news. Downloading this Toolkit subscribes you automatically or contact gvp@presbypeacefellowship.org to subscribe or to share your church’s ideas, photos and action news.



Photo left, First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York preparing to march on March for Our Lives Day 3/24/2018
Right, Bethany Presbyterian Church, San Bruno, CA contingent on the same day.

Guns to Gardens

After the shooting at the Sandy Hook School in Dec. 2012, Mennonite pastor Mike Martin felt a call to become a blacksmith and forge unwanted guns into garden tools. It took a year and half before anyone turned in a gun.



Since then, Mike founded RAWtools.org as a nonprofit network of blacksmiths across the nation. He was joined by activist-theologian Shane Claiborne and by New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence who, in a Presbyterian Church office, christened the project “Guns to Gardens.” After a mass shooting in a nearby grocery store in 2021, Community United Church of Christ in Boulder, CO offered a “Gun Safe Surrender” event in their parking lot. Dozens of firearms were surrendered and forged into garden tools. The idea of *churches* offering this healing and practical service was born.



In 2022, the PC(USA) General Assembly became the first major church body to support Guns to Gardens, commending the drive-through events in church parking lots. The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship works with RAWtools to offer training and outreach. Guns to Gardens is growing. In 2022 the Denver Broncos football team hosted a Guns to Gardens event ever at their stadium in Mile High, CO, *photo, left*. That day 189 unwanted guns were turned into tools to grow life. After 18 Guns to Gardens events, New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence has dismantled over 2,000 guns, 40% of which were semi-automatic or assault weapons. See: <https://www.gvptoolkit.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Chapter-5-Guns-to-Gardens-Buyback-Pgm-PGV-Toolkit.pdf>

Learn about PPF’s online **Action Circles**. These Circles introduce your church to the best practices for Guns to Gardens and build community among churches that are considering a call to turn guns into garden tools. See dates for five-session Action Circles on Zoom at <http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence>

What is Required?

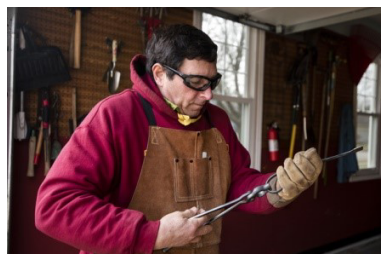
- A congregation committed to saving lives.
- A metal chop saw and someone trained to use it according to the rules for dismantling guns from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.
- Publicity to invite church members and your community to anonymously surrender guns.
- Signage. Electricity. Safety gear. A parking lot or similar open space. Refreshments.
- Capable persons to safely handle the guns and check that they are unloaded.
- Capable persons to stand alongside the gun owner while the gun is being dismantled to welcome, listen, thank them, and pray with them if requested.
- Gift cards to thank donors for gun parts. This is optional –or thank them in other ways.
- A plan to send leftover gun parts to RAWtools or a local blacksmith or artist to make useful tools or jewelry.



Guns are checked and removed from vehicles at Community United Church of Christ, Boulder, CO



Louisville church volunteers at a Guns to Gardens event in a church parking lot. Five guns were dismantled, including a semiautomatic. Photo: Lavonne Fingerson



After conducting nine funerals for gun violence victims in Wisconsin, retired pastor Jeff Wild turns gun parts into garden tools. Photo: Angela Major/WPR

They will beat their sword into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Isaiah 2:4

FAQs about Guns to Gardens

Why would someone surrender a gun?

There are many reasons: someone who does not want to return an unwanted gun to the gun market where it could do future harm. A parent who bought a gun in the pandemic but now worries about having a gun in a home with children or if they have the capacity to store it against gun theft. A former hunter who no longer feels able to safely handle guns or who has grandchildren visiting in the home. A gun returned to a family by police after it was used in a suicide by their loved one. A family with conflict, anger, mental or physical illness, job loss, divorce or other crisis.

How does Guns to Gardens differ from other Buy Backs?

Any effort to get guns out of homes and communities is important, but with some government-sponsored "Buy Backs," guns may be resold or dismantled with the parts sold to those who create gun kits. Guns to Gardens fully dismantles each unwanted gun in the presence of the owner and uses the parts to create tools, jewelry or art. While Buy Backs may offer fair market value cash for guns, Guns to Gardens does not buy guns. Rather, gun owners are thanked for choosing Guns to Gardens with gas or grocery store gift cards. This requires reaching out to your community to seek donations for gift cards.



Do we need to involve our local police?

The event can be done with or without the presence of police. While most church events do not involve police, inform your local police about the event as they may refer gun owners to you. You can hire off-duty police to check that guns are unloaded. Some states have special rules.

Do we need to do a background check?

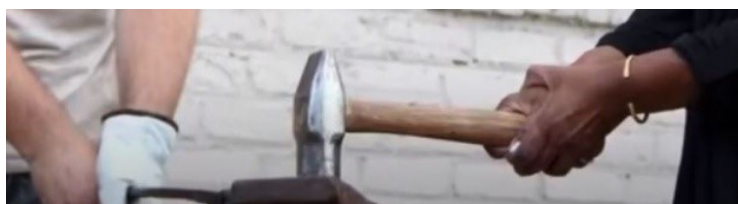
No. As the gun owner remains in their vehicle to observe the dismantling, there is no transfer of ownership. Once the leftover parts are no longer legally a gun, they can be donated to be transformed into useful tools.

What about ammunition?

Guns to Gardens events do not accept ammunition. All guns must be unloaded. Include this in all publicity.

What about insurance?

Policies differ, but most cover the event if it is an official event approved by the church officers and there is no ammunition involved. If needed, you can also add a one-day special event insurance policy.



Will Guns to Gardens make a difference? *Guns to Gardens is a direct action to intervene in record levels of gun violence. Every gun dismantled protects someone from gun suicide, domestic gun violence, murders committed with stolen guns or unintentional shootings.* This much-needed practical service of transformation offers healing to persons and communities who are traumatized by gun violence. For the church to host and facilitate this process is to show that God is on the side of saving and healing lives. Guns to Gardens is a prophetic act: to voluntarily rid homes and communities of unwanted guns is to upend the powerful gun lobby myth that we need "guns everywhere." By taking direct action to save lives, congregations hope to inspire elected officials to ***find their own courage*** to protect our nation from gun violence.

At a Methodist Church Guns to Gardens event in Dallas, TX, Rev. Deanna Hollas dismantles a rifle inherited by a gun owner. The scope on the gun can be used to make a microscope.
Photo: Judson Watkins



More Guns to Gardens Resources

225th General Assembly PC(U.S.A.) Action on Guns to Gardens:*

<https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3001010>

Guns to Gardens in the New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence

Toolkit: <https://www.gvptoolkit.org/>

Guns to Gardens Tee Shirts and Sweatshirts:

<https://www.bonfire.com/ppf-guns-to-gardens-ministry/>

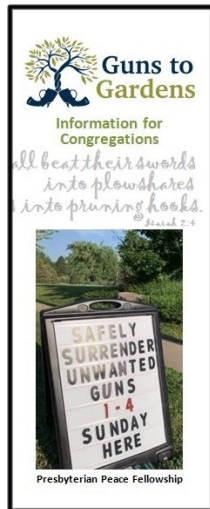
Guns to Gardens Videos, New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence:

Artist Pedro Reyes and students transform gun parts into art:

<https://vimeo.com/808469126/c17b19c6bd?fbclid=IwAR2vs8k4EzVpZAeG7cYFmxek83ZOZv8gF6jAK9iaPv3lZ488qC6dBrwXliQ>

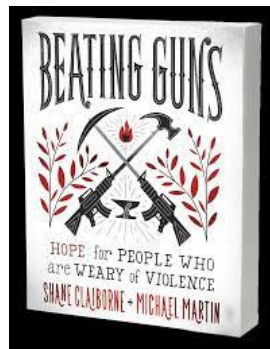
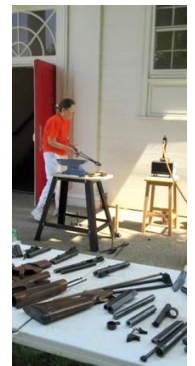
Owner of a semiautomatic assault weapon shares why he wanted it to be transformed by Guns to Gardens:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qw6rl3giWMQ>



Guns to Gardens Brochure for your church. Print back to back. Flip on the short end. Fold with green logo on front:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fUDPIXlqcdKEIB3xrZQ2mYUA2vDxx5w/view?usp=sharing>



Photos: Denver Guns to Gardens Church team; Brochure; Volunteers at Oakhurst Presbyterian Church, Decatur, GA; Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church in WV displays parts from 26 firearms and saw volunteer; Rev. Rosalind Hughes transforms gun parts in Euclid OH; First Presbyterian Church of Stockton, CA members display garden tools made from gun parts; **Beating Guns** by Mike Martin and Shane Claiborne, Brazos Press; Blacksmith Scotty Utz leads Guns to Gardens workshop in NC; Guns to Gardens sweatshirt or tee shirts to order.

***Guns hold memories, some good and some painful. The church is an appropriate host to accompany a gun owner while their gun is dismantled. They may appreciate a moment of prayer or silence, or simply someone to share their story with. The church is the place of pastoral healing....**

By turning guns into garden tools, we demonstrate the biblical vision that God creates us to live in gardens, not battlefields. We take direct action to inspire elected officials to find their courage to also act to save lives.

--225th Presbyterian General Assembly

Secure Gun Storage Saves Lives

The 2021 National Firearms Survey found that 4.6 million children live in homes with guns that are both loaded and unsecured, putting them at risk of child and youth suicide, unintentional shootings, or shootings committed with stolen guns. In addition to homes, vehicles are now the largest source of stolen guns used in crimes.

1. The Be SMART for Kids Campaign: This campaign is used by major hospitals, healthcare systems, the American Academy of Pediatrics, law enforcement agencies and schools. Community partners include national organizations like Injury Free Coalition for Kids, Safe Kids Worldwide, National PTA, as well as numerous other state and local partners.

SMART is an acronym that stands for:

S: Secure all guns in your home and vehicles.

M: Model responsible behavior around guns.

A: Ask about the presence of unsecured guns in other homes.

R: Recognize the role of guns in suicide.

T: Tell your peers to be SMART.



Congregations can join in monthly BeSMART conference calls and use printable resources that include:

--*Keeping Your Home Safe with Secure Storage*, which shows how gun owners don't need to choose between storing guns securely and maintaining quick access to them if needed.

--*Secure Storage Toolkit*, a guide to getting secure storage resolutions passed within school districts.

--*Talking to Your Children about Guns*, a guide that includes specific tips for young children, adolescents.

--*Asking about Secure Gun Storage*, with examples of effective conversation-starters to "normalize the ask," urging parents and caregivers to always ask about gun storage in any home where children may visit.

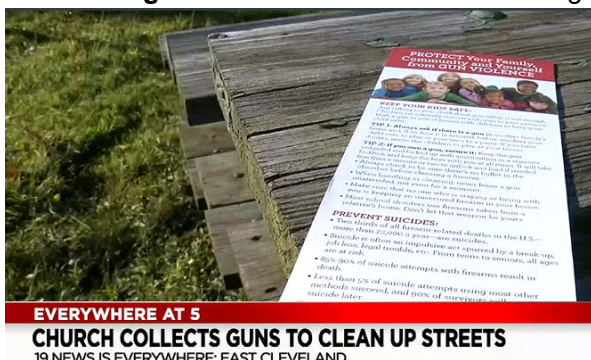
Learn more at <https://besmartforkids.org/>

2. Other Ways to Promote Gun Safety and Secure Storage:

--Download or Order **Gun Safety Cards** from www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence

--Provide free or low cost **gun locks** in your area. Local Veterans Administration offices may offer free locks.

-- **State Legislation:** States with secure storage laws have lower rates of child gun violence, including child suicide. In these states, the rate of gun suicide among young people ages 10 to 24 was lower in 2022 than in 1999. In states with no secure storage laws, the rate increased 36% during that time. Congregations have access to their state officials and can learn about gun safety legislation in their state at <https://everytownresearch.org/rankings/>



EVERYWHERE AT 5

CHURCH COLLECTS GUNS TO CLEAN UP STREETS

19 NEWS IS EVERYWHERE: EAST CLEVELAND

Photo: East Cleveland, Ohio churches gave out 800 Gun Safety Cards from the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship in their community, and provided gun locks. Download free pdf or order packs of 50.

80%

In incidents of gunfire on school grounds, up to 80 percent of shooters under the age of 18 got the gun from their home or the homes of friends or relatives.

3. Preventing School Shootings: The U.S. Secret Service has found that 3/4 of school shooters over the past 40 years simply took an unsecured firearm from the home of a parent or close relative. The number is even higher with school shooters under the age of 18.

School boards in Houston and Frisco, TX acted to prevent school shootings and accidents by passing actions to send parents a form on the importance of secure gun storage in homes and the state laws on storage. See the form at:

https://www.houstonisd.org/cms/lib2/TX01001591/Centricity/Domain/7903/Gun%20Safety%20Eng_2022_2023.pdf

These Texas school districts join other districts in GA, CA, AZ, OR, SC, VT and CO in seeking to educate parents about secure storage requirements and options. The form does not ask if guns are in the home. It simply asks parents to respond that they received the information about the importance of safe storage. Learn how to promote secure storage with your school board here: <https://besmartforkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Secure-Storage-Toolkit.BeSMART.11.2022.pdf>

No Guns in God's House Sign Project & Sample Signage

Sign (Actual Size 6" x 6" or 6" x 6.75") to Include Local Info



Decal (Actual Size 4" x 4")



See additional sign option on the back cover of this Toolkit, which can be printed or cut-out for use.

Download Color Sign PDF Files at www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gunsigns

Artwork Provided by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program

Why should we declare church property to be a Gun-Free Zone?



Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago

Changes in concealed carry laws in many states now allow guns to be carried into places never before considered appropriate, including into houses of worship. ***It is important that churches stand firm against the myth that more guns in more places makes us more secure.*** The 221st General Assembly of the PC(USA) encouraged congregations, church camps and other facilities to post "No Guns in God's House" signs. This action offers us an entry into dialogue about spiritual issues of gun violence and our call as Christians to be peacemakers. The signs offer churches a way to witness to the nonviolence of Jesus and to declare church property to be a sanctuary, free from weapons.

Which sign should we use? The square, circle and rectangular images offer options, or create your own sign. You can include language to meet local codes, or specify an exception for active law enforcement officers. See: <http://www.mydoorsign.com/no-guns-knives-weapons-allowed>

Will these signs meet code to be legal where we are? Check your local requirements. Municipalities, counties and states are writing new laws all the time regarding gun-free zone signage. Research *all* levels of government that have jurisdiction over your community before deciding which image is the right option for you and whether or not your congregation intends to comply with these codes. Many of these codes are designed to make no-guns signage so large and unwieldy that businesses and other locations will not post it. But we are the church. Have courage! Posting your signs on your property is an act of faith and witness.

Does a Session vote on this or do we need a congregational vote?

Yes, the Session votes on use of these signs. Sample policy language, suggested by the 221st GA, to record in Session minutes: *"Individuals (other than active law-enforcement officers) are prohibited from carrying guns onto this property."* This is, however, a *very* important conversation for *congregations* to have – what does it mean to you as a church to post these signs on church property? Talk and pray about it, together!

Brochure for Sessions: Print out a PPF brochure on the No Guns in God's House Sign project at: www.presbypeacefellowship.org/resources/no-guns-in-gods-house-brochure/

Holding the Gun Industry Accountable

A promising new action calls for holding the gun industry accountable for its impact. For decades, a successful priority of the NRA has been to shield the gun industry from product liability, the only industry in the US with this privilege. With the escalating human, social and economic costs of gun violence at over 43,000 lives and \$557 billion per year, that immunity is now under question. Accountability can extend to: traditional gunmakers and sellers, as well as to online and ghost gun sellers; gun kit makers; those who market guns to children; and those who traffic in guns illegally, such as across state lines or selling guns to “straw buyers” who purchase on behalf of someone who could not pass a background check.

Learn more in this Toolkit: See Resources on The Gun Lobby, p. 7, especially the podcast, “The Gun Machine”, and Session 5 of the Courageous Conversation Curriculum, p. 27, “Unmasking the Powers.”

Portland, OR faith groups protest the retail sale of assault weapons following the Oct. 2023 mass shooting in Lewiston, Maine.
Photo: Ben McCanna, Portland Press Herald



Action Ideas:

1. Sign up: Get Action/Information Alerts at www.smokinggun.org Watch for legislation or court cases that either shield or hold accountable those who profit from the gun violence epidemic.

2. Retail Campaigns: Use letters, phone calls, visits and, most importantly, **social media** to encourage retail stores to not display firearms where children and youth under the age of 21 may see them, especially assault weapons –or to thank those stores that have removed guns from inventory or open display. These displays “normalize” guns in our society in order to recruit children as future consumers. Displays also traumatize children who already live with the fear of gun violence in their schools every day. Monitor whether toy guns are included in Easter baskets and Christmas displays.

Let your store manager and your online community hear from you that you don’t want your children exposed to weapons while buying clothing, toys or other goods. Create a campaign with hashtags for your church members to use when they visit stores. Suggested language: *The leading cause of death for children and youth is guns. To the manager of (store name), I don’t want my kids exposed to deadly weapons when buying a shirt, soccer ball, or other items. Stop exposing kids to their killer. #NoGunsUnder21*



Sample social media photo of an empty gun display. A thank you on social media could go to this Walmart for removing assault weapons from inventory.
Photo: Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

3. Violent Toys Buyback or Exchange: Organize an event for children to trade violent toys for alternatives. This action from Campaign Nonviolence counters the impact of gun and toy industry marketing to children. See https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ludW6gpdeWG9mkBa_xc7aHGNFz7ft3rjz8rg4STDMQ/edit#heading=h.hycazyhc4c14

4. Corporate Engagement: Members of Fifth Ave. Presbyterian Church in New York City created a letter writing campaign to Bass Pro Shops and Camping World USA to request the ban of sales of assault style guns and high-capacity ammunition magazines. See their sample letter [here](#). The PC(U.S.A.) Office of Mission Responsibility Through Investment is considering an expansion of the current restrictions on investing denominational funds in gun industry stocks. <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/mrti/>

Count Me In! Campaign

PPF offers the Count Me In! Campaign as a first step, to encourage more and more Presbyterians to make a commitment **to do something** in their local church and community to help prevent gun violence. We are looking for thousands of local Presbyterians to hear God's call to action and to *make a commitment*.

The campaign resources below can be used in your local church or presbytery, as helpful to you. Prayer is a key part of this campaign, asking God to help us become **active solution-finders** and not passive observers of the gun violence epidemic in our country.



Count Me In! 10 Ways Your Church Can Help Prevent Gun Violence

1. Form a study group using the Gun Violence Prevention Congregational Toolkit Curriculum www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence
2. Hold a prayer vigil for victims of gun violence
3. Invite church youth to form a chapter of Students Demand Action
4. Host a **Guns to Gardens** gun recycling event to transform unwanted guns into garden tools. Learn how at www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence
5. Join the **BeSMART for Kids Campaign** to encourage secure gun storage to save lives
6. Hold an "Offering of Letters" service
7. Host a "Clergy for Safe Cities Summit" in your city
8. Visit elected officials on background checks & banning assault weapons
9. Host an open candidates' forum on the topic of gun violence
10. Post a **No Guns in God's House** sign

1. Bookmark – 2 sides, sample at left: Ten Ways Your Church Can Help Prevent Gun Violence & Prayer for Action. Download and print for outreach: <https://bit.ly/GVPbm>

2. Prayer Card – 2 sides, sample below: Ten Ways America Can Prevent Gun Violence & Prayer for Action. Download and print: <https://bit.ly/GVPprayer>

3. Count Me In! Logo – Copy the round Logo from this page and use on church newsletters, bulletins, etc.

4. Gun Violence Prevention E-news Sign-Up – A nation-wide online network to share our local church gun violence prevention projects, challenges and to encourage one another in this holy work. If you order or download this PPF Toolkit, you will receive a short, monthly e-news with updates on what churches are doing, new education resources and action efforts. Or sign up by emailing gvp@presbypeacefellowship.org

A Presbyterian Prayer for Action

Gracious God, whose mercy never ends, whose Spirit brings the Kairos moment for change:
We confess our past willingness to abide the deaths of over one million, eight hundred thousand souls lost to gun violence since 1968 -- the children, the parents, the distraught, as well as millions more injured, ruined, orphaned, widowed. Help us to comprehend this carnage and not become numb.

We give thanks for the long witness of the General Assembly and all Presbyterians who are already engaged in preventing gun violence.
We thank you for raising up the students to lead us with marches, walk-outs and passion born of pain.

We call upon you, Lord; we have nowhere else to turn. Galvanize all of us, every congregation in the Presbyterian Church. Wake us up in our pews and our lives; do not let Christ find us asleep on this watch. Rather, Lord, grant to our church members, both those of us who own guns and those of us who do not, a unity of purpose to change the national debate on gun violence. Show us the path.

At all the places where you are proclaimed, give us courage to stand against principalities and powers. Grant us the joy of using the gifts that you provide -- energy, intelligence, imagination and love-- to help our communities and our nation heal from this tragedy and sorrow. In Christ's name we pray, **Amen**.

Adapted from an Overture to the 223rd General Assembly, PC(USA)
www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence/?s=Prayer+for+Action

Advocacy

1. Advocacy is a form of evangelism with our elected officials, translating our faith commitment to saving lives into incremental steps and often compromises in that direction. It is building **a relationship** with officials and, very importantly, their staffs, so that your expertise and passion about gun violence prevention will become a resource for them as they address gun sense legislation.

Advocacy can be letters, emails, phone calls, visits with legislators or staff. It can be public such as social media, billboards, editorials or public witness at their offices.

Find your elected Officials at: <https://www.lwv.org/take-action/find-your-elected-officials>

Sample Social Media, include your photo: I'm a resident of _____ and I want Congress to act on preventing gun violence in the U.S.A. I contacted my Senators and Representative, urging them to ban the future sale of assault weapons to protect Americans from these weapons of war. Please raise your voice too.

2. National & State Advocacy Groups: See Section 4, Connecting with Others

Text READY to 644-33 to be included in advocacy with Moms Demand Action, among the best advocacy groups.

3. Resources from the Presbyterian Office of Public Witness, Washington DC:

1. Holy Discontentment: Grassroots Advocacy and Organizing in the PC(USA), a detailed guide on how to do advocacy with your elected officials at file:///C:/Users/Jan/Downloads/Holy-Discontentment-Brochure_lores.pdf

2. See info on OPW Young Adult Advocacy Conference, Ecumenical Advocacy Days & Training, OPW Blog, Presbyterians in the Senate and Congress and more at <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/compassion-peace-justice/washington/>

4. Gun Sense Advocacy Priorities:

- 1. Expand Federal Background Checks** to all gun sales and close the "Charleston Loophole" that allows gun sales to proceed if the check is not completed within 72 hours.
- 2. Require secure storage** of guns when not in use.
- 3. Raise the age** for buying guns to 21 or older.
- 4. Ban semiautomatic assault-style weapons and large capacity magazines.**
- 5. Fund more Violence Interruption Programs.**
- 6. Disarm domestic abusers** and make **Extreme Risk Protection Orders** available in every state.
- 7. End the blanket gun industry immunity.**
- 8. Make gun trafficking a federal crime**, across state lines.
- 9. Defend against expansive gun legislation** by state and federal legislatures.

After Years of NRA Control of Officials, Recent Citizen Advocacy for Gun Violence Prevention has Accomplished these Steps:

- 1. Banned bump stocks and additional accessories** that make guns more lethal
- 2. Strengthened the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS)**
- 3. Passed Red Flag Laws in 21 states;** banned assault weapons in 10 states and the District of Columbia, plus state secure storage laws and verdicts for victims to hold gun lobby accountable
- 4. After 20 years of NRA opposition,** a restoration of federal research into the causes of gun violence
- 5. In spite of years of gun lobby stalling,** confirmed a Director for the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF)
- 6. Passed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act** of 2022, the first major federal gun safety legislation in nearly 30 years, which:
 - Helps the states to create Red Flag Laws
 - Provides \$250 million for Violence Interruption Programs in US cities
 - Closes the "Boyfriend Loophole" to prevent domestic gun violence
 - Supports and funds mental health and school safety programs
 - Enhances background check requirements for buyers age 18-21
 - Cracks down on illegal gun trafficking
 - Allows the ATF to clarify the definition of gun dealers to require background checks on more gun sales. As of Jan. 2024, the ATF is reviewing over 370,000 citizen and group comments about this proposed new rule that could close the Gun Show/Online loophole.
- 7. Established the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention** to coordinate efforts to prevent suicide, homicide, domestic violence, police shootings and unintentional shootings.



Photo, Citizen advocates watch as their governor signs the Illinois assault weapons ban, Illinois Public Media

Offering of Letters Service Advocacy as an Act of Faith

What You Will Need to do in Advance:

1. Choose among Worship, Scripture and Hymns below, or use your own ideas.
2. Include the following items in your bulletin:
 - a. A list of relevant Senators or Representatives from your district with their addresses. To determine relevancy, consider the following: What district/districts are likely to be represented by those gathered? Is it more beneficial to write to a Congressperson, a Senator or your State officials right now?
 - b. Paper to write on, a pen, a stamped envelope.
 - c. A Sample Letter. (See below.)



Offering of Letters Sample Service

Call to Worship (1 John 3:18)

One: Little children, let us love, not in word or speech,

Many: **but in truth and action.**

One: Let us worship God.

OR (Luke 1:78-79)

One: By the tender mercy of our God,

Many: **the dawn from on high will break upon us.**

One: Giving light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

Many: **to guide our feet into the way of peace.**

Selected portions in Spanish from the bi-lingual Offering of Letters Service at College Hill Community Church, Dayton, OH. Over 90 letters were written at the service.

Opening Hymn

Call to Confession:

Friends, we are reminded constantly that Rachel still weeps for her children. Our hearts are heavy as we consider those who are wounded and die this very week, this very day, this very hour on our city streets, in our schools, and in our homes. We have hurt each other by our action, and by our inaction. In penitence and in abiding faith for our world made whole, let us confess our sin before God and neighbor. Let us pray.

Líder: Amigos, constantemente recordamos que Raquel sigue llorando por sus hijos. Nos pesa el corazón al considerar a los heridos y muertos de ésta misma semana, éste mismo día y ésta misma hora en las calles de nuestra ciudad ... en nuestras escuelas y en nuestros hogares. Nos hemos herido unos a otros por nuestra acción y por nuestra inacción. En la penitencia y en fe permanente para nuestro mundo en su totalidad, confesamos nuestros pecados ante Dios y el prójimo. Oremos

Prayer of Confession:

God of justice and of grace, sometimes we feel far from bearing your image. Although we can sense that things are not right, we prize the comfort of familiarity over the risk of the unknown. Although we know the numbers and statistics, they largely remain just that, failing to leave an imprint on our heart and conscience. We *hear* but we don't listen, *see* but we don't behold, *feel* but we don't act.

In your steadfast kindness and mercy, forgive us. Hasten us to know ourselves as claimed in spite of our sin, and free us to be agents of your peace. Amen.

OR an alternative Prayer of Confession:

Prayer of Confession: One: God of justice and grace, sometimes we feel far from bearing your image. 90 people die of every day from gun violence in the U.S. 10 of these are children. Lord, in your mercy,

Líder: Dios de justicia y de gracia, a veces nos sentimos lejos de llevar tu imagen. 90 personas mueren todos los días a causa de la violencia con armas de fuego en los EE. UU. 10 de estos son niños. Señor, en tu misericordia,

Many: Forgive us. Todos: Perdónanos.

One: God of justice and grace, at times we feel far from bearing your image. The U.S. rate of firearms deaths for children is twelve times higher than 25 other industrialized nations combined. Lord, in your mercy,

Líder: Dios de justicia y de gracia, a veces nos sentimos lejos de llevar tu imagen. La tasa de muertes por arma de fuego en los Estados Unidos para los niños es doce veces más alta que las otras 25 naciones industrializadas juntas. Señor, en tu misericordia,

Many: Forgive us. Todos: Perdónanos.

One: God of justice and grace, sometimes we feel far from bearing your image. Over 43,000 Americans die from guns every year in the U.S. This is almost ten times the total of U.S. servicemen and women killed in the war in Iraq. Lord, in your mercy,

Líder: Dios de justicia y de gracia, a veces nos sentimos lejos de llevar tu imagen. 43,000 estadounidenses mueren a causa de las armas cada año en los Estados Unidos. Esto es mucho más que el total de hombres y mujeres muertos en la guerra en Iraq. Señor, en tu misericordia,

Many: Forgive us. Todos: Perdónanos.

One: God of justice and grace, sometimes we feel far from bearing your image. Almost 40% of the guns sold in the United States were bought from private sellers, at gun shows or online, often without background checks or firearms safety classes. Lord, in your mercy,

Líder: Dios de justicia y de gracia, a veces nos sentimos lejos de llevar tu imagen. El 40% de las armas compradas en los Estados Unidos se compran a vendedores privados, principalmente en gun shows. No se requieren verificaciones de antecedentes ni clases de seguridad con armas de fuego en estos intercambios privados. Señor, en tu misericordia,

Many: Forgive us. Todos: Perdónanos.

Words of Assurance (The minister uses their own words here)

Prayer for Illumination: God, it is by the power of your Spirit that these words still live. Subordinate in us any voice but your own, and grant us understanding.

The Word Read Text Suggestions: Ps. 140 Romans 12:2 Is. 11:9 Ps. 25:4 Gal. 51 Is. 58:6-9

The Word Proclaimed (To leave time for the Offering of Letters, the message should be about 10 minutes.)

Offering of Letters

Introduction

(At this point, a worship leader should introduce the offering, explaining where to find the sample letter in the bulletin, the list of congressional representatives and their addresses, and the envelopes. Clarify that, if a worshipper does not finish their letter within the time allotted, they can finish it and add it to the plate after worship. Those who do not feel called to offer a letter at this time should be acknowledged and invited to use the time for prayer)

Letter-writing (Instrumental music may be played. This should take about 10 minutes)

Procession of the Letters (Music: *Canticle of the Turning*)

(As they are led, worshippers should take their letters to the offering plates at the front of the sanctuary. Ushers may pick up letters for those confined to their seats. Instructions of this sort should be included in the bulletin and/or stated in the introduction.)

Prayer of Dedication:

God, it is by your grace that we offer our voices in praise and in service. In your infinite wisdom and love, accept and use our offerings in service to your indwelling kingdom, that they may be one step toward making your world more whole. Amen.

Closing Hymn

Charge and Benediction: (Ephesians 3:18-20)

One: I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Many: Now to God, who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly more than we can ask or imagine, to God be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

SAMPLE LETTER

(Date)

Dear Senator _____ or Rep. _____,

Greetings! My name is _____. I write as a concerned citizen and as a follower of Jesus Christ. Recent violent events in our country have made it clear that the time for action to reduce gun violence is now. I urge you, Senator/Representative _____, to support and pass sensible gun control measures that will save lives. Over 43,000 Americans are killed every year by guns. That includes 15 children per day. Even one is too many.

There are things we can do to prevent more deaths, and we must. I urge you, as my elected official, to work for the common good, especially for the passage of comprehensive background checks as well as the renewal of the ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. Neither will infringe on the rights of responsible gun owners and both will keep us safer.

(If you have a personal story to share, insert it here. Be brief and honest.)

Jesus said, "Blessed are the Peacemakers." As a follower of Jesus, I strive to fulfill that calling every day, and I will continue to advocate for steps to create more peace in our society. I urge you to join me, and millions of others, in this mission. To me, loving our country means loving the lives that are at risk of being lost to gun violence, doing everything we can to build a safer society for all.

Sincerely, _____

Your town or address



Letter writing at Wappingers Falls Presbyterian Church, Wappingers Falls, NY

The Offering of Letters Service was created for the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship by Rev. Sara Dorrien-Christians

Elections & Voter Education



As a non-profit organization, the church does not engage in partisan politics, speaking or acting for or against any party or candidate. However, the church can offer the important service of voter education. Efforts can include:

1. Voter Registration Campaigns
2. Advocate for Voting Rights - See "Ten Ways to Protect Voting Rights" <https://lawyerscommittee.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/0406.pdf>
3. Voter Turn Out efforts, including education on location of polls, early voting options and ID requirements.
4. Provide local media with questions for candidates on gun violence prevention. Encourage media to ask questions about candidate approaches to the issue of gun violence.
5. Distribute nonpartisan questionnaires to the candidates and share the results.
6. Sponsor nonpartisan candidate forums or debates, open to all candidates.

While individuals may do all of the following things, the church itself cannot: endorse, oppose, recommend, rate, give funds or volunteer time for candidates. This includes not planning activities for a single candidate. All must be invited. Learn more about Dos and Don'ts for non-profit groups in an election year at

<https://lawyerscommittee.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/0381.pdf>
[https://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/DOs and DONTs of Electoral Advocacy.pdf](https://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/DOs_and_DONTs_of_Electoral_Advocacy.pdf)

Host an Open Candidate Forum

Resources:

The American Association of University Women & the League of Women Voters have long traditions of nonpartisan candidate forums to educate voters. According to the AAUW:

How to Organize a Candidate Forum: Plan ahead. Pick a time and date to host your forum. Invite all the candidates. Send an invitation letter to the candidates well before the planned event and follow up with a phone call. Select a format and moderator. Fill the seats. Reach out to diverse organizations. Generate an audience. ...Learn more at <https://www.aauw.org/resources/policy/advocacy-toolkit/organize-candidate-forum/> or <https://www.lwv.org/elections/educating-voters>

Another idea is to provide space at the church for one of these groups to sponsor their candidate forum. Share with them your special interest in learning gun violence prevention strategies of each candidate.

Examples of Church-Based Candidate Forums:

1. Students in New Rochelle, NY organized a forum in the local church sanctuary. View the forum at: <https://www.lohud.com/videos/news/local/westchester/2018/04/10/video-students-host-candidates-gun-violence-forum/501683002/>
2. [Unpacking Gun Violence: A Candidate's Forum, Colorado](https://www.rmpic.org/single-post/2018/05/08/Unpacking-Gun-Violence-A-Candidates-Forum-May-20th)
<https://www.rmpic.org/single-post/2018/05/08/Unpacking-Gun-Violence-A-Candidates-Forum-May-20th>

Sample Questions:

- If elected, what will you do to help prevent gun violence?
- Do you support re-instating the federal assault weapons ban? Why or why not?
- If elected, would you support raising the age for purchasing a gun to age 21? Why or why not?
- Polls show that 80% of NRA members and 87% of the general public support background checks on all gun sales. If elected, would you support comprehensive background checks and closing the "Charleston loophole"?
- What other steps would you support at the state or federal level to prevent gun violence?

Case Studies of Presbyterian Congregations & Projects

First United Church of Oak Park, IL <http://www.firstunitedoakpark.com>

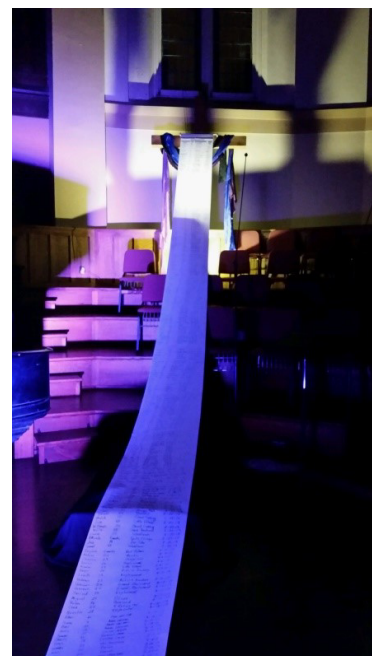
Just west of downtown Chicago, this merged Presbyterian/United Church of Christ congregation borders the city with one of the highest levels of gun violence in America. With the support of the church's Faith in Action Committee, a small group gathered to discern the response of the church to social justice concerns. Their first step was a congregational survey, asking members to rank issues of concern. Gun Violence ranked highly and the committee decided to create a simple, faith-based project that would raise awareness in the church and the larger community about gun violence. The Scroll idea was born.

The Scroll

Each month a different group in the church is asked to write on a long paper scroll the names of all who died by murder over the previous month, over 90% of whom died from gun violence. On the first Sunday of the month, the names are read as part of the congregation's communion worship service. Each month the scroll gets longer. Word got out into the community that this church cared about these victims and their families.

The photo, *right*, was taken at the Maundy Thursday Service by congregation member Cathy Cerniglia. The Scroll hangs on the cross which has been placed on the top row of the choir loft. The scroll has the 462 names of all Chicago Murder Victims September 2016 - April 10 2017.

Members of the congregation were invited to memorialize friends and family who had died from gun violence as a part of the annual All Saints Day service of remembrance. The All Saints memorials and the Scroll touched people in a prayerful and worship-centered way. It was a traditional role of the church, remembering the dead, anchored in faith.



To assist the congregation in their response, the small group asked the Adult Education Committee to plan an educational program on gun violence. A schedule of five weeks of Adult Education was planned. They invited in speakers, including a Presbyterian leader for community collaborations, who spoke of our engagement with gun violence as it fits into the larger theme of justice. This presentation by Rev. Wilson from Chicago Presbytery discussed the connection of *who we are* with *what we do*. She raised the questions of how personal faith becomes communal, how we engage and build community, and how we make justice a way of life. Another presentation described gun violence as a public health issue ---that violence is a contagious disease--- and featured a "Violence Interrupter" from the group CeaseFire IL. The Violence Interrupter's job was to mediate in the community and to talk with young people in efforts to de-escalate violence.

A commitment to help reduce gun violence runs deep in this congregation now. Some members are involved daily in a neighborhood program that mentors and provides after school support to youth in neighborhoods that suffer high levels of gun violence. The church has initiated a "Gospel Music Concert to Stop Gun Violence," with the goal of creating community between largely white and largely black neighborhoods next to each other. Their vision is to fill the church's 800 seat sanctuary with neighbors united to end gun violence.

Still others are part of state-wide advocacy efforts, working to convince the Illinois General Assembly to initiate mandatory state licensing of guns dealers. While the Federal level of gun law enforcement has been rendered weak and understaffed, this would allow the State of Illinois to take its own action to enforce current gun laws. Gun shops that consistently sell guns that are used in crimes would be monitored and could lose their license if they do not comply with background check rules and the prohibition of straw purchases. We also advocated for many years --and successfully!-- for an Illinois ban on the future sale of assault weapons.

--by Lois Thiessen Love, Waging Peace Committee, First United Church of Oak Park, IL

Detroit Community Clergy Alliance

<https://www.facebook.com/Detroit-Community-Clergy-Alliance-399004803471912/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CV6iPc3MVcq/>

In 2012 a group of concerned clergy held a gathering at a local Detroit church (Solomon's Temple). Resource speakers came from Boston (Ten Point Coalition) and PICO (People Improving Communities thru Organizing). The focus was gun violence. At the end of the gathering, attendees marched into the streets. This gave birth to the Detroit Community Clergy Alliance. The Alliance, in cooperation with CeaseFire (a program of the DOJ of the federal gov't.), has consistently marched since then for 12 years.

Ours is a ministry of presence. We always start at an anchor church and walk the neighborhood. We do not proselytize, yet the host pastor is always present and those we encounter are introduced to their neighborhood church/leaders. We pray as we walk. We invite those we encounter along the way to pray with us. Our message is this: we want you to live and be free (not die or go to jail with a gun felony). We take the message of peace, asking the community to put down their guns.

– Rev. Kevin Johnson, Retired Pastor of Calvary Presbyterian Church



Over 200 people walk on St. Mary's Street Peace Walk
Photo:
The Detroit News

Church of Reconciliation, Chapel Hill, NC

The Reconciliation Peace Community (RPC) of the Church of Reconciliation initiated several activities concerning gun violence for interested members of the congregation and larger community. Members of the RPC led an Adult Sunday School hour on the Christian response to gun violence in the United States. Discussion leaders offered national, regional, and local information on gun violence as a prelude to considering what those in attendance felt were the most fruitful and faithful responses to the endless tragedies we read about weekly. In particular, we focused on how our faith as well as our actions can sustain us when cynicism or a numbing despair about these tragedies seem so widely embraced in our culture.

The members of the RPC led a follow-up Adult Sunday School session that asked the question, "What does the Lord require of us?" The leaders of this session distributed resources to all attendees who seek concrete ways to combat gun violence. The resources pointed to active efforts underway within faith as well as non-faith communities to enhance education about causes and responses to gun violence, to engage in public witness against gun violence, and to lobby legislators for laws that will curb the violence.

After a Sunday worship, the Reconciliation Peace Community hosted a lunch for anyone in the congregation and the larger community to hear from Congressman David Price, who represents Chapel Hill in the U.S. Congress, to learn more about what the Congress has done or may do to address this epidemic. Meanwhile, at the request of the RPC and on approval by the Session, the Church of Reconciliation has posted in several places in our main church building signs that read "NO GUNS IN GOD'S HOUSE." We hope these signs will send a clear message as to our position with regard to guns in the corporate life of our church.

New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence

Co-led by Dr. Harry Eberts, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Santa Fe, NM, New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence (NMPGV) is a nonpartisan regional group working to reduce firearm injury and death through public health, education, advocacy and public awareness. Their programs include:



1. The Student Pledge to discourage students from bringing guns to school and the **Gun Owners Pledge**:

I understand that as a gun owner there are inherent responsibilities in owning a gun. I promise that my firearms will never be accessed by vulnerable persons. I will always maintain supervision of my firearms when there are children or teenagers on my property. I will insure that my stored firearms are locked and unloaded when I am not home. (NMPVG also provides free gun locks and safety information)



2. Murals to End Gun Violence – an awareness effort that brings together students, artists and activists

3. The Guns to Gardens Project, which organizes gun safe surrender programs (below) and then remakes the guns into garden shovels and spades with the help of a national gun transformation group, RAWtools www.rawtools.org

4. Other projects include: Disarm Hate Vigils, Public Service Announcements and a Firearms-Free Business Zone Campaign.



First 30 minutes of Gun to Gardens

5. In Legislative Advocacy, NMPGV supports initiatives that:

- Allow safe, legal use of guns
- Restrict access to people with a history of violence
- Focus on monitoring gun sales
- Limit guns in public places

These legislative guidelines had led NMPGV to support legislation to close gun show loopholes, provide a gun-free State Capitol building and gun-free schools, prevent child gun access and limit concealed carry permits.

See www.newmexicanstopreventgunviolence.org for videos on each of their projects

Benton Township, MI

On the anniversary of the Sandy Hook School shootings, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship member Rob Burgess helped organize a vigil in his community of Benton Township, MI. The vigil was small, but by sending information to local media, the message of the vigil reached across the community.

Photo, right, Dan Campbell, Herald Palladium News



Faith Presbyterian Church, Austin, TX

To remember the Sandy Hook School anniversary, Faith Presbyterian Church offered a “Minute for Mission” on gun violence during worship and distributed the PPF gun violence brochure with the worship bulletins. They followed up by posting additional “No Guns in God's House” signs in more buildings on their campus, including the fellowship hall which is used by many community groups.

Case Study of a Presbytery – Elizabeth Presbytery

This story is 11 years old, but still offers an example for Presbyteries.

The Peacemaking Committee of Elizabeth Presbytery in central New Jersey had dwindled to about two members. Well, exactly two members. Then Newtown, CT happened. One of the two members was Shannan Vance-Ocampo, then a mother of a school-age daughter, pastor of Watchung Ave. Presbyterian Church in North Plainfield and a member of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. At that time, Shannan had just been elected Vice-Moderator of the Presbytery. "I thought that preventing violence like Newtown should be the business of the church," So she suggested a special called meeting of Elizabeth Presbytery to discuss the issue of gun violence. The meeting was called, with the only stipulation that the program not be politicized. The date was set for Palm Sunday afternoon. "As far as I know," says Shannan, "Elizabeth was the first presbytery to ever have a special called meeting on gun violence---and certainly on Palm Sunday."



- In 2010 gun violence killed 31,276 people in the U.S.A. This equals an average of 85 people per day
- Roughly 35% of these gun deaths were homicides, roughly 62% were suicides
- In the same year roughly 75,000 people were treated in U.S. emergency rooms for non-fatal gun injuries
- A child or a teenager dies from a gun-inflicted injury every 30 minutes in the United States

What Should We Do as People who Love and Follow Jesus????

A Special Meeting of Elizabeth Presbytery

At left, is the flier inviting delegates and other church members to the meeting. On a Palm Sunday afternoon in New Jersey, 85 people showed up from 16 congregations. The program began and ended with singing hymns by PPFer Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (see Pastoral Resources) and everyone viewed the TV documentary *Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence*, created by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.

"*Trigger* is amazing," says Shannan, "because it shows the ripple effect that each act of gun violence has on so many people. When it was over, people didn't move. They didn't talk." Rick Ufford-Chase, Moderator of the 216th PC(USA) General Assembly and then PPF Executive Director, had been invited to lead a discussion. Sitting at round tables, everyone had a chance to discuss gun violence and to listen to others. Rick posed these six questions to guide each round-table discussion:

1. What affected you in the movie?
2. When you think about gun violence and how you could respond to it, what is your scriptural grounding? What scripture verses come to mind?
3. The film views gun violence as a public health crisis. What are your responses to viewing gun violence as a public health crisis?
4. What do you think the role of the church should be?
5. What do you think we should do next as a presbytery?
6. Are you willing to serve on a Gun Violence Action Team of the presbytery?

Every church received a notebook prepared by the presbytery office with these resources:

1. Fact Sheet on Gun Violence by Bryan Miller, Director of CeaseFire New Jersey
2. PC(USA) policy on Gun Violence
3. Info on the then current denominational Peace Discernment Process.
4. Info on study-action resources from The Thoughtful Christian and the Peace Fellowship's Gun Violence Prevention Congregational Toolkit

"We also had Jim Atwood's wonderful book for sale, *America and its Guns*," said Shannan. "Ten people joined a team to plan the presbytery's next steps, including a young police detective who seemed very moved by the experience." At the end, Shannan greeted each person at the church door, including an older man. "He and I had never visited much before,"



she says. "He gave me a big hug and was very emotional. He told me that he was a retired doctor and that when he was in his 20s just starting out, two small children were playing with a gun. One killed the other. 'I had to identify the body,' he said, 'and then go and tell the mother that her child was dead. Thank you for having this event today. It helped me.'" Shannan reflects that "I don't think he had ever spoken about this trauma before."

Step One to Prevent Gun Violence:
Start the Conversation in Your Community.



Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church, Chicago
One the First Churches Acting for Gun Violence Prevention
 by Gail Russell, Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church

Gun violence first came to LPPC's consciousness in the early 1980's, when church member Katherine Zartman led churches in the city to be centers to receive guns that people would surrender, with no questions asked. An artist welded 75 guns to a plow to symbolize "They shall beat their swords into plowshares." Fast forward several decades....Church member, Monna Ray, brought the issue up again. She and a friend of LPPC, Marianne Nesler, attended a memorial service for Chicago victims of gun violence at a nearby Presbyterian Church. They came away inspired to get our church involved. We began posting names of young gun victims on a kiosk at the rear of our sanctuary. That led us to praying for young gun violence victims during the Prayers of the People, *a practice which continues to this day.*



Over the years there have been many important projects and relationships:

- Participating in "CrossWalk," and building connections with African-American neighborhoods and churches
- Holding Anti-Gun Violence Sunday worship, asking congregants to sign pledges for a variety of actions
- Providing prayer cards with names, ages and neighborhoods of young gun victims, to take home for prayer
- Gathering signatures on a petition for background checks and gun registration
- Giving 25% of our Peacemaking Offering to the Illinois Council Against Gun Violence
- Showing the film "The Interrupters" after worship to showcase Violence Interruption Programs like Ceasefire
- Joining "Fierce Women of Faith's" walk against gun violence on the far south side of the city
- Putting signage on our church doors to prohibit guns in the church building
- Providing a handout on the two upcoming referenda in the state legislature about guns and ammunition, and encouraging people to contact their legislators about these referenda
- Advocating for a ban on assault weapons and to stop illegal gun dealers

The Chicago Marathon Witness and the Vigil Against Violence

In 2014 we began to use the Chicago Marathon on Columbus Day weekend for a public display on our front yard about young victims of gun violence in Chicago. Our church is on a major route to the Marathon. The first year we had a tee-shirt display hung across our front yard with the names and ages of all those under the age of 19 who had been killed by gun violence that year and the dates that they were killed.



The next year we hosted a speaker from the group Ceasefire, which provided interruption to gang violence on the north side of the city. That year, *and every year since on Marathon Sunday*, we remember Chicago youth who died from gun violence with an exhibit on the front lawn. In 2016, when the number of gun violence victims was far higher in Chicago than it had been, we developed an installation with the young gun victims' photographs, names and ages. Beginning on Saturday, passersby view the installation on our front lawn. One year it was 83 young gun victims, another year 106 victims.

To help the community understand that the problem of gun violence does not belong solely to the south and west sides of Chicago, we developed partnerships across the city with groups, political leaders, public spokespersons and celebrities, and asked for their help in planning a **Vigil Against Violence**, held early Sunday evening of Marathon weekend. The vigil inside the sanctuary offers gospel singing and rapping, led by students, and calls to action by various leaders, from the city's chief public defender to Che "Rhymefest" Smith, talking about his personal experience with the Chicago police, and performing his song "Glory."



We dedicate this story to Monna Ray. She persisted! And so do we.



**Photo: Druid Hills Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, GA
Tee Shirt Memorial**

Tee shirt memorials make a powerful visible witness. There are many steps involved. When the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill, PA does a tee shirt project (see Toolkit inside cover), there is a part of the project to involve every group in the congregation, from Youth Group to Presbyterian Women: getting the tee shirts, building the display, writing names on the shirts, assembling the display, media work, etc.

The Soul Box Project - Like the AIDS Memorial Quilt begun in the 1980s, the Soul Box Project uses art for healing and as a visual “wake up call” about the numbers of people whose lives are being lost to gun violence. With two pieces of paper and origami instructions, participants create a small open box, approximately 2 x 2 inches, to embellish with names, images and symbols for a particular victim. So far, the Soul Box Project has collected over 200,000 boxes, which are available to display in public places. Some churches combine this or similar projects with a letter-writing campaign to elected officials or a voter registration table. Making and viewing the Soul Box Project can be a healing and transformative process. www.soulboxproject.org

First Presbyterian Church, Villisca, Iowa – The Sign Project

When I received an article from the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship on The Sign Project, working to get “No Guns in God’s House” signs in 100 churches, I was immediately intrigued and on board. I took the idea to our session. The immediate reaction was about 50/50. They did give me permission to send for the printed PPF Congregational Toolkit. I remember one question “Does it cost anything”? We received two Toolkits, which made it easier to circulate to the members’ homes for them and their spouses to read.

When it was put back onto session agenda, we had a good discussion. Out seven elders, we might have still had one or two not in favor. Their points were 1: It wouldn’t do any good, a sign won’t stop them, 2: if a gun is worn into the church, what do we do? And all the other questions you have heard, even down to where are the signs to go and what size? I saw all this as incidental to the main issue: “Where is our Faith in God!!”

I got permission to speak to the congregation. Our minister, Sandy Wainwright Rossander, formed a church service around a presentation by me of the NO GUNS IN GOD’S HOUSE sign proposal. I stressed the “step out in faith” basis. Many members spoke up that day. I was surprised at the number in favor. We voted by paper ballot. The count in favor of signage was 19 for, 3 against. This is an average attendance for our congregation.

Since then I have copied the signs from the PPF website because I can change the size to what we wanted and have had them laminated and placed on door and sign board in front of church. A narcotics group uses our church basement once a week. They come and go through a door with the gun and red hash mark through it sign. These are town people. Never a word has been said to anyone in our church. So that is our story. I think the effort did bring us together in prayer and in thought for a better world because of the actions of one small church. God is with us, and we must step out and be counted. -Linda Moore, First Presbyterian Church





Love in Action – Scenes from the PPF monthly Gun Violence Prevention Congregational E-News
 From top left: First & Franklin Presbyterian Church, Baltimore, hangs ribbons with names of victims and delivers the ribbons to elected officials; Vigil at First United Church, Oak Park, IL; Candidates Forum at Riviera Presbyterian Church, Coral Gables, FL; Jim Atwood, prophet of Presbyterian Gun Violence Prevention; Wear Orange march, Webster Groves Presbyterian Church, St. Louis; BeSMART for Kids Campaign for Secure Storage; Black Lives Matter/Brady.org; Keith Curl-Dove blesses the Guns to Gardens chop saw, Triad City Beat Photo, Faith and New Creation Community Presbyterian Churches, Greensboro, NC; March for Our Lives, 3.24.2018; Wear Orange at Oakland Cambridge Presbyterian Church in Cambridge, WI. Subscribe to the E-News by downloading PPF Toolkit.

Section 4 Connecting with Others

National Groups & Contacts in all 50 States

There are many ways to get involved in preventing gun violence. You can find or start a group or chapter in your church or with others in your community. Below we list national groups that work on both federal and state gun violence prevention, as well as a contact in each state, someone already working near you on this issue.



Guns to Gardens- National coordination for the Guns to Gardens movement <http://www.rawtools.org>
<http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence> <https://philly.rawtools.org/>

Everytown for Gun Safety - <http://www.everytown.org> 646-324-8250 Everytown has an “every state” strategy for saving lives. Everytown conducts gun violence research and promotes National Gun Violence Awareness Day in June, asking us to wear orange and to create local events to raise awareness. Its networks include:

-Moms Demand Action <http://www.momsdemandaction.org> which offers the Moms Demand Gun Sense Action Network in every state and the Mother’s Dream Quilt Project. Moms Demand has an excellent legislative text-alert system for each state.

-The Gun Violence Survivors Network, Mayors Against Illegal Guns, and Students Demand Action <http://www.studentsdemandaction.org> Student groups “turn outrage into action.” Find, start or support a local school chapter; learn about voter registration and using social media for violence prevention.



March for Our Lives - <http://www.marchforourlives.com>

Launched by students after the Parkland, FL school shooting Feb. 14, 2018, March for Our Lives inspired two million people to join in March 24, 2018 events nationwide and a massive voter registration campaign among teens and young adults. See info on how teens can start a “Local Activism Club,” the Vote for Our Lives project and school walk-outs to protest inaction by adults to reform gun regulation.

Their message: “America’s mass shooting generation is mobilizing.”

Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence - <http://www.bradycampaign.org> 202-370-8100 Founded by Jim and Sarah Brady and sponsor of the Million Mom March in 2000, the Brady Campaign is one of the oldest gun violence prevention national groups. Based in Washington DC, they also sponsor the Legal Action Project to use the court system to support sensible gun policy. With chapters across the US, they maintain an on-line map that shows local affiliates across the nation. Their website offer worship resources under “God not Guns.”

Center for Gun Violence Solutions, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, incorporating the oldest GVP group, the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, the Johns Hopkins program conducts ground-breaking research on causes and solutions to gun violence as a public health emergency.

<https://publichealth.jhu.edu/departments/health-policy-and-management/research-and-practice/center-for-gun-violence-solutions>

States United to Prevent Gun Violence - <http://www.supgv.org> Established in 2010 to create a 50 state solution on gun violence and a clearinghouse on state gun laws and advocacy. With networks in 30 states, they can help you get started in your state. Programs include safe gun storage to prevent child gun deaths and support for steps to prevent domestic gun violence against women.

Giffords - <http://www.giffords.org> Founded by Gabby Giffords and Mark Kelly in 2012 as Americans for Responsible Solutions, Giffords now sponsors education, advocacy and a significant Political Action Committee (PAC), as well as the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. The Law Center has worked for over 20 years to mobilize lawyers to help strengthen gun laws. Topics covered range from universal

background checks to gun design safety and standards to regulations on reporting lost and stolen guns. The Giffords Law Center maintains an on-line resource and scorecard on the gun laws in each of the US states. Click on your state to find current regulations. www.smartgunlaws.org/search-gun-law-by-state

The Newtown Action Alliance - <http://www.newtownactionalliance.org> Founded in Newtown, CT after the 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting, the Newtown Alliance provides “comfort, education, scholarship and other support and resources to people and communities impacted by or living in the aftermath of gun violence..., and to help them lead the way toward positive cultural change.” Actions include efforts to reduce the use of violence in entertainment and to ask politicians to refrain from accepting donations from the NRA.

Gun Violence Archive - <http://www.gunviolencearchive.org> The GVA provides free public access to accurate reporting on gun-related incidents in America, updated daily. Not an advocacy group, GVA gathers near real-time data from over 2,000 media, law enforcement, government and commercial sources daily. Results are published at www.facebook.com/gunviolencearchive

Sandy Hook Promise - <https://www.sandyhookpromise.org> Founded after the Newtown, CT Sandy Hook school shooting, Sandy Hook Promise seeks to find middle ground in the search for solutions, with a focus on community-based mental health and crisis intervention programs, as well as legislation to allow law enforcement to temporarily remove guns from individuals deemed a danger to themselves or others.

Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence - <https://www.iphnetwork.org/fupgv> Over 50 national religious groups work together to sponsor Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath each year and other mutual projects to lessen the grip of gun violence and the gun industry on the United States. Their website “Other Resources” includes an excellent *Gun Violence Guide for Faith Leaders*. PPF and the PC(USA) are members of Faiths United.

Violence Policy Center - <http://www.vpc.org/> The VPC does investigation and analytical work to provide accurate statistics on gun violence, information on the gun industry and research-based steps to prevent gun violence on topics ranging from murder-suicide to self-defense gun use.

Working with Student Groups

“The mass shooting generation is mobilizing.”

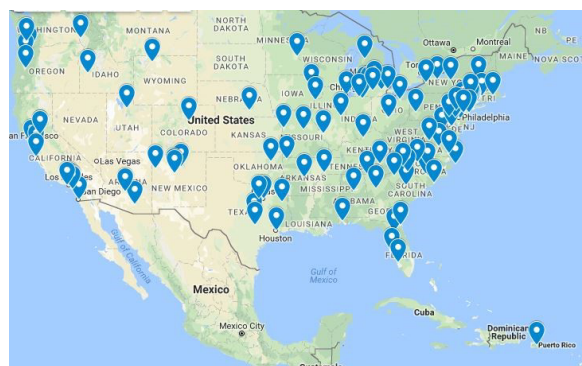
www.studentsdemandaction.org

www.marchforourlives.com

The students resisting gun violence inspire us all, including leading the historic March 24, 2018 March for Our Lives Day. Ideas for working with students:

1. Offer meeting space and working space
2. Charter a chapter of Students Demand Action or March for Our Lives at your church
3. Connect youth to existing advocacy groups
4. Support internships and fellowships for this work. Invest financially in the youth of the church.
5. Learn about the **Student Pledge** to discourage students from bringing guns to school at

www.newmexicanstopreventgunviolence.org



Left, Google map shows location of Presbyterians on March 24, 2018 who posted their local rallies on social media #presbysmarchforourlives
Above right, photo: Washington DC, *The Atlantic*

Gun Violence Prevention Contacts in All 50 States

Alabama	Moms Demand Action AL: www.facebook.com/MomsDemandActionAL Selma Center for Nonviolence https://www.selmacenterfornonviolence.org/
Alaska	Moral Movement: www.moralmovementAK.org
Arizona	Arizonans for Gun Safety: www.azfqs.com
Arkansas	Arkansas Stop the Violence: https://www.facebook.com/people/Arkansas-Stop-the-Violence
California	Women Against Gun Violence: www.wagv.org St. Paul's Episcopal (Guns to Gardens): https://www.stpaulsoakland.org/ First Presbyterian (Guns to Gardens): https://fpcstockton.org/
Colorado	Raw Tools: www.rawtools.org Faith Communities United to End Gun Violence: www.cfcu-co.org Guns to Gardens Metro Denver: https://www.gunstogardensdenver.org/
Connecticut	Connecticut Against Gun Violence: www.cagv.org Swords to Plowshares: https://www.s2pnortheast.org/
Delaware	Delaware Coalition Against Gun Violence www.decagv.org
Florida	Florida Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence www.preventgunviolenceflorida.org
Georgia	Safe Georgia: https://www.safegeorgia.org Chris 180: https://chris180.org/cureviolence/
Hawaii	Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence: https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064842128911
Idaho	Moms Demand Action ID: www.facebook.com/MomsDemandActionID
Illinois	Gun Violence Prevention Coalition: www.ilgvp.com One Aim: HOME - One Aim (oneaimil.org)
Indiana	Hoosiers Concerned About Gun Violence www.hcgv.org
Iowa	Iowans for Gun Safety: https://iowansforgunsafety.org
Kansas	Aim 4 Peace Violence Prevention Program: www.kcmo.gov/health/aim4peace/ KC Mothers in Charge: https://www.kcmothersincharge.org/
Kentucky	Sowers of Justice Network: www.sowersofjusticenetwork.org/nonviolence No More Red Dots: https://www.nmrd.info
Louisiana	LA Coalition against Domestic Violence: www.lcadv.org
Maine	Maine Gun Safety Coalition: www.mainegunsafety.org

- Maryland** Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence: www.mdpgv.org
- Massachusetts** Massachusetts Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence: www.mapreventgunviolence.org
Stop Handgun Violence: www.stophandgunviolence.org
- Michigan** Coalition for Common Ground: www.facebook.com/CCGKZOO/
End Gun Violence: <https://www.migunsafety.org/>
- Minnesota** Protect Minnesota: www.protectmn.org
Mothers Against Community Gun Violence: <https://www.macgvnb.com/>
- Mississippi** Moms Demand Action MS: www.facebook.com/momsdemandactionMS
- Missouri** Grandparents Against Gun Violence: <http://www.moksgagv.org>
Women's Voices Raised for Social Justice: www.womensvoicesraised.org/gun-solutions/
Guns to Gardens St Louis: thriza@light4thedarkness.com
- Montana** Jeannette Rankin Peace Center: www.jrpc.org
Big Sky Rising: www.facebook.com/pg/BigSkyRising
- Nebraska** Nebraskans Against Gun Violence: www.nebraskansagainstgunviolence.org
- Nevada** Moms Demand Action NV: www.facebook.com/MomsDemandActionNV
- New Hampshire** GunSense NH: <https://www.facebook.com/GunSenseNH/>
Episcopal Church of NH: <https://www.nhepiscopal.org/>
- New Jersey** Cease Fire NJ: www.peacecoalition.org/campaigns/ceasefire.html
Rutgers Center on Gun Violence Research: www.gunviolenceresearchcenter.rutgers.edu
- New Mexico** New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence: www.newmexicanstopreventgunviolence.org
- New York** New Yorkers Against Gun Violence: www.nyagv.org
Mayor's Office to Prevent Gun Violence: www.nyc.gov/peacenyc
- North Carolina** North Carolinians Against Gun Violence: www.ncgv.org
NC SAFE: <https://www.ncsafe.org/>
- North Dakota** Moms Demand Action- Interfaith Lead karevanfossan@gmail.com
- Ohio** Ohio Coalition Against Gun Violence: www.ohioceasefire.org
First Community Church (Guns to Gardens): <https://fcchurch.com/>
Church of the Epiphany (Guns to Gardens): <http://epiphanyeuclid.org/>
- Oklahoma** OK Gun Sense: www.facebook.com/groups/527444644007433/
- Oregon** Ceasefire Oregon: www.ceasefireoregon.org
Oregon Alliance for Gun Safety: <https://www.oralliance.org/>

- Pennsylvania** CeaseFire PA: www.ceasefirepa.org
 Rawtools PA: <https://rawtools.org/>
 Heeding God's Call: www.heedinggodscall.org
- Rhode Island** Rhode Island Coalition Against Gun Violence: www.ricagv.org
- South Carolina** Arm-in-Arm: South Carolinians for Responsible Gun Ownership: www.arminarmsc.org
 Diocese of South Carolina: <https://www.episcopalchurchsc.org/gun-violence-prevention.html>
- South Dakota** Moms Demand Action SD: www.facebook.com/MomsDemandActionSD
- Tennessee** Safe Tennessee Project: www.safetennesseeproject.org/
- Texas** Texas Gun Sense: www.txgunsense.org
 Moms Demand Action TX: www.facebook.com/momsdemandactionTX
 Texas Impact: <https://texasimpact.org/end-gun-violence/>
- Utah** Gun Violence Prevention Center of Utah: www.gvpc.org
 Gun Sense Utah: www.facebook.com/GUNSENSE.ACTION
- Vermont** Gun Sense Vermont: <http://www.gunsensevt.org>
- Virginia** Virginia Center for Public Safety: www.vacps.org
 Virginia Council of Churches www.vacouncilofchurches.org
- Washington** Alliance for Gun Responsibility: www.foundation.gunresponsibility.org
 Washington CeaseFire: www.washingtonceasefire.org
- Washington DC** Gifford Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence: <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/>
 The TraRon Center: <https://traroncenter.org/>
- West Virginia** Moms Demand Action: www.facebook.com/MomsDemandActionWV
 Shepherdstown Presbyterian (Guns to Gardens): <http://shepherdstownpresbyterian.org/>
- Wisconsin** Wisconsin Anti-Violence Effort: www.waveedfund.org
 Midvale Community Lutheran Church (Guns to Gardens): <https://www.midvalelutheran.org/>
 Oakland-Cambridge Presbyterian(Guns to Gardens): <http://shepherdstownpresbyterian.org/>
- Wyoming** Moms Demand Action WY: www.facebook.com/momsdemandactionwy

Help us update this list! Please send corrections and new contacts to: gvp@presbypeacefellowship.org



Photo:
 Student
 "Walk
 Out" at
 Peekskill,
 NY High
 School

Credits & Contact Info:

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Contact the Gun Violence Prevention Ministry of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship at

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Toolkit Credits: Thank you to all who provided photos, case studies, resources and ideas, named or unnamed!

Photos and Resources are Identified throughout this Toolkit, with these additions:

Cover Photo, New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence

Inside Cover, Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia and Korean Hosanna Presbyterian Church, Los Angeles

Photo p. 10, James Atwood Receiving PPF 2014 Peaceseeker Award, by Della Orr-Harter

Photo p. 15, Heeding God's Call

Graphic p. 27 Winchester Ad, 1950s, in a style similar to Norman Rockwell

Hymns p. 34, Carolyn Winfrey-Gillette <http://www.carolynshymns.com>

Photo p. 35, Wappingers Falls Presbyterian Church, Wappingers Falls, NY

Photo p. 39, Orlando, FL, Pulse Massacre Memorial Tree, by Peggy Howland

Top Photo p. 53, Emmanuel African American Methodist Episcopal Church, Charleston, SC

Artwork p. 56, No Guns in God's House Signage by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program

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Photo, p. 68, Dan Campbell, *The Herald Palladium News*, Benton Township, MI

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Special Thanks to Current/Past Members and Staff of the Peace Fellowship's Gun Violence Prevention Working

Group: Harry Eberts, Deanna Hollas, Rachel Sutphin, Phil Swank, Robert Lowry, Abigail Aldoory Cross, Margery Rossi, Lois Thiessen Love, Scott Marrese Wheeler, Kevin Johnson, Chandra Mills Cooper, Temple Hiatt, Simon Doong, Cheryl and Doug Hunt, Rosalind Hughes, Keith Curl-Dove, Sara Dorrien-Christians, Margaret Leonard, Eugene McGrath, and all who have helped, including Peace Fellowship leaders: Laurie Lyter Bright, Sarah Prager, Lucy Waechter Webb, Katie Blanchard, Christa Galvin, Marilyn White **Toolkit Editor:** Jan Orr-Harter Send new resources and action ideas to gvp@presbypeacefellowship.org



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No Armas de Fuego

en

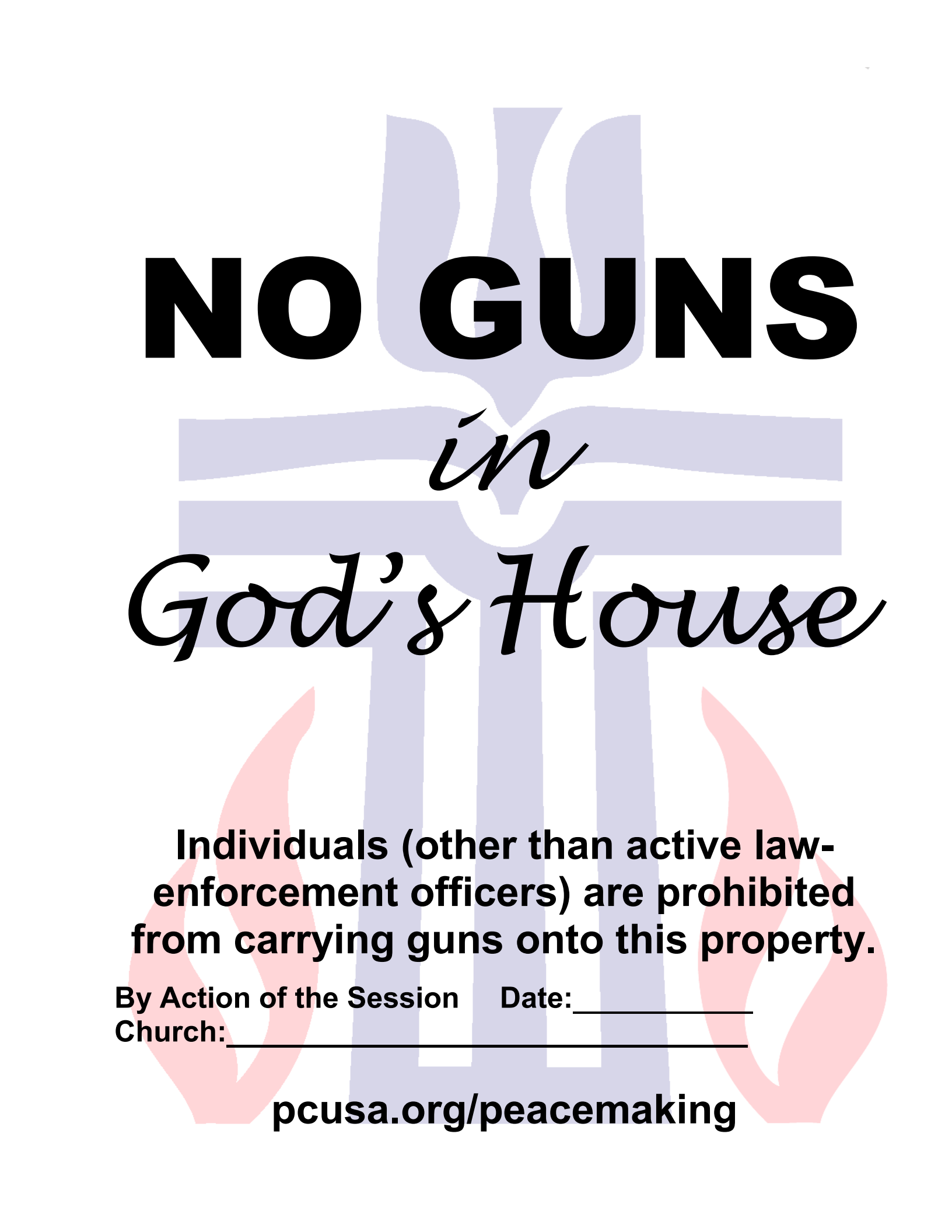
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Individuos (que no sean oficiales activos de la ley) se prohíben llevar armas en esta propiedad.

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Individuals (other than active law-enforcement officers) are prohibited from carrying guns onto this property.

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