

Gun Violence Prevention

Actions of the 221st General Assembly (2014)

09-07 On Gun Violence Prevention, from the Presbytery of Hudson River
APPROVED AS FOLLOWS:

In response to *Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call*, which calls us to “encourage the church at every level—from individual member to congregation, presbytery, synod, and national church—to become informed and active in preventing gun violence” and urges that “the church take responsibility to build public awareness of gun violence and the epidemic of preventable gun-related deaths” (*Minutes, 2010, Part I, pp. 830ff, electronic version*), the Presbytery of Hudson River, Synod of the Northeast, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), respectfully overtures the 221st General Assembly (2014) to do the following:

- 1) **Direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to**
 - a) provide models for congregational and local ecumenical forums to explore the dynamics of gun violence in their areas, and to select appropriate initiatives for witness and action in their communities, and
 - b) assist in the formation of support, healing, and advocacy groups for those who have experienced gun violence in their families.
- 2) **Encourage synods, presbyteries, and seminaries to develop educational programs that include**
 - a) the theological and pastoral care issues raised by murder, suicide, domestic violence, and wounding by gun violence,
 - b) a means of public acknowledgement of grief and repentance in worship and in communal events, and
 - c) links between those who have suffered from gun violence and existing support, healing, and advocacy groups.
- 3) **Commend Presbyterian Mission Agency for the development and dissemination of the film *Trigger: The Ripple Effects of Gun Violence*, and the inclusion of mass shootings among the disasters addressed by PDA disaster response teams; and encourage the continuation of these important efforts.**
- 4) **Direct the PC(USA) and its constituent parts to recommit itself to work with federal, state, and local legislators] to**
 - a) oppose legislation that exempts gun manufacturers and marketers from legal liability and/or financial accountability for the medical and security costs of predictable gun misuse and availability to criminals, the unstable, and the self-destructive;
 - b) support the disclosure of funds spent by gun manufacturers on lobbying, campaign contributions, and other legislative strategies that serve to undermine the protection of U.S. citizens from the highest rates of gun violence in the world;
 - c) oppose ‘stand your ground’ and other legislation that may entitle gun owners to shoot before taking alternative measures (such as relying on law enforcement and/or other de-escalation techniques) in perceived defense of persons or property;
 - d) oppose legislation designed to permit and encourage the carrying of weapons in all areas of life, including houses of worship, noting that those in possession of guns are four times more likely to experience gun violence;
 - e) support legislation to require licensing, registration, and waiting periods to allow comprehensive background checks, and cooling-off periods;

- f) support legislation to close the ‘gun show loophole’ by requiring background checks for all gun buyers;
 - g) support legislation to ban semiautomatic assault weapons, armor piercing handgun ammunition, and .50 caliber sniper rifles;
 - h) support legislation to advocate for new technologies to aid law-enforcement agencies to trace crime guns and promote public safety;
 - i) support legislation to raise the age for handgun ownership to the age of twenty-one;
 - j) following the recommendation of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, support laws to ‘require judges and law enforcement to remove guns from situations of domestic violence, as well as from people whose adjudicated mental illness, drug use, or previous criminal record suggests the possibility of violence,’ and to increase police training in nonviolent proactive intervention;
 - k) advocate that federal and state governments enact legislation to regulate ammunition, guided by Gun Violence Gospel Values, as approved by the 219th General Assembly (2010);
 - l) Support the development, promotion, and use of ‘smart gun’ and ‘smart ammunition’ technologies that will help to prevent unintended and accidental shootings and aid law enforcement in reducing gun violence.
- 5) **Consistent with *Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God’s Call, Recommendation 9* (page 2; see also *Minutes, 2010, Part I, p. 831, electronic version*), which reads “we recommend that churches and other entities prominently display signs that prohibit carrying guns onto their property,” we strongly encourage**
- a) the session of each PC(USA) congregation to declare their particular premises and gatherings to be gun-free zones by voting to adopt the following (or similar) policy and recording it in their minutes: “Individuals (other than active law-enforcement officers) are prohibited from carrying guns onto this property,” and to publicize this policy by prominently displaying appropriate signage, such as one of the samples attached (Appendix A, ovt038-appA&B.pdf), which can be downloaded from a website such as the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, etc.;
 - b) all PC(USA) entities that own property (including but not limited to the Office of the General Assembly (OGA), synods, presbyteries, camps and conference centers, educational institutions, etc.) to declare their particular premises and gatherings to be gun-free zones by adopting the following or a similar policy as indicated by official vote and recorded in the minutes: “Individuals (other than active law-enforcement officers) are prohibited from carrying guns onto this property,” and to publicize this policy by prominently displaying appropriate signage, such as one of the samples attached (Appendix A, ovt038-appA&B.pdf), which can be downloaded from a website such as Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, etc.;
 - c) individual Presbyterians to bear witness to the gospel value of peacemaking and to build safer and more secure communities by advocating for similar gun-free zone policies in their workplaces, schools, neighborhood businesses, and gathering places. Free downloadable signage for general use (see attached, Appendix B, ovt038-appA&B.pdf) is available at www.gunfreespaces.org.

Gun Violence Prevention

Summary of Actions of the 221st General Assembly (2014)

09-07 On Gun Violence Prevention, from the Presbytery of Hudson River

- 1) **Presbyterian Mission Agency** *[Direct]*
 - a) **PROVIDE MODELS FOR STUDY, WITNESS AND ACTION** – provide models for congregational and local ecumenical forums to explore the dynamics of gun violence in their areas, and to select appropriate initiatives for witness and action in their communities.
 - b) **FORM SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY GROUPS** - assist in the formation of support, healing, and advocacy groups for those who have experienced gun violence in their families.

- 2) **Synod, presbytery and seminary educational opportunities** *(Encourage)*
 - a) **ADDRESS THEOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL CARE ISSUES** raised by murder, suicide, domestic violence, and wounding by gun violence.
 - b) **PROVIDE A PUBLIC MEANS OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT** of grief and repentance in worship and in communal events.
 - c) **PROVIDE LINKS FOR THOSE SUFFERING** to existing support, healing, and advocacy groups.

- 3) **Existing responses from the Presbyterian Mission Agency** *(Commend and continue)*

COMMEND AND CONTINUE:

 - The film *Trigger: The Ripple Effects of Gun Violence*.
 - The inclusion of mass shootings among the disasters addressed by PDA disaster response teams.

- 4) **Advocacy on 12 gun violence prevention issues**

All parts of PC(USA) recommit to work with federal, state, and local legislators *(Direct)*

 - a) **OPPOSE EXEMPTIONS FOR THE GUN INDUSTRY** – oppose legislation that exempts gun manufacturers and marketers from legal liability and/or financial accountability for the medical and security costs of predictable gun misuse and availability to criminals, the unstable, and the self-destructive.
 - b) **SUPPORT DISCLOSURE OF FUNDS SPENT** by gun manufacturers on lobbying, campaign contributions, and other legislative strategies that serve to undermine the protection of U.S. citizens from the highest rates of gun violence in the world.
 - c) **OPPOSE ‘STAND YOUR GROUND’** and other legislation that may entitle gun owners to shoot before taking alternative measures (such as relying on law enforcement and/or other de-escalation techniques) in perceived defense of persons or property.

- d) **OPPOSE OPEN CARRY** legislation designed to permit and encourage the carrying of weapons in all areas of life, including houses of worship, noting that those in possession of guns are four times more likely to experience gun violence.
 - e) **SUPPORT WAITING PERIODS** and legislation to require licensing and registration to allow comprehensive background checks, and cooling-off periods.
 - f) **UNIVERSAL BACKGROUND CHECKS/CLOSE THE ‘GUN SHOW LOOPHOLE’** by requiring background checks for all gun buyers.
 - g) **BAN SEMIAUTOMATIC ASSAULT WEAPONS**, armor piercing handgun ammunition, and .50 caliber sniper rifles.
 - h) **SUPPORT NEW TECHNOLOGIES** to aid law-enforcement agencies to trace crime guns and promote public safety.
 - i) **RAISE THE AGE FOR HANDGUN OWNERSHIP** to the age of twenty-one.
 - j) **REMOVAL OF GUNS FROM PARTICULAR SITUATIONS** – following the recommendation of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, support laws to ‘require judges and law enforcement to remove guns from situations of domestic violence, as well as from people whose adjudicated mental illness, drug use, or previous criminal record suggests the possibility of violence,’ and to increase police training in nonviolent proactive intervention.
 - k) **REGULATE AMMUNITION** guided by *Gun Violence Gospel Values*, as approved by the 219th General Assembly (2010).
 - l) **SMART GUN AND AMMUNITION TECHNOLOGIES** that will help to prevent unintended and accidental shootings and aid law enforcement in reducing gun violence.
- 5) **SIGNAGE PROHIBITING CARRYING GUNS ONTO CHURCH PROPERTY**
(Strongly encourage)
- a) **SESSIONS DECLARE GUN-FREE ZONES** - adopt a policy and prominently display signage “*Individuals (other than active law-enforcement officers) are prohibited from carrying guns onto this property.*”
 - b) **PC(USA) ENTITIES DECLARE GUN-FREE ZONES** including but not limited to the Office of the General Assembly (OGA), synods, presbyteries, camps and conference centers, educational institutions, etc.) - adopt a policy and prominently display signage “*Individuals (other than active law-enforcement officers) are prohibited from carrying guns onto this property.*”
 - c) **PRESBYTERIANS TO BEAR WITNESS** to the gospel value of peacemaking and to build safer and more secure communities by advocating for similar gun-free zone policies in their workplaces, schools, neighborhood businesses, and gathering places.