

Gun Violence Prevention

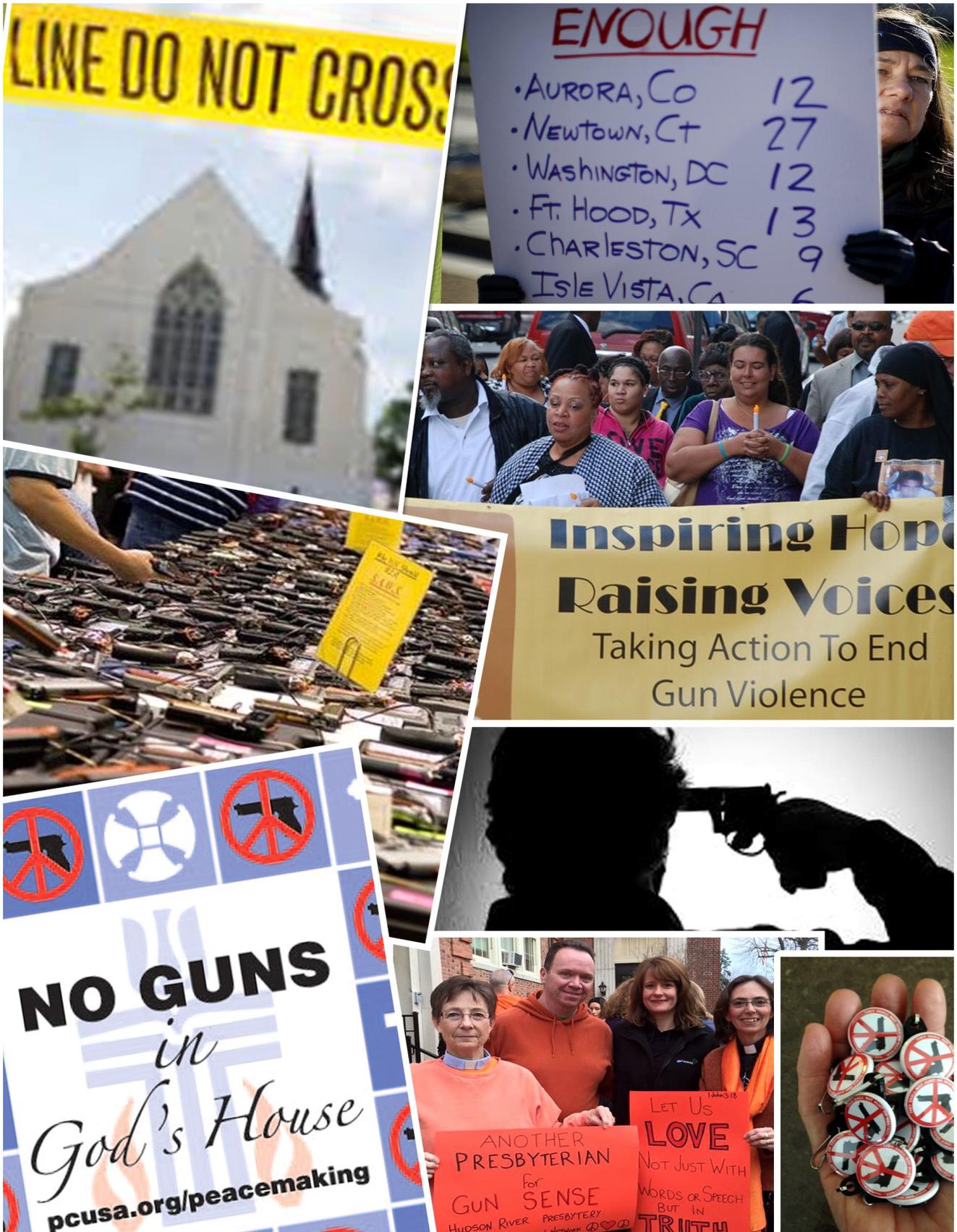


Congregational TOOLKIT

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

Cover photo used with permission, Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill

In 2013, The Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill in Philadelphia 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.



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Back Cover: A Sign to Use



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Introduction

“Putting an end to America’s gun violence is not an either/or, winner-take-all kind of discussion. To get there, those who hate guns must be willing to sit down with those whose livelihoods depend on them for food or safety and whose culture has praised guns for generations, while those who have never seen a gun they didn’t like must be willing to listen to the fears of children in our inner cities who hear gunshots before they go to sleep at night and are afraid to go to playgrounds because that’s where kids get shot. We must talk together to heal our land.”

--James E. Atwood, *Gundamentalism and Where it is Taking America*

The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship offers this **new Gun Violence Prevention Toolkit** to revise a prior version and to help turn the church toward action. In an epidemic of 36,000 American gun deaths last year, we ask: ***What does the Lord require of us?***

We thank two pastors who created the original toolkit, Margaret Leonard and Sara Dorrien-Christians, both members of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. We also thank all those who have pioneered the conversation on gun violence, all those churches, presbyteries and others on whose models we draw and hope to enlarge.

How to use this new toolkit? Reach into the toolkit and pick the best education resources for your setting and just start! We offer print, online resources, plus films to screen in your church or community, as well as three small group options. We affirm the power of small groups of thoughtful people to explore difficult and controversial issues in ways that transform and that build community and commitment. A small group might be 30. It might be 3. It might be an adult or youth group, or for Advent or Lent. Just start the conversation wherever you are. Invite the Spirit in and see where it calls you. Or start the study on your own, or with a friend or two. Pastoral and worship tools are also here for your use.

In terms of action, there are many ways to help reduce gun violence. The toolkit offers action projects that have Presbyterian roots. We encourage you to share with us projects of your own design. National groups provide key leadership, and we include their information as essential. However, the real change on gun violence in America must come from local communities in every state, city and community. And guess what? That’s exactly where the church of Jesus Christ is located!

The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship is a nation-wide community of Presbyterians who trust in the nonviolence of Jesus. For 75 years, we have promoted the practical search for cooperation and peace, including the search for steps to prevent gun violence that can be supported by the majority of Americans.

Please join us in this search. We give full permission for you to re-print and make multiple copies of this toolkit for your use in churches and communities. An online version will continue to be updated in pdf format for easy printing. Send us your ideas and stay in touch through **www.presbypeacefellowship.org** or **@presbypeace**

2017 Edition

Be Bold! Nonviolence Works,

Margery Rossi, Chair, Gun Violence Prevention Working Group, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship
Emily Brewer, Executive Director, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

Section 1 Educational Resources

Resources On-Line

Gun Violence IS Public Health – A PowerPoint presentation by Dr. Susan L. Polan, PhD., American Public Health Association, that examines gun violence from the perspective of a growing public health crisis.

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1GHDlaJ7Y7ITa70GZBhgvBqYUN1XE8VELOS6iNdYQgU>

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

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

Children & Gun Violence – This article underscores the need for funding research into gun violence. A professor at the Children's Hospital at Montefiore/Albert Einstein College of Medicine documents that, in the US, 16 children per day are *admitted* to hospitals because of gun violence. That's 5,862 per year, but we have no count on how many children die of gun violence in emergency rooms or before being admitted to a hospital.

<http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/04/health/children-gunshot-wounds-study/index.html>

Films

Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence

A film by David Barnhart, an award-winning producer, director, and documentary filmmaker.

The documentary frames gun violence as both a disaster and a public health issue. It addresses the critical issue of gun violence prevention by moving the conversation away from the polarizing extremes that have long dominated the debate and lifting up the voice and experiences of those who seek common ground and a new way forward. *Trigger* was produced in part as a response to the 219th General Assembly (2010) resolution *Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call* and to shed light on the growing issue. The documentary is the result of a collaborative effort of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, and the Compassion, Peace, and Justice Ministry of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

There is a study guide and bulletin insert that goes along with this DVD for use in congregational or other community based meetings during screenings.

For additional resources and downloads: <http://www.triggerdoc.com/next/resources/>



Americans Remember the Loved Ones They've Lost to Gun Violence

The families of gun victims speak to their fellow Americans about the need for practical steps to prevent gun violence. View this short video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIHQJlavfps>

Newtown: What Remains After All is Lost?

Filming over the course of nearly 3 years, Filmmaker Kim Snyder explores a traumatized community in the aftermath of the deadliest mass shootings of schoolchildren in American history. Screened at the Sundance Festival and other international film venues, *Newtown* tells the story of resilience in the face of unspeakable tragedy.

Learn more about hosting a screening in your community at <http://www.newtownfilm.com>

Changing the Conversation: America's Gun Violence Epidemic

Produced for use in high school and 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. Purchase info at <http://www.changegunviolence.com>

Making A Killing: Guns, Greed and the NRA

This film tells the stories of how guns, and the *billions* of dollars made by the gun and ammunition industry, impact the lives of everyday Americans. It features personal stories from people across the country who have been affected by gun violence, including survivors and victims' families. The film exposes how the powerful gun companies and the NRA are resisting responsible legislation for the sake of profit. It looks into gun tragedies that include unintentional shootings, domestic violence, suicides, mass shootings and trafficking – and what we can do to put an end to this profit-driven crisis.

Learn more about the film: <http://www.bravenewfilms.org/makingakilling>

Obtain a copy of the film: <http://www.bravenewfilms.com/makingakilling>

Raising Adam Lanza: A Documentary

In the wake of the mass killings at Sandy Hook Elementary School, FRONTLINE investigates a young man and the town he changed forever. Adam Lanza left behind a trail of death and destruction, but little else. He left no known friends, no diary. He destroyed his computer and any evidence it might have provided. His motives, and his life, remain largely a mystery. In collaboration with *The Hartford Courant*, FRONTLINE looks for answers to the central—and so far elusive—question: who was Adam Lanza?

To view the trailer or film: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/raising-adam-lanza/>

2020: January 31, 2014 Young Guns – A Diane Sawyer Special

Diane Sawyer and David Muir take a sharp look at kids and guns in a special report that originally aired on Jan. 31, 2014 at 10 pm ET.

To view the special online: <http://www.abc.go.com/shows/2020/episode-guide/2014-01/31-2020-131-young-guns-a-diane-sawyer-special>

The Inside Scoop: May 15, 2017 Host Catherine Read Interviews Presbyterian Author James Atwood on his Book, *Gundamentalism*

This video offers a wide-ranging discussion of the current impact of guns in America, in conversation with James Atwood, with a special appeal to gun owners to support gun safety and reasonable gun laws. The second half of the interview features Andrew Goddard, parent of a son injured at the Virginia Tech shooting and now Director of the Virginia Center for Public Safety. He gives an excellent overview of the state of Virginia, as a case study for all 50 states.

View online at <https://youtu.be/VfTSUM-6HZw>

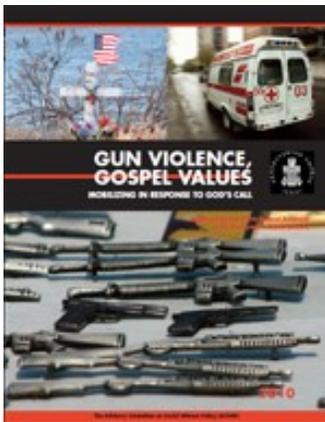
The PC(USA) & Gun Violence Prevention Policy

The PC(USA) and its predecessor bodies have addressed gun violence through the actions of many General Assemblies in the last fifty years. 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 of all kinds." Similar resolutions were passed again in 1976, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1996 and 1998.

Each resolution reflected a sense of moral urgency in response to rising gun violence and the cultural trends that contributed to it. 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. In 1991 and 1996, these resolutions were backed up with strong educational curricula as well as comprehensive strategies for advocacy.

In 2008 the General Assembly recommended that churches should take seriously the pastoral implications of caring for members of our community who have experienced the pain of gun violence, advocate for legislation that would increase the safety and well-being of communities in relation to the presence of guns, and conduct a national study on gun violence. From this recommendation, a gun violence prevention task force of ten people was formed under the auspices of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy.

The task force worked tirelessly over the next two years and produced a comprehensive study of contemporary gun violence in the United States, complete with recommendations for the church as to how to address this critical issue. This study was *unanimously* approved by the 219th General Assembly:



Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call, PC(USA) Advocacy Committee on Social Witness Policy

This report, approved by the 219th General Assembly (2010), challenges our society's fatalism and numbness in accepting the world's highest gun death rates, reviews past church stands and proposes a new "spiritual awakening" to support needed laws: a church-related, community-based strategy inspired by "Heeding God's Call" in Philadelphia, with similar groups in Richmond, VA and central NJ. The report includes analysis of our culture of violence-acceptance, with its undercurrents of fear, desperation, and suicide, and advocates a public health approach to halt spread of guns and gang violence.

To download a pdf version:

<https://www.pcusa.org/site/media/media/uploads/acswp/pdf/gun-violence-policy.pdf>

To purchase hard copies: <http://www.store.pcusa.org> Order item # 2405211002

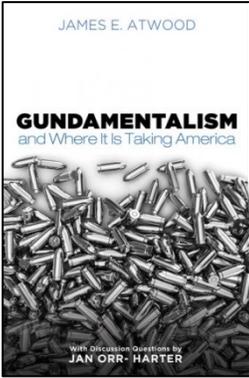
On Gun Violence Prevention, PC(USA) General Assembly Action, 2014

—From the Presbytery of Hudson River

This is the most recent action taken by the General Assembly regarding gun violence. It directs the church to speak out on a variety of legislative matters with the aim of reducing gun violence; it encourages Presbyterians to learn more about the theological issues involved in gun violence; respond pastorally to situations of gun violence, and to claim a bold witness against gun violence by hanging signage on church property declaring it a gun-free zone.

The full final version of this action is provided in this Toolkit, p. 37.

Study & Small Group Suggestions



Gundamentalism & Where It Is Taking America

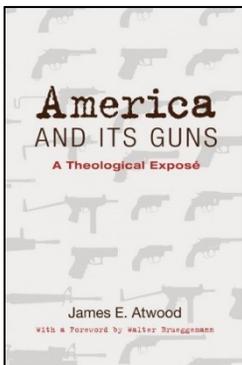
By James E. Atwood

Discussion Questions by Jan Orr-Harter

Gundamentalism and Where It Is Taking America offers an immensely readable and comprehensive overview of the issue of gun violence in America, with discussion questions following each chapter. While written from a faith perspective, the book is designed for both church groups and a broader audience, including college, law, medical and public health schools; law enforcement agencies; local government and community groups. James Atwood is a retired Presbyterian pastor and an avid deer hunter for half a century. During most of that time, he has been in 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 Americans. Chapters include such topics as: How Did We Get Here?; Straight Talk to Anyone Buying a Gun for the First Time; Policing the Inner City; Can Guns be Made Safer? Atwood's book, which details his learning in a lifetime in the struggle for reasonable gun laws in America, puts dependable social and theological analysis of our unique national epidemic into your hands along with scientific data that will provoke honest reflection and discussion for the building of a safer and saner America. Along with the discussion questions, suggestions for action are also included.

To purchase the book: <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

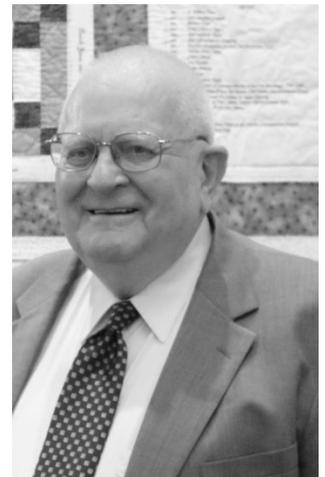
Six Session PPF Study Guide by Jan Orr-Harter

James Atwood, an avid hunter, cautions that an absolute trust in guns and violence morphs easily into idolatry. Having spent 40 years as a Presbyterian pastor fighting against the easy access to firearms, one of which took the life of a friend, he uses his unique experience and his biblical and theological understanding to graphically portray the impact guns have on our society. He documents how Americans have been deceived into believing that the tools of violence will provide ultimate security, whether they take the form of advanced military technology or a handgun in the bedside stand. He closes with a wake-up call to the faith community, which he says is America's best hope to unmask the extremism of the Gun Empire. This book will appeal primarily to persons of faith because it brings together multiple aspects of the gun death crisis in America—the statistics, the laws, the players, the options— with the underlying spiritual and theological imperatives of what is often considered to be a “hands-off” political issue. Available at <http://www.amazon.com> in print and Kindle or with the publisher's group discounts. Call 541-344-1528 or order from <http://wipfandstock.com/catalogsearch/result/?q=America+and+its+guns>

See the next page for the PPF Six Session Study Guide for this book.

Rev. James Atwood, right, speaks and conducts workshop for groups across the nation. See media coverage with Jim at <https://youtu.be/VfTSUM-6HZw>

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540-568-8523 jatwood1959@gmail.com



America and Its Guns: A Theological Exposé

by James Atwood

Suggestions for studying this book in a church small group setting:

The group convener can be one person or can be rotated. The convener's role is to start and end the meeting, to ask the suggested questions, to move discussion forward and to make sure that everyone in the group is heard fairly. Each session opens with a question for each person to answer. Thereafter, just take turns.

Everyone may not wish to address every question. Sessions will be about 90 minutes each. Group size can be 4-12 persons. If larger, divide into two groups. Suggested group field trip: a gun show in your community.

1. Session One – A Call to Conversation Preface, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 (read beforehand)

Convener welcomes everyone, opens with prayer and invites each person to introduce themselves by answering:

1. How do you feel about entering into a discussion about gun violence? Have guns impacted your life, family, friends?
2. On p. 14 Atwood writes that "Gun violence is no more a political issue than drunk driving, selling crack cocaine or arson." How do we Americans determine the issues we will discuss and those we will avoid? How does not talking about gun violence impact the "peace, unity and purity of the church?"
3. On p.19 a National Rifle Association (NRA) executive said: "You would get a far better understanding of the NRA if you were approaching us as one of the great religions of the world." Is there, or has there ever been, something in your life that has served as an idol? Why would an NRA leader make such a statement?
4. On p. 20-21 Atwood lists indications of possible gun idolatry. Do you agree or disagree? Can a person of faith serve two masters—that is, can we claim another ultimate value in addition to loving God and neighbor?
5. Share a passage in these chapters that especially spoke to you—and why?
6. Chapter 4 covers efforts to find common ground to reduce gun violence over 4 decades and asks the question, "Can the church bring gun rights and public safety zealots together in the same space to start an honest conversation?" Is this study group such a conversation? Who needs to be in the same space to discuss this in your community/state?
7. On p. 18 Atwood writes, "What our nation needs is balanced legislation that respects two fundamental constitutional rights: the right to keep and bear arms and the right to enjoy domestic tranquility as one pursues life, liberty and happiness." Are there other examples in American life of "balanced legislation" or a balanced approach to difficult issues or competing rights?

Convener asks a group member to close the meeting with prayer. Homework: Read chapters 5, 6, 7

2. Session Two – Violence Chapters 5, 6, 7

1. Convener opens with prayer and asks: Do you agree with Atwood that violence as entertainment helps us to see gun violence as normal? Do you personally enjoy violence as entertainment? Do others in your family? Why?
2. Chapter 5 discusses children and guns. Make a gun with your thumb and finger and shoot it to kill everyone in the group, saying, "You're dead!" Did you do this as children? Did/do your children? How does it feel to do it as an adult?
3. Look at the phrases on p. 45-47. Do you hear yourself or your loved ones in these expressions?
4. Atwood states that the violent language of some politicians and talk show hosts has abetted both gun violence and the militia groups who target law enforcement as "foot soldiers of the federal government." Do you agree or not? Why?

5. See the Appendix on p. 227-228 and update it with: Iraq War Deaths 2003-2009: 4,400 and US gun deaths 2003-2009: 202,500 (p.194). Does anything surprise you in these numbers? Were you aware that gun deaths have been above 30,000 per year for decades? Why is this high level of civilian gun death so peculiarly American?

6. Describe in your own words what is meant by the phrase “redemptive violence,” p. 63-66. Give examples.

7. If violence is part of our American DNA, what does that suggest to you about gun violence prevention efforts? What does it suggest to you about the purpose of the church in the United States today?

Convener asks a group member to close the meeting with prayer. Homework: Read Chapter 8, 9, 10

3. Session Three – The Principalities & Powers Chapters 8, 9, 10

1. Convener opens by reading Ephesians 6:12 and asks everyone: Each person give one word that describes the “principalities and powers” (King James Version) that Paul addresses.

2. Is the absence of sensible gun laws in America related to the Principalities and Powers? What is relation between these spiritual and earthly powers? Have you ever experienced these powers in relation to guns?

3. With any smart phones, search for images of “Jesus with assault weapon” and share. What is at the root of a human desire to attribute the blessing of guns and violence to God? Does anything in these chapters make you angry?

4. Do you agree that US racial-ethnic diversity is one reason some people feel a need to acquire a gun? (p. 92)

5. Did the marksman and sporting era of the NRA (1871-1976) play a role in your family history? Were you aware of its change of focus since 1977 and the Cincinnati Revolt? Why is the NRA so successful at promoting gun sales?

6. Atwood documents that the oft-repeated “20,000 gun control laws on the books” is untrue. Why does it persist?

7. Have you faced up to a significant fear in your life? Why is fear so powerful? How did faith help you face up to fear?

Convener asks someone to read Ephesians 6:10-20. Close with open prayer. Homework: Read Chapters 11, 12, 13

4. Session Four – The Impact of Idolatry Chapters 11, 12, 13

1. Convener opens with prayer and asks everyone: Do you have concerns about guns and the children and youth in your life? Have you done anything about this? Why or why not?

2. Were you surprised at the high rate of gun violence and deaths among those with concealed carry permits? Were you surprised about the statistics on gun suicide? (p. 111) Does anything else surprise you in these chapters?

3. Can you describe the sense of identity and power that guns appear to convey? Can you identify with or have you experienced the “prison” of violence in poor urban neighborhoods? What is the connection between guns and identity?

4. How can we better help veterans who return home transformed by violence? Who else suffers from PTSD?

5. How do you react to Atwood’s suggestion that the cost of unfettered gun access is a form of human sacrifice—“between 82 and 84 Americans, ten of whom are children and youth under 18, are killed every day by guns?” (p. 128) This book was published months before the Newtown, CT killings. Has Newtown, CT changed you in any way?

6. Any other items you wish to discuss from the book so far?

Convener reads Exodus 20:2-3 and asks a member to close with prayer.

Homework: Read Chapters 14, 15, 16 and the gun sellers' voluntary "Code of Conduct" at www.heedinggodscall.org

5. Session 5 – Our Gun Laws Today & Our Impact Abroad Chapters 14, 15, 16

1. Convener opens with prayer and asks everyone: How do you interpret the Second Amendment and its role today?

2. If left unencumbered, what is the NRA's vision for America? Where are they trying to take us? Are we there yet?

3. In the 50 laws and policies in Chapter 15, do any seem justifiable? Which do you see as most dangerous? Why?

4. Should states continue to have the option to withhold information on mental illness in background checks?

5. Define a "straw purchase." What steps could change the gun show and gun dealer culture to reduce gun violence?

6. How can the US church best respond to the appeal from the Presbyterian Church of Mexico? (p. 181)

7. Do you share Atwood's vision for *moving the mountain of gun violence*, listed at the end of p. 168? Why or why not?

Convener asks everyone for a word to describe where they are now with the issue of gun violence, closing with prayer. Homework: Read chapters 17, 18, 19. Find out how many gun shows and licensed gun dealers operate in your state.

6. Session 6 – The Spiritual Alarm Clock--Will We Wake Up? Chapters 17, 18, 19

1. Convener opens with prayer and asks everyone: What did you learn about gun shows and dealers in our state?

2. How have you or others in your community responded to local gun violence or national mass shootings?

3. Why are so many NRA members silent on their support for responsible gun laws and adequate law enforcement?

4. In stopping the Senate compromise on expanding background checks (April 2013), did the gun empire overreach?

5. What in Bob Ricker's story impresses you? Can you see yourself or anyone you know in his story? (p. 200-202)

6. Share anything in this group study experience that has changed your views on gun violence.

7. What are the risks if your church moved from words to action for responsible gun laws? Of not doing so?

8. Where, if at all, do you see God in the crisis of gun violence in America? Are there other issues to discuss?

9. Is this our last meeting or should we do something? Discuss possible next steps and make a plan.

Convener thanks all for participating, closes with open prayer and a benediction.

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Gun Violence Curriculum

A Five Session Study

This Curriculum was created by Rev. Margaret Leonard, with revisions in 2017 by the PPF Gun Violence Prevention Working Group. It gives an overview of the gun violence issue without the need for participants to read a book. There are several aspects of gun violence prevention not covered by this study, such as access to guns by children, gun accidents, guns and domestic violence and the economic motivation of the gun and ammunition industry. Look for future additions to the Curriculum.

Gun Death Story - For Sessions 1-4, the leader or another member of the group will tell a Gun Death Story to discover the name and personal story of a recent gun victim. The goal is to put a human face on their gun death statistic. To prepare each Gun Death Story, bring a news clipping about a recent local gun-related death and/or select a national story from the news site that lists daily gun violence across America, trying to pull out details about who this person was, their life and their relation to others.

See <http://www.newser.com/tag/22994/1/gun-violence.html>

Documentation - Documentation sources cited here on gun violence go back several years. In recent years, the National Rifle Association and its congressional allies have been successful at cutting off funding for research into the data and causes of gun violence, threatening agencies with even further funding cuts if they pursue this research. Into this vacuum of information, several new non-profit research groups are being launched by universities, hospitals and others. This new data will become available in the years ahead.



Session 1

Gun Violence 101 & The Citizen's Test

Goals & Objectives:

To explore the issue of gun violence in America, becoming more aware of it as a problem, and discerning how our faith community may be called to address it.

By the end of the session, participants will have:

- studied national gun violence statistics.
- named initial unease or concerns with the issue.
- identified how it has touched us individually or communally.

Setting	Adult Christian Education Forum, small group or committee meeting	
Materials	___ Candle ___ Match ___ A Gun Death Story ___ Computer w/internet connection	___ Citizen's Test on Gun Violence in America ___ Paper ___ Pen/Pencil ___ Bibles

Opening

- **Share a Gun Death Story and light a candle in memory of this person.**
- **Lead the group in this or your own prayer:**
Holy God, we come together today to learn more about our world and your presence in it. We ask that you be with the families and friends of (naming people about whom we have just read). We pray also for the perpetrators, broken people, just like ourselves. Please give us ears to hear and eyes to see your light in the midst of this pain and darkness. Amen.
- **Read Romans 12: 9-21.**

Presenting & Exploring

- **Watch video:**
 "Americans Remember the Loved Ones They've Lost to Gun Violence"
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIHQJlavfps>
- **Take the Citizen's Test.** Go over the answers together.

Lead the group in discussion, going around the room to answer the following questions.

—Note: allow a moment of silence after each question is asked so that all may have the opportunity to consider their answers. It is okay for the discussion to veer from these specific questions as the Spirit leads.—

- o What, if anything, makes you nervous about this topic?
- o Where do you think that nervousness comes from?
- o How has gun violence touched your life? Has it hit close to home? When was the first time you remember hearing about gun violence? Do you think that experience has shaped your view or perception of gun violence?
- o Do you think this is an appropriate topic for churches to discuss? Why or why not?

Closing

- **Reread** Romans 12: 9-21.
- **Invite the participants to reflect** on what they've learned and how they feel called to move forward in the coming week.
- **Name** a time to come back together for further discussion.

- **Close with prayer:**

God, may your life-giving Spirit move through us and inspire us. It is hard to hear about the suffering of our world. We know that you promise a better life, a better way of being together. Help us to find hope in the midst of such sadness and hear your call to action. Amen.



CITIZEN'S TEST ON GUN VIOLENCE IN AMERICA

(Revised, 10/2016)

1. The UCC, PC(USA), other faith communities, The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, The Brady Campaign, and gun violence prevention groups throughout the country are opposed to hunting, 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. The annual overall cost of firearms violence for the US economy is:
a. \$876 million b. \$28.5 billion c. \$50.4 billion d. \$229 billion
4. Today, 16 years after 9/11, it is now impossible for those on the FBI's "no fly list" to legally buy guns and explosives.
True _____ False _____
5. Each year, _____ persons are killed by guns in the US.
a. 10,000 b. 17,000 c. 50,000 d. 33,000
6. The most frequently used murder weapon is a:
a. handgun b. assault rifle c. shotgun d. knife
7. Americans in what part of the country own the most firearms?
a. South b. Midwest c. West d. Northeast
8. The highest homicide rates per 100,000 population are in the
a. South b. West c. Midwest d. Northeast
9. Americans are more likely to be murdered or assaulted by
a. a friend, acquaintance, or family member
b. a person with a criminal record.
c. a person of another race or religion
10. The Second Amendment guarantees *law-abiding American citizens* the right to own any type of firearm with no restrictions.
True _____ False _____
11. A gun kept in the home for self-defense is ___ times more likely to be used in a murder, accidental shooting, suicide attempt, or be stolen and used in a crime than to stop an intruder.
a. 5 b. 7 c. 11 d. 22
12. Recent polls indicate more than _____% of all gun owners and NRA members support background checks on all guns sold.
a. 10% b. 25% c. 50% d. 80%
13. The Consumer Product Safety Commission is prohibited by law from examining the safety of any gun or piece of ammunition.
True _____ False _____
14. A majority of gun owners do not lock up their firearms in the home.
True _____ False _____

15. 60% of crime guns come from what percentage of legal gun dealers?
a. 25% b. 10% c. 50% d. 5%
16. The NRA has consistently supported the work of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.
True _____ False _____
17. The United States is the Number 1 supplier of *illegal* guns to countries around the world.
True _____ False _____
18. Many persons who carry guns to town hall meetings, presidential speeches and other political events believe they have a constitutional right to take violent action against our government, should it become "tyrannical." (not defined)
True _____ False _____
19. Thirty three 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 _____
20. 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% _____

ANSWERS AND SOURCES FOR CITIZEN'S TEST

Updated October, 2016

1. False: These entities never express opposition to hunting, sports shooting, or gun ownership. Our mission is to keep dangerous weapons out of the hands of dangerous people. We do advocate for a ban on assault weapons and large magazine clips.
2. True. Center for Disease Control. National Vital Statistics Report and the U.S. Department of Defense. See also www.politifact.com; Mark Shields of PBS; and Congressional Research Services, *America War and Military*.
3. D. \$229 billion. Follman, Mark. "The True Cost of Gun Violence to America." *Mother Jones*. April 15, 2015. See also *Gun Violence: The Real Costs*, by Philip J. Cook and Jens Ludwig, Oxford Press, 2000. In 2000 the documented cost was \$100 billion.
4. False. Individuals on the FBI's Terrorist Watch List can legally buy firearms from licensed dealers, as long as they can pass the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) database. If they cannot pass, they can buy guns from private sellers in more than 40 states and at 5,000 gun shows throughout the country.
5. D. Each year, more than 33,000 people are killed by guns in the U.S. More than half the deaths are by suicide. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, WISQARS tool, <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html>
6. A. Handgun. FBI, 2008 Uniform Crime Report, Expanded Homicide Data Table 8, http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2008/offenses/expanded_information/data/shrtable_08.html Firearms: 67.8 %; Knives or other cutting instruments: 13.4%; Personal weapons (hands, fists, feet, etc.): 5.7%; Blunt objects (clubs, hammers, etc.): 3.9%; Other dangerous weapons: 9.2%
Read more at <http://www.snopes.com/politics/guns/baseballbats.asp#yfu69YHjlpULbRHM.99>
7. A. South—followed by the West. "Guns in America: Results of a Comprehensive National Survey on Firearms Ownership and Use," Philip J. Cook and Jens Ludwig, 1996, <https://www.policefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Cook-et-al.-1996-Guns-in-America.pdf>
8. South. The highest percentage of murder rates are in the South, with Louisiana as #1 in the country. FBI, 2013 Uniform Crime Reports, Crime in the United States by State, [https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s.-2013/tables/5tabledatadecpdf/table_5_crime_in_the_united_states_by_state_2013.xls](https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2013/crime-in-the-u.s.-2013/tables/5tabledatadecpdf/table_5_crime_in_the_united_states_by_state_2013.xls) The most dangerous state in the US is Louisiana; the most dangerous city for African Americans is Omaha, NE.
9. A. a friend, acquaintance or family member. . 2014 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>
10. False. The Supreme Court in 2008 interpreted the Second Amendment as an individual right, overturning 200 years of judicial history. 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>

11. C. 22 times. Lengthy studies indicate every time a gun in the home was used in a self-defense or legally justifiable shooting, there were four unintentional shootings, seven criminal assaults or homicides, and 11 attempted or completed suicides. Cited by Rowen, James. "Guns in Homes Pose Greater Risk to Families than Intruders, Data Shows." *Milwaukee Journal*. December 20, 2012.
12. D. 80% of NRA members and 87% of non NRA members regard these and other measures as complementary, not contradictory to their second amendment rights. "Gun Owners Poll" Frank Luntz-Republican Pollster, July, 2012.
13. True. CPSC can regulate teddy bears and toy guns, but not real firearms and ammunition. Consumer Products Safety Act, 1972.
14. False. A recent North Carolina study of gun owners indicated 43% did not use trigger locks or safely store weapons. (*ABC News*, May 1, 2015.) 40 % of gun owners keep their guns loaded and unlocked at all times. A 2005 study showed 73% of children under 10 living in homes with guns know the location of their parent's guns. A frequent result of unsecured weapons is suicide.
15. D. 5% of licensed dealers engage in gun trafficking, accept straw purchasers, hire nefarious personnel and lose thousands of guns every year out the back door.
16. False. For decades, the NRA drafts legislation to decrease the regulatory authority, budget, and manpower of the ATF. e.g. In 1972, ATF had 2,500 agents charged with inspecting 60,000 dealers. An inspection is likely every 8 years. Agents are still at 1972 levels for the entire nation while the NYCPD has 35,000 officers for the city.
17. True. "Setting the Record Straight: The UN and Small Arms," *New York*, June 26- July 7, 2006, and William Hartung and Rachel Stohl, "Hired Guns", *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2004. As guns and small arms are placed in the hands of vindictive militias and child soldiers, even if the country should side with us in "our global war on terror," the already high death rates of women and children in those regions escalate even further.
18. True. Increasing numbers of "insurrectionist" gun owners carry their guns as a show of force. The CEO of the NRA, Wayne LaPierre, declares, "The people have a right to take whatever measures are necessary, including force, to abolish oppressive government." At the 2009 Conservative Political Action Conference he added, "The guys with the guns make the rules."
19. True. Thirty three states support the Castle Doctrine. One is not obliged to retreat if one's home is attacked. Most states have expanded the law to assert a person has no duty to abandon a place where he has a right to be. These laws have given birth to a shoot-first-ask-questions-later mindset.
20. C. 18 %. An analysis, published in 2006 by the Rand Center on Quality Policing at the request of Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly, (NYC) found that in the years 1998-2006, the average hit ratio for officers involved in a shooting where the subject does not fire back was 30 percent. During a gunfight, where the target is shooting at officers, the study reported that the hit rate falls to just 18 percent. (Dahl, Julia. "Empire State Building Shooting Sparks Questions About NYPD Shot Accuracy". *August 29, 2012. CBS News. NYC*)

Special Thanks to James Atwood for creating The Citizen's Test.

Session 2

Guns in the USA Today & “Battleground America”

Goal & Objectives:

To understand the evolving relationship of the American public to guns today.

By the end of the session, participants will have:

- explored the historical and contemporary interpretations of the Second Amendment.
- considered implications of gun policy on our community.
- thought about how the role of guns has changed in our society.

Setting	Adult Christian Education Forum, small group or committee meeting
Materials	___ Candle ___ Match ___ Gun Death Story ___ copies of “Battleground America” summary* ___ Paper ___ Pen/Pencil *If possible, ask the participants to read the article before you meet. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/04/23/battleground-america

Opening

- **Share a Gun Death Story and light a candle in memory of this person.**
- *Lead the group in this or your own prayer:*
Holy God, we come together today to learn more about our world and your presence in it. We ask that you be with the families and friends of (naming people about whom we have just read). We pray also for the perpetrators, broken people, just like ourselves. Please give us ears to hear and eyes to see your light in the midst of this pain and darkness. Amen.
- **Read** Isaiah 58:1-12.

Presenting & Exploring

- **Introduce** the article “Battleground America,” asking who had a chance to read it, stating its author and where it was printed (Jill Lepore, printed in *The New Yorker* on April 23rd, 2012), and explaining that the following points for discussion are taken directly from it. (All points are direct or paraphrased quotes.)
- **Pass out** the summary of the article so each participant has a copy. Going around the room, ask for volunteers to read each point.

- **Discuss *The New Yorker* article, “Battleground America”** by answering the following questions as a group (a summary of the article is included should someone have forgotten to read it):

—Note: allow a moment of silence after each question is asked so that all may have the opportunity to consider their answers. It is okay for the discussion to veer from these specific questions as the Spirit leads.—

- o Did anything in this article surprise you?
- o How aware have you been of society’s shift in attitude regarding gun control?
- o Do you think anything was represented unfairly?
- o Does the article change your understanding of the issue? Why/why not?
- o Why do you think this issue is not discussed freely among friends, family, or in church?

Closing

- **Reread** Isaiah 58:1-12.
- **Invite the participants to reflect** on what they’ve learned and how they feel called to move forward in the coming week.
- **Name** a time to come back together for further discussion.
- *End the group in this or your own prayer:*
God, may your life-giving Spirit move through us and inspire us. It is hard to hear about the suffering of our world. We know that you promise a better life, a better way of being together. Help us to find hope in the midst of such sadness and hear your call to action. Amen.



A Short Summary of **BATTLEGROUND AMERICA** One Nation, Under the Gun

By Jill Lepore, *The New Yorker*, April 23, 2012

The Second Amendment

The Second Amendment: “A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.”

Demographics

- There are nearly 300 million privately owned firearms in the United States: 106 million handguns, 105 million rifles, and 83 million shotguns. That works out to about one gun for every American.”
- T.J. Lane, the teenager who killed his classmates at Chardon High, found the gun he used in his grandfather’s barn. It belonged to his uncle.
- The United States is the country with the highest rate of civilian gun ownership in the world. “The second highest is Yemen, where the rate is nevertheless only half that of the U.S.”
- Men are far more likely to own guns than women are, but the rate of gun ownership among men has fallen since 1980 while it has remained the same for women in the same stretch of time....Gun ownership is higher among whites than blacks, higher in the country than in the city, and higher among older people than among younger people.
- In many states, to purchase a gun from a licensed dealer you need a permit, which requires you to complete firearms-safety training. People who buy guns from private sellers at gun shows or through other private exchanges aren’t required to take a firearms-safety class. These exchanges fall under what is called the “gun-show loophole.”
- 40% of the guns bought in the United States are bought from private sellers, not licensed dealers.
 - Arms are military weapons. A firearm is a cannon that you can carry as opposed to artillery so big and heavy that you need wheels to move it, or people to help you...the firearms used by a well-regulated militia (at the time the Second Amendment was written) could be discharged only once before they had to be reloaded.
 - The Second Amendment was drafted by James Madison in order to assure the Anti-Federalists that the people would have the right to form a militia. The original version read: “The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed; a well armed and well regulated militia being the best security of a free country: but no person religiously scrupulous of bearing arms shall be compelled to render military service in person.”
 - None of this (the debate over the Second Amendment) had to do with hunting. People who owned and used long arms to hunt continued to own and use them...As Garry Wills once wrote, “One does not bear arms against a rabbit.”

America’s Evolving Relationship to Guns

- Firearms have been regulated in the United States from the early days. “Laws banning the carrying of concealed weapons were passed in Kentucky and Louisiana in 1813, and other states soon followed: Indiana (1820), Tennessee and Virginia (1838), Alabama (1839), and Ohio (1859). Similar laws were passed in Texas, Florida, and Oklahoma. As the governor of Texas explained in 1893, the ‘mission of the

concealed deadly weapon is murder. To check it is the duty of every self-respecting, law-abiding man.’ ”

- Although the laws were occasionally challenged, they were rarely struck down in state courts.
- The National Rifle Association was founded in 1871. For most of its history, the NRA was chiefly a sporting and hunting association.
- The first major federal gun control legislation pieces were the 1934 National Firearms Act and the 1938 Federal Firearms Act. Taken together, they created a licensing system for dealers and prohibitively taxed the private ownership of automatic weapons. The NRA supported both.
- In 1939, The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the 1934 act, unanimously agreeing with solicitor general Robert H. Jackson that the Second Amendment is “restricted to the keeping and bearing of arms by the people collectively for their common defense and security.”

The Modern Gun Debate

- Gun-rights arguments have their origins not in 18th century Anti-Federalism but in 20th century liberalism. They are the product of what the Harvard law professor Mark Tushnet has called the “rights revolution,” the pursuit of rights, especially civil rights, through the courts.
- In the 1970’s, the NRA began advancing the idea that the Second Amendment guarantees an individual’s right to carry a gun, rather than the people’s right to form armed militias to provide for the common defense.
- Fights over rights are effective at getting out the vote. Describing gun-safety legislation as an attack on a constitutional right gave conservatives a power at the polls that, at the time, the movement lacked.
- Ronald Reagan was the first Presidential candidate whom the NRA endorsed. His election made it possible for conservatives to begin turning a new interpretation of the Second Amendment into law.
- Orrin Hatch became the chair of the Subcommittee on the Constitution, and commissioned a history of the Second Amendment, which resulted in a 1982 report, “The Right to Keep and Bear Arms.” The authors of the report claimed to have discovered “clear—and long-lost—proof that the Second Amendment was intended as an individual right of the American citizen to keep and carry arms in a peaceful manner, for protection of himself, his family, and his freedoms.”
- In 1986, the Firearms Owners Protection Act was passed, repealing parts of the 1968 Gun Control Act (passed largely in response to the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr.) and giving new legal authority to the NRA’s interpretation of the Second Amendment, and a growing body of scholarship funded by the NRA.
- Chief Justice Warren Burger said that the new interpretation of the Second Amendment was “one of the greatest pieces of fraud, I repeat the word ‘fraud,’ on the American public by special-interest groups that I have ever seen in my lifetime.”
- Between 1968 and 2012, the idea that owning and carrying a gun is both a fundamental American freedom and an act of citizenship gained wide acceptance and, along with it, the principle that this right is absolute and cannot be compromised; gun-control legislation was diluted, defeated, overturned, or allowed to expire; the right to carry a concealed handgun became nearly ubiquitous.

For the entire article, see <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/04/23/battleground-america>

Session 3

Illegal Gun Sales

Goals & Objectives:

To explore the issue of illegal gun sales, specifically becoming familiar with the practice of “straw purchasing.”

By the end of the session, participants will have:

- learned how guns are illegally traded in the US.
- reflected on our relationship to the illegal gun market.

Setting	Adult Christian Education Forum, small group or committee meeting	
Materials	<input type="checkbox"/> Candle	<input type="checkbox"/> Copies of <i>Straw Purchasing</i> handout
	<input type="checkbox"/> Match	<input type="checkbox"/> Paper
	<input type="checkbox"/> Gun Death Story	<input type="checkbox"/> Pen/Pencil
	<input type="checkbox"/> Computer w/internet connection	<input type="checkbox"/> Bibles

Opening

- **Share a Gun Death Story and light a candle in memory of this person.**
- *Lead the group in this or your own prayer:*

Holy God, we come together today to learn more about our world and your presence in it. We ask that you be with the families and friends of (naming people about whom we have just read). We pray also for the perpetrators, broken people, just like ourselves. Please give us ears to hear and eyes to see your light in the midst of this pain and darkness. Amen.

- **Read** Matthew 26:36-52.

Presenting & Exploring

- **Ask the group:** Have you noticed violence in our community differently than you did before our discussion last week? How do you feel about the presence of guns in our communities?
- Watch one of these videos: Lost and Stolen-A Documentary
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xdw3Ttzrmw&feature=related>

•
OR

Think Again: Straw Purchasing
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKNVGxtU0-0>

Review the *Straw Purchasing* handout below

- **Lead the group in discussion**, going around the room to answer the following questions, allowing a moment of silence after each question is asked so that all may have the opportunity to consider their answers. It is okay for the discussion to veer from these specific questions as the Spirit leads.—
 - o Was there anything that surprised you in the video or handout?
 - o For what purposes are unregulated guns needed?
 - o For what purposes are guns needed to be bought in bulk?
 - o What is our relationship to gun violence in the community, and specifically the illegal sales of guns?

Closing

- **Reread** Matthew 26:36-52.
- **Invite the participants to reflect** on what they've learned and how they feel called to move forward in the coming week.
- **Name** a time to come back together for further discussion.
- *End the group in this or your own prayer:*
God, may your life-giving Spirit move through us and inspire us. It is hard to hear about the suffering of our world. We know that you promise a better life, a better way of being together. Help us to find hope in the midst of such sadness and hear your call to action. Amen.

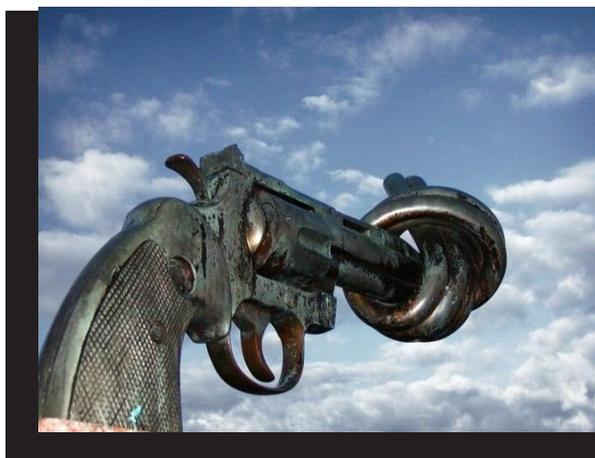


Straw Purchasing Handout

The International Association of Chiefs of Police has called for US legislation that would help stop illegal gun trafficking, which is accomplished in part through straw purchases.

What is “straw purchasing?”

A straw purchase is an illegal firearm purchase where the actual buyer of the gun, being unable to pass the required federal background check or desiring to not have his or her name associated with the transaction, uses a proxy buyer who can pass the required background check to purchase the firearm for him/her.



Courtesy of Francois Polito

The straw purchasing cycle is the most common way that guns are trafficked and sold to individuals who are restricted from owning them. According to a 2000 report, “nearly 50 percent of ATF (Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) investigations involved firearms being trafficked by straw purchasers either directly or indirectly.”¹

So what’s the big deal?²

“Virtually every crime gun in the United States starts off as a legal firearm,” according to then-Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) director Bradley Buckles in 2000.³

In a 1997 report, the ATF looked at how guns then “pass through the legitimate distribution system of federally licensed firearms dealers” before ending up in the hands of criminals. The ATF concluded, in part, that, “there is a large problem of diversion to the illegal market from licensed gun establishments.”⁴

When a gun is recovered in a crime, the ATF can use the serial number on the gun to trace back to where it first left the legal market - tracing from the first sale of the firearm by an importer or manufacturer, to the wholesaler or retailer, to the first retail purchaser. In some cases, that first retail purchaser is the link between the legal and illegal markets.⁵

Looking at trace information from 1998, the ATF found that “a small group of dealers accounts for a disproportionately large number of crime gun traces.”⁶

More than 85 percent of dealers in the U.S. had no crime guns traced to them at all in 1998, while about 1 percent of licensed firearm dealers accounted for 57 percent of traces that same year.⁷ The ATF also concluded that “sales volume alone cannot be said to account for the disproportionately large number of traces associated with those dealers.”⁸

Guns get from dealers to criminals in part through trafficking. “ATF’s trafficking investigations show that trafficked firearms are diverted to prohibited persons and are subsequently used in serious crimes,” according to an ATF report.⁹

In trafficking investigations between 1996 and 1998, 25 percent involved guns used in an assault and 17 percent involved guns used in homicides.¹⁰ Nearly 5 million Americans were victims of violent crimes committed with firearms between 1993 and 2005.¹¹

The ATF examined gun-trafficking investigations from July 1996 to December 1998 and found that 46 percent of trafficking investigations during this period involved straw purchasers.¹² This was nearly double the percentage of the next closest source. (Gun: Enforcing Federal Law Against Firearms Traffickers. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2000).

Our Security is Connected

Advocates for gun violence prevention actions should acknowledge regional differences in gun usage and gun violence prevalence. Many guns used on the streets of cities were originally purchased in rural areas. Similarly, illegally sold guns frequently flow across state lines as well. Gun sales in one area can affect gun violence in others. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.” Even if we do not see this activity, we must stand with those in our community who suffer.

Footnotes:

1 Department of Justice Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. *Following the Gun: Enforcing Federal Laws against Firearms Traffickers*, June 2000.

2 The information in this section comes directly from Mayors Against Illegal Guns report, “Inside Straw Purchasing: How Criminals Get Guns Illegally,” April 2008.

3 Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives. *Following the Gun: Enforcing Federal Law Against Firearms Traffickers*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2000

4 Department of Justice Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. *A Progress Report: Gun Dealer Licensing and Illegal Gun Trafficking* (1997).

5 Department of Treasury Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. *ATF Snapshot 2007*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2007.

6 Department of Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. *ATF Regulatory Actions: Report to the Secretary on Firearms Initiatives*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2000.

7 Department of Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. *Commerce in Firearms in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2000.

8 Department of Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. *ATF Regulatory Actions: Report to the Secretary on Firearms Initiatives*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2000.

9 Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives. *Following the Gun: Enforcing Federal Law Against Firearms Traffickers*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2000.

10 Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives. *Following the Gun: Enforcing Federal Law Against Firearms Traffickers*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2000. (Percentages do not total to 100 because some investigations involved guns used in multiple types of crimes)

11 Department of Justice. “Nonfatal Firearm-related Violent Crimes, 1993-2005.” DOJ. <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/glance/tables/firearmnonfataltab.htm> Department of Justice. “Homicide trends in the U.S.” DOJ.

12 Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives. *Following the Gun: Enforcing Federal Law Against Firearms Traffickers*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2000. This was the only comprehensive study of its kind.

STRAW PURCHASING—the short version

STEP 1:

Illegal arms dealer seeks out someone with a clean record to make firearms purchase in their stead. This buyer is called the “straw purchaser.”

STEP 2:

Illegal arms dealer provides the straw purchaser with money, both to pay for the firearms and their services.

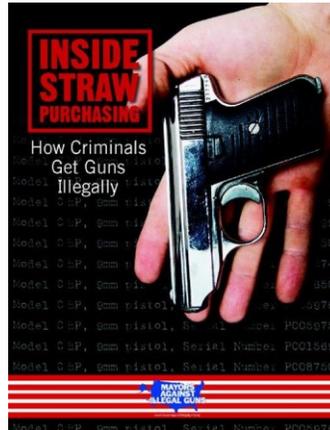
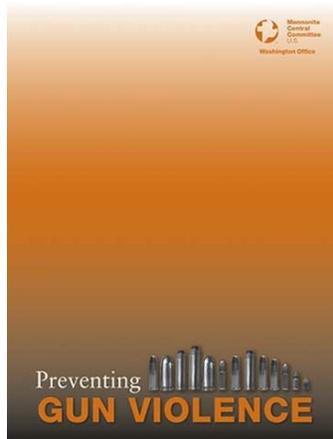
STEP 3:

The illegal arms dealer sells the guns to individuals who would not otherwise be able to buy weapons legally.

STEP 4:

When guns used in a crime are traced back to a straw purchaser, they claim the guns were lost or stolen. In some states, this gets them off the hook and they are able to continue supplying guns to the underground market.

More Resources for Further Study:



Preventing Gun Violence, Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office

<https://mcc.org/media/resources/609>

Inside Straw Purchasing, Mayors Against Illegal Guns

<https://everytownresearch.org/reports/inside-straw-purchasing-criminals-get-guns-illegally/>

Session 4

Guns and Suicide

Goals & Objectives:

To explore the issue of suicide, especially the relationship between guns and suicide.

By the end of the session, participants will have:

- learned about suicide demographics, influences, and prevention techniques.
- discussed the taboo topic from a faith and pastoral perspective.
- reviewed suggestions for limiting access to lethal means of suicide.

Setting	Adult Christian Education Forum, small group or committee meeting								
Materials	<table> <tr> <td>___ Candle</td> <td>___ Copies of the suicide handouts</td> </tr> <tr> <td>___ Match</td> <td>___ Pen/Pencil</td> </tr> <tr> <td>___ Gun Death Story</td> <td>___ Bibles</td> </tr> <tr> <td>___ Computer w/internet connection</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	___ Candle	___ Copies of the suicide handouts	___ Match	___ Pen/Pencil	___ Gun Death Story	___ Bibles	___ Computer w/internet connection	
___ Candle	___ Copies of the suicide handouts								
___ Match	___ Pen/Pencil								
___ Gun Death Story	___ Bibles								
___ Computer w/internet connection									

Opening

- **Share a Gun Death Story and light a candle in memory of this person.**
- Lead the group in this or your own prayer:
Holy God, we come together today to learn more about our world and your presence in it. We ask that you be with the families and friends of (naming people about whom we have just read). We pray also for the perpetrators, broken people, just like ourselves. Please give us ears to hear and eyes to see your light in the midst of this pain and darkness. Amen.
- **Read** Romans 14: 7-9.

Presenting & Exploring

- Watch the video:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUzzyyG0H08>
- **Review** the National Suicide Statistics handout and the article on “Limiting Access to Lethal Means” from the Brady Campaign.
- **Lead the group in discussion**, going around the room to answer the following questions. Allow a moment of silence after each question so that all may have the opportunity to consider their answers. It is okay for the discussion to veer from these specific questions as the Spirit leads.
 - Did you ever think that you would talk about the issue of suicide in church? Why or why not?

- Was there anything that surprised you in the video or the readings?
- Have you had any personal connections to this topic?
- What emotions are stirred up for you when talking about the issue of suicide?
- How do you think theologically about this issue?
- What does good care look like for the friends and family of someone who committed suicide?
- Often suicides are committed with a gun that still has its price tag, just purchased. With half of all suicides committed with a gun, suicide prevention could be the greatest result of universal background checks, waiting or “cooling off” periods and closing the gun show loophole. How does this impact your thinking about gun regulations?

Closing

- **Reread** Romans 14: 7-9.
- **Invite the participants to reflect** on what they’ve learned and how they feel called to move forward in the coming week.
- **Name** a time to come back together for further discussion.
- *End the group in this or your own prayer:
God, may your life-giving Spirit move through us and inspire us. It is hard to hear about the suffering of our world. We know that you promise a better life, a better way of being together. Help us to find hope in the midst of such sadness and hear your call to action. Amen.*



National Suicide Statistics

Figures from the National Center for Health Statistics.

- Over 36,000 people in the United States die by suicide every year.
- Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death for adults between the ages of 18 and 65 years in the United States.
- Currently, suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States.
- A person dies by suicide about every 15 minutes in the United States.
- Every day, approximately 101 Americans take their own life.
- Ninety percent of all people who die by suicide have a diagnosable psychiatric disorder at the time of their death.
- There are four male suicides for every female suicide, but three times as many females as males attempt suicide.
- There are an estimated 8-25 attempted suicides for every suicide death.

Firearms and Suicide

While murders, accidents and mass murders are visible through the news, suicide is often not reported. According to the Brady Campaign, there are 20,000 gun suicides in the U.S. every year, more than 50 every single day. That's more than half of all suicides. *It's also two-thirds of all gun deaths.* Preventing gun suicide is probably the area where reasonable gun regulations can make the most difference.

Research shows that a gun in the home makes a suicide three times more likely than for homes without guns. There are a few reasons why the presence of a gun in the home is a risk factor for suicide. First is the surprising impulsivity of many suicide attempts. Guns are also so much more lethal than other methods. Most people who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide. But because guns are so effective, only one in 10 people who attempt suicide by gun get that second chance.

Limiting easy access to a gun for someone who considers or even attempts suicide can literally be the difference between life and death. And, in addition to the loss of life, suicide deaths impact the future of families, especially children.

- There are 20,000 gun suicides in the U.S. every year, more than 50 every single day.
- Although most gun owners reportedly keep a firearm in their home for "protection" or "self-defense," 83 percent of gun-related deaths in these homes are the result of a suicide, often by someone other than the gun owner.
- Firearms are used in more suicides than homicides.
- Death by firearms is the fastest growing method of suicide.
- Firearms account for over 50 percent of all suicides.
- Only some states require a waiting period between purchase and acquisition of a firearm, but making it a federal requirement would decrease gun suicides nationwide, as well as the ability to cross state lines to obtain a gun in suicide crisis. Defeating mandatory waiting periods is a key legislative goal of the National Rifle Association.

Youth

- Suicide is the sixth leading cause of death among those 5-14 years old.
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among those 15-24 years old.
- Between the mid-1950s and the late 1970s, the suicide rate among U.S. males aged 15-24 more than tripled (from 6.3 per 100,000 in 1955 to 21.3 in 1977). Among females aged 15-24, the rate more than doubled during this period (from 2.0 to 5.2). The youth suicide rate generally leveled off during the 1980s and early 1990s, and since the mid-1990s has been steadily decreasing.
- Between 1980-1996, the suicide rate for African-American males aged 15-19 has doubled.
- Risk factors for suicide among the young include suicidal thoughts, psychiatric disorders (such as depression, impulsive aggressive behavior, bipolar disorder, certain anxiety disorders), drug and/or alcohol abuse and previous suicide attempts, with the risk increased if there is situational stress and access to firearms.

Older Adults

- The suicide rates for men rise with age, most significantly after age 65.
- The rate of suicide in men 65+ is seven times that of females who are 65+.
- The suicide rates for women peak between the ages of 45-54 years old, and again after age 75.
- About 60 percent of elderly patients who take their own lives see their primary care physician within a few months of their death.
- Six to nine percent of older Americans who are in primary care settings suffer from major depression.
- More than 30 percent of patients suffering from major depression report suicidal ideation.
- Risk factors for suicide among the elderly include: a previous attempt, the presence of a mental illness, the presence of a physical illness, social isolation (some studies have shown this is especially so in older males who are recently widowed) and access to means, such as the availability of firearms in the home.

Depression

- Over 60 percent of all people who die by suicide suffer from major depression. If one includes alcoholics who are depressed, this figure rises to over 75 percent.
- Depression affects nearly 10 percent of Americans ages 18 and over in a given year, or more than 24 million people.
- More Americans suffer from depression than coronary heart disease (17 million), cancer (12 million) and HIV/AIDS (1 million).
- About 15 percent of the population will suffer from clinical depression at some time during their lifetime. Thirty percent of all clinically depressed patients attempt suicide; half of them ultimately die by suicide.
- Depression is among the most treatable of psychiatric illnesses. Between 80 percent and 90 percent of people with depression respond positively to treatment, and almost all patients gain some relief from their symptoms. But first, depression has to be recognized.

Alcohol and Suicide

- Ninety-six percent of alcoholics who die by suicide continue their substance abuse up to the end of their lives.

- Alcoholism is a factor in about 30 percent of all completed suicides.
- Approximately 7 percent of those with alcohol dependence will die by suicide.

Medical Illness and Suicide

- Patients who desire an early death during a serious or terminal illness are usually suffering from a treatable depressive condition.
- People with AIDS have a suicide risk up to 20 times that of the general population.
- Studies indicate that the best way to prevent suicide is through the early recognition and treatment of depression and other psychiatric illnesses.

Limiting Access to Lethal Means --from The Brady Campaign

For Footnote Citations and the Complete Article, see “The Truth about Suicide and Guns,”
The Brady Campaign <http://www.bradiycampaign.org/the-truth-about-suicide-guns>

...The research presented thus far convincingly demonstrates that ready availability of a firearm increases the likelihood of suicide.^{66,67,68} Given this stark connection, making firearms less available would seem to be a logical strategy for prevention. Since many suicides are impulsive, separating someone from the means to self-harm takes away their ability to act on what otherwise might have been a fleeting impulse.^{69,70,71,72} Suicidal crises are often triggered by an immediate stressor, such as the loss of a job or the breakup of a relationship.^{73,74,75} However, the urge to act is fairly short-lived, typically lasting a few minutes to a few hours.⁷⁶ That’s why delaying access to a gun is critical; it allows time for the suicidal impulse to pass without being realized.

However, the urge to act is fairly short-lived, typically lasting a few minutes to a few hours. That’s why delaying access to a gun is critical; it allows time for the suicidal impulse to pass without being realized.

Intervention during this time of acute risk is key to saving lives. Most people who attempt suicide don’t really want to die, they are just so overwhelmed by their emotions they feel unable to cope.⁷⁷ Indeed, the vast majority of people who make it through a suicidal crisis do not go on to die by suicide. A systematic review of 70 studies following patients after a non-fatal attempt found that, on average, only 7 percent (range: 5 to 11 percent) eventually died by suicide, whereas 70 percent did not attempt again.⁷⁸

“ 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



A common misconception is that people who want to die will find a way to kill themselves, with or without a gun. However, studies suggest that the risk of method substitution is low. If a person's preferred suicide method is unavailable, it is unlikely they will switch to a different one.⁷⁹ Even if another method is used it is likely to be less lethal, thus increasing the odds of survival.⁸⁰

Reducing access to the methods people use to kill themselves can save lives. Research shows that making lethal suicide means less available or less deadly, leads to decreases in suicide rates by that method and, in some cases, lowers overall suicide rates as well.^{81,82}

Studies have documented substantial decreases in method-specific suicide rates following firearm regulation, detoxification of domestic gas, construction of barriers at jumping sites, mandatory use of catalytic converters in vehicles, modifications in drug packaging and toxicity, and restrictions on pesticides.⁸³ In fact, suicide rates have been shown to decrease by as much as 30 to 50 percent. Means reduction is more likely to impact overall suicide rates if the method is highly lethal and makes up a substantial portion of suicide deaths.⁸⁴

One of the earliest examples comes from the detoxification of domestic gas in England and Wales in the 1960s and early 1970s. Researchers found that reductions in the carbon monoxide content of domestic gas were followed by dramatic decreases in suicides by that method, while overall suicide rates decreased by approximately one-third.^{85,86}

In a systematic review of suicide interventions, an international panel of experts found that means reduction was one of only two approaches with proven effectiveness.⁸⁷ In the United States, the potential impact of means reduction is greatest for strategies involving firearms, which are the leading cause of suicide death.⁸⁸ Means reduction encompasses a broad range of interventions that can occur on a population or on an individual level. Population-based approaches include policies designed to regulate the distribution and safe storage of firearms. At the individual-level, means reduction is targeted at specific groups or individuals. Strategies can include health education and promotion in the form of mass media campaigns and individual counseling by healthcare providers.

Research has shown that reducing firearm availability can lead to reductions in firearm suicide rates.^{89,90,91,92} In one study, researchers measured the impact of changes in household firearm ownership on suicide rates in the United States between 1981 and 2002. They found that each 10 percent reduction in firearm prevalence was associated with significant declines in rates of firearm suicide (4.2 percent) and overall suicide (2.5 percent). The effect was even greater among children ages 0 to 19.⁹³ A more recent study of suicide on college and university campuses between 2004 and 2009 revealed substantially lower suicide rates for students compared to all 20- to 24-year-olds. These differences were attributed to the nine-fold decrease in firearm availability on campuses versus homes.⁹⁴

Much of the available research on means reduction initiatives targeting firearms has focused on legislation. In 1976, legislation was passed regulating the purchase, sale, and possession of handguns in Washington, DC. Adoption of the law was associated with a prompt 23 percent decline in firearm suicide rates, with no corresponding changes in rates of non-firearm suicide. Moreover, no declines were seen in adjacent areas of Maryland or Virginia, where legislation had not been passed.⁹⁵ A decrease in suicide rates among persons 55 and older was seen following passage of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act, which required purchasers to undergo a background check and, for a few years, specified a five-day waiting period for firearm purchases.⁹⁶

In a recently published study, researchers found lower rates of suicide by firearm, as well as lower overall suicide rates, in states with restrictive firearm laws (e.g., background checks on all gun sales, mandatory waiting periods, safe storage requirements) compared to those with few restrictions. Although this study yielded some preliminary findings, the analysis may be flawed because it only partially accounted for potential

compounders.⁹⁷

Limiting access to firearms has been shown to reduce suicide rates in many countries outside the U.S., including Australia,⁹⁸ Canada,⁹⁹ Israel,¹⁰⁰ and New Zealand.¹⁰¹ A study of the Israeli Defense Forces found that a change in policy, requiring firearms to be stored on base while soldiers took their weekend leave, resulted in a 40 percent decrease in suicide. Much of this decrease could be attributed to the policy change since the weekday suicide rate did not change significantly.¹⁰² Following a 1996 firearm massacre in which 35 people were killed, additional regulations were passed that made gun laws stronger and more uniform across Australia. The reforms included a ban on semi-automatic and pump-action rifles and shotguns, a national gun buyback program, registration of all guns, and background checks on all gun sales. Researchers found that the new gun laws accelerated the rate of decline for suicide by firearm, doubling it from 3 percent to 7.4 percent per year.¹⁰³

Suicide is a complicated issue that requires a comprehensive approach. Most suicide prevention efforts focus on identifying those at risk and treating the underlying issues that lead to suicidal thoughts and behavior. However, the enormity of the problem and the complex interplay between risk factors make it difficult to predict who will actually attempt suicide and when. That's why it is so important that suicide prevention efforts focus not only on why people take their own lives, but the ways in which they attempt suicide as well.

Session 5

Action: What Does the Lord Require of Us?

Goals & Objectives:

To explore options for action as a church community.

By the end of the session, participants will have:

- learned about several action proposals with Presbyterian roots.
- evaluated which action/s, if any, seems best for your context.
- discussed a plan for next steps, schedule and responsibility for follow up.

Setting	Adult Christian Education Forum, small group or committee meeting	
Materials	___ Candle	___ copies Toolkit "Take Action!" section 3
	___ Match	___ Pen/Pencil
	___ Copies of the GA 2014 Action	___ Bibles
	___ (read beforehand)	

Opening

- **Light a candle** to represent the presence of Christ in the room with you
- Lead the group in this or your own prayer:
Holy God, we come together today to look to you in helping us respond to what we have learned about gun violence. We ask you to be with us as we seek a first step and we thank you for one another as a community living in your name. Please give us ears to hear and eyes to see your light pointing our way. Amen.
- **Read John 21: 15-19.**

Presenting & Exploring

- **Review** the action ideas offered by the General Assembly in 2014 in *On Gun Violence Prevention* and the PPF toolkit **Section 3, Take Action!**
- **Lead the group in discussion**, giving everyone a chance to participate. It is okay for the discussion to veer from these specific questions as the Spirit leads.
- Can someone summarize the No Guns in God’s House Sign Project? What would be pros and cons of proposing this idea in your church? What steps would be needed?
- Can someone summarize the Offering of Letters Worship Service Project? What would be pros and cons of proposing this idea in your church? What steps would be needed?
- Also review the Case Studies for Oak Park, Stony Point Presbyterian Churches and Elizabeth Presbytery. Do these examples give you any ideas?

- What other ideas for action have occurred to you? Do/could your particular elected officials play key roles?
- Discern if one idea seems to rise above other ideas for helping your church or community act to prevent gun violence. What initial steps are needed? By whom?
- Do you need to meet again? When? If you plan to meet again, try to discover who, if anyone, in your community is already working on this? What are they doing? Who might join in your effort? Review the contacts for national and local groups before you meet again.

Closing Invite each participant to lift up in a prayer of gratitude for what they most appreciated in this study experience. Close by singing *The Doxology*.



Thank you for using this “Gun Violence Prevention Curriculum.” Please contact the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship if you need consultation on education or action or if you have resources and projects to share.
 Contact: info@presbypeacefellowship.org or call 845-786-6743

On Gun Violence Prevention

As Adopted by the 221st General Assembly (2014) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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, which can be downloaded from a website such as the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, etc.; **[See sign samples in this Toolkit, Action Resources, and on the back cover]**

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, which can be downloaded from a website such as Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, etc.; **[See sign samples in this Toolkit, p. 52 and on the back cover]**

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.

(2014 General Assembly Vote: 484 affirming, 87 opposed, or 85% approval) Action was item 09-07 and can be found here: <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/4627>

Rationale [for the GA Action Above]

This rationale reaffirms the two basic arguments for church involvement in the matter of gun violence: the scale of this ongoing tragedy and the biblical and theological bases for engagement by Presbyterians.

The Scale of the Ongoing Tragedy The scale of gun violence in the United States includes, annually, the deaths of at least 3,000 children (often underreported) and 25,000 adults (with suicides underreported), with more than 100,000 wounded, often seriously. Beyond the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s booklet, *Gun Violence; Gospel Values*¹, extensive data and detailed policy considerations can be found in the recent book, *Reducing Gun Violence in America*².

Biblical Basis Christian opposition to gun violence begins with Jesus' teaching and example: that we should love our neighbors, love our enemies; that all who take the sword will perish by the sword; that peacemakers are blessed and will be called children of God. These (and other) statements are echoed in the New Testament letters: that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit; that we should be holy in all our conduct; that we should love righteousness and hate wickedness; and leave vengeance to the Lord. Further, the prophetic tradition identifies the need for broader social change: that we should turn our swords (guns) into plowshares and our spears (rocket launchers) into pruning hooks and learn war no more. Overall, through the Spirit, we hear the blood of those senselessly slain crying out from the ground for us to act and not be weary. The first letter of John challenges us not to love in word or speech but in deed and in truth. We must struggle with how to

implement the vision, a challenge that was taken up by John Calvin as well. At the very core of his theology was an understanding that the intentions of God should be implemented on earth.

Theological Basis The theological position that guns are idols in our society is put forward most directly by former PC(USA) missionary, Jim Atwood, a hunter and gun owner himself, in *America and Its Guns: A Theological Expose*.³ Atwood and others seek to explain why it has been so difficult to pass responsible legislation, despite public opinion polls showing large majorities in favor. This theological explanation does not claim that all gun owners are idolatrous, but that economic and ideological (and politically polarized) explanations are not enough, and that gun violence must be put under the sovereignty of the Lord of life. It is not necessary, of course, to subscribe to any particular theological account to seek to reduce gun violence in the U.S. and in the world.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been concerned about the frightening gun violence phenomenon, and has consistently spoken out about it for three decades, as have our sisters and brothers in virtually every other faith tradition. This overture expands upon the existing policy of the General Assembly by providing specific ways for individuals and congregations to have a voice and take action in confronting the gun violence crisis. As stated in the last paragraph of *Gun Violence, Gospel Values*, “The Call to Action” (pp 19–20; see also Minutes, 2010, Part I, p. 842, electronic version),

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, as well as the legislation necessary to regulate the accessibility and sale of military weapons disguised as “sporting guns.” 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.

So far, our denomination’s efforts to affect change have been largely focused outside the church walls on advocacy efforts toward gun-shop owners and legislative change. Sadly, in 2013, we have seen how unwilling our legislators are to carry out the will of the American public regarding background checks and other laws that would restrict the ownership of assault weapons and ammunition. We believe that we need to provide a stronger witness in the world by living out our commitment to nonviolence within our buildings and equipping our members with resources to effect change in their local communities.

Recent expanded provisions 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 our churches, at the grassroots level, stand firm against the deception that more guns in more places makes us somehow safer and more secure. Gun manufacturers and guns rights advocates routinely claim that more guns in the hands of “good guys” will make the world safer. However, statistics actually show that where there are more guns, there is more violence.⁴ It is time for the faith community to have its say.

Gun violence can be a difficult subject to talk about in any context, but it finds particular resistance within the walls of the church, where many people believe “political” issues should not be discussed. (Jim Atwood’s *America and Its Guns: A Theological Expose*, Chapter 2, “Closing the Door on Discussion,” discusses the particular difficulty of talking about gun violence as a spiritual rather than political issue.) As a result, very little meaningful discussion is happening in the church or elsewhere. We are hopeful that this overture will boldly stimulate healthy and helpful conversation, as well as create “constructive, nonviolent tension” as encouraged by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail:

You may well ask: “Why direct action? Isn’t negotiation a better path?” You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the

word “tension.” I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth.

(http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html)

In recent months an advocacy group called “Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America” started an on-line campaign asking Starbucks to prohibit guns in their stores. It only took a short time for the company to change its policy. This demonstrates the power of average citizens to claim their right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Encouraging individual Presbyterians to build safer and more secure communities by advocating for similar gun-free zone policies in their workplaces, schools, neighborhood businesses, and gathering places, allows them to bear witness to the gospel value of peacemaking with concrete action.

Similarly, in *A Social Creed for the 21st Century*, the 218th General Assembly (2008) approved the following, which also shows a strong commitment to working together for peace in our country:

We—individual Christians and churches—commit ourselves to a culture of peace and freedom that embraces nonviolence, nurtures character, treasures the environment, and builds community, rooted in a spirituality of inner growth with outward action. We make this commitment together—as members of Christ’s body, led by the one Spirit — trusting in the God who makes all things new.

(Minutes, 2008, Part I, p. 925)

Endnotes

1. <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/gun-violence-gospel-values-mobilizing-response-god/>
2. <http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9781421411118>, edited by researchers at the Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health.
3. For a review and purchase information, see <http://justiceunbound.org/action-alerts/action-news/america-held-hostageby-gun-violence/>
4. See <https://www.policefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Cook-et-al.-1996-Guns-in-America.pdf> and the FBI’s 2008 Uniform Crime Reports, Crime in the United States by State, Table 5, https://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2008/data/table_05.html

Section 2 Pastoral Resources

Film & Publications

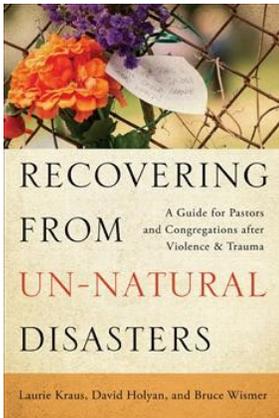
Tapestry: Reweaving the Fabric of Community After Public Violence

The *Tapestry* film looks at the effects of public violence events in congregations and the communities of which they are a part. It is framed through the lens of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance National Response Team members who have responded to public violence events and support those communities of faith and their leaders as they walk through the valley of the shadow of trauma and its aftermath and begin the process of healing. 21 minutes.

Tapestry is available for free on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/104723148>

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

For additional resources and downloads: <http://pda.pcusa.org/situation/hcd/>



Recovering From Un-Natural Disasters: A Guide for Pastors and Congregations After Violence & Trauma

By Laurie Kraus, David Holyan & Bruce Wismer

Recovering from Un-Natural Disasters is a must-read 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.

Unlike natural disasters, un-natural disasters deal with the concept of sin and require a different recovery strategy. In this book, 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. To purchase the book:

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



Scripture Passages for Addressing Gun Violence

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** - Thinking is important The Great commandment
- **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 Lamb who was slain
- **Revelation 11:15** - Kingdoms of world become kingdoms of Christ
- **Revelation 19:6** - God's certain victory over evil

These texts certainly do not exhaust the Biblical witness against humanity's bent to call evil good and good evil. The Bible presents God's recurring 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.

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--the well-being of all people in human society.

HYMNS Relating to Gun Violence

From *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (1990)

O God of Earth and Altar p. 291
 Lord, Make Us Servants of Your Peace p. 374
 Song of Hope p. 432
 O Day of Peace p. 450

From *Glory to God* (2013)

Come Great God of all the Ages p. 309
 How Clear is Our Vocation, Lord p. 432
 God of Compassion, in Mercy Befriend Us p. 436
 I've Got Peace Like a River p. 623
 We Wait the Peaceful Kingdom p. 378
Dona Nobis Pacem p. 752
 Make Me a Channel of Your Peace p. 753

Special thanks to hymn writer and Presbyterian Peace Fellowship member Carolyn Winfrey Gillette who gives permission to use these hymns in worship and by ecumenical groups committed to ending gun violence:

[I Cried to God](#)

[God of Mercy, You Have Shown Us](#)

[God, We Have Heard It](#)

[O Christ, You Did No Violence](#)

[They Met to Read the Bible](#)

[When People Die by Hatred](#)

See http://www.carolynshymns.com/topical_index.html

God, We Have Heard It:

HERZLIEBSTER JESU: Johann Crueger,
 1640 (Ah, Holy Jesus)
 Hymn text by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette
 All rights reserved.

God, we have heard it, sounding in the silence:
 News of the children lost to this world's violence.
 Children of promise! Then without a warning,
 Loved ones are mourning.

Jesus, you came to bear our human sorrow;
 You came to give us hope for each tomorrow.
 You are our life, Lord God's own love revealing.
 We need your healing!

Heal us from giving weapons any glory;
 Help us, O Prince of Peace, to hear your story;
 Help us resist the evil all around here;
 May love abound here!

By your own Spirit, give your church a clear voice;
 In this world's violence, help us make a new choice.
 Help us to witness to the joy your peace brings,
 Until your world sings!



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

Worship Resources

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

July 26, 2012 ✕ 8:00 PM

Stony Point Presbyterian Church

We grieve with you, Aurora, Colorado.

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 be 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 ploughshares,
and our spears into pruning hooks.**

Leader: We gather today in remembrance of all those killed or harmed by gun violence in Colorado, Alabama and New York just this week.

**People: We mourn the loss of 30,000 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 ploughshares,
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,
who from of old has helped us in our distress.

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 Aurora.

Sign letters to our legislators.

Join us as we mobilize in response to God's call.



* The prayer flags were pieces of fabric (5 x 7) in different colors. Participants used permanent markers to send a short symbol or prayer. The flags were sent 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.

A Litany on the Tragedy of Gun Violence

Written for Martin Luther King Day by Rev. Mark Koenig for the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program

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 non-violence,

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 30,000 Americans die by guns each year in the United States.

Many: And we grieve.

One: An average of ninety people is killed by guns every day, including ten children.

Many: And our hearts break.

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

Many: And we mourn.

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

Many: And we weep.

One: The annual economic cost of gun violence in America is estimated to be at least \$100 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 Americans have died by gun fire within our own country than American 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 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 so do.

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.

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

Between 25 and 50 percent of people who kill themselves had previously attempted suicide. 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

- Fifty to 75 percent of all suicides give some warning of their intentions to a friend or family member.
- Imminent signs must be taken seriously.

Be Willing to Listen

- Start by telling the person you are concerned and give him/her examples.
- If he/she is depressed, don't be afraid to ask whether he/she is considering suicide, or if he/ she has 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 he/she is not alone, that suicidal feelings are temporary and that depression can be treated. Avoid the temptation to say, "You have so much to live for," or "Your suicide will hurt your family."

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 at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

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.

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 his or her own way. Some people visit the cemetery weekly; others find it too painful to go at all.
- Each person also grieves at his or her 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.”

Excerpted 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, affirm the grieving process and/or communicate appreciation for their life
- 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 someone sit with them while they cry. People grieve differently and they may grieve differently than you. In the aftermath of gun violence grief, some may want to join in a gun violence prevention group and some may not.
- 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

Excellent Resource from the PC(USA):

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

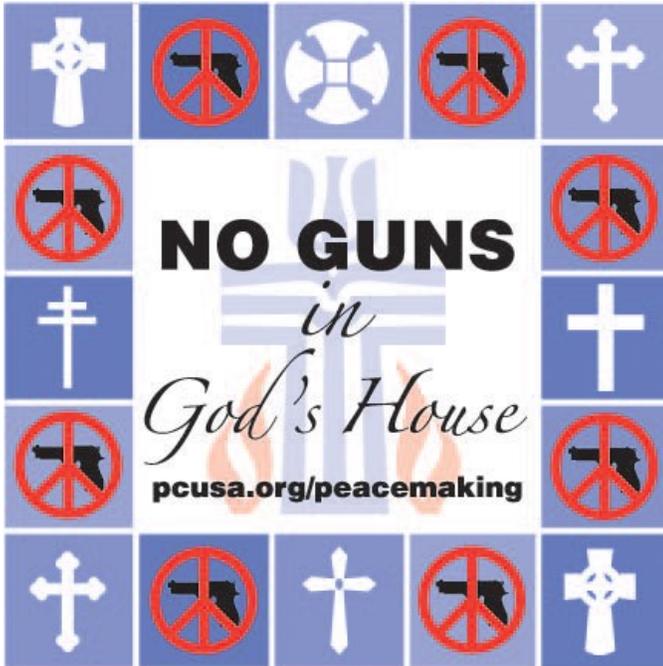
Download at <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/seeking-be-faithful-guidelines-presbyterians-times/>

Section 3: Take Action!

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

Actual Size 6 x 6" or 6 x 6.75" to Include Local Info

Actual Size 4 x 4" Decal



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

Other Sample Options: <http://www.officesupply.com> Product # USS6096

<http://www.mydoorsign.com/no-guns-knives-weapons-allowed>

**“No Guns in God’s House” Sign Project
PC(USA) General Assembly Proposal to Congregations, 2014**

Gun Violence causes an average of over 33,000 deaths each year in the United States and more than 100,000 injuries, accompanied by an unquantifiable amount of trauma, grief and fear. The scope of the problem can be overwhelming, leaving many people feeling paralyzed, numb and hopeless to act. Although Americans typically categorize gun violence as a political issue, it is in fact, a spiritual and theological issue.

That’s why the 221st General Assembly of the PC(USA) asked congregations to post “No Guns in God’s House” signs and decals. This action offers churches an entry into dialogue about the spiritual issues of gun violence and our call as Christians to be peacemakers. The signs also offer churches a vehicle to witness to the way of nonviolence and to declare church property to be a sanctuary, free from violence and fear.

No Guns in God's House FAQs

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

Our denomination's efforts to affect change have been largely focused outside the church walls on advocacy and legislative change. Sadly, we have seen how unwilling our legislators are to carry out the will of the American public. We believe it is time to provide a stronger witness by living out our commitment to nonviolence *within our buildings* and equipping members with resources to affect change.

Recent expanded provisions 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 deception that more guns in more places makes us somehow safer and more secure.*** Gun violence can be a difficult subject to talk about in any context, but it finds particular resistance within the church, where many people believe "political" issues should not be discussed. As a result, very little meaningful discussion happens in church or elsewhere about guns. We hope that this signage will stimulate healthy and helpful conversation that will embolden congregations to witness for love and peace, and stand against fear.

Which sign should we use?

The square & circle images offer options for your congregation to choose. Or you can create your own sign. The rectangular image includes some space for you to post necessary language to meet local codes, if you opt to include it. You may want to specify in the rectangle that the church is a gun-free zone except for active law enforcement officers.

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. Study the rules and prayerfully determine the right step for you.

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

The Session has spiritual and policy-making authority in a congregation, so it is appropriate for the Session to vote on use of these signs. Sample policy language to record in minutes: *"Individuals (other than active law-enforcement officers) are prohibited from carrying guns onto this property."*¹

This is, however, a *very* important conversation for *congregations* to have – what does it mean to you to post these signs on church property? There are many resources available to sessions and congregations to engage these issues from a spiritual and theological perspective. Talk about it, together!

A cut-out sign is provided on the back of this Toolkit. You can order the 6 x 6 and 6 x 6.75 signs and the 4 x 4 decal from www.store.pcusa.org # 24358-16-006 and # 24358- 16 005.

Or you can download the pdf files from www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gunsigns

¹ <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/4627>

Offering of Letters

Worship Service for Gun Violence Prevention

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

OPTIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

For congregations already committed to preventing gun violence, use the worship outline below. You could invite members of the Presbytery and other local churches to join you for the service. After the service, invite those who are interested in learning more or committing to action to meet immediately following the service or a week later at a predetermined location. As a group, work your way through PPF's "Gun Violence Prevention Curriculum" or Jim Atwood's book, "America and Its Guns: A Theological Exposé," using the study guide questions created by Jan Orr-Harter. (See this Toolkit, Educational Resources)

For congregations who are committed to reform but want to learn a little more before offering their letters in a worship service, you might want to screen the 54 minute movie *Trigger*, followed immediately by an "Offering of Letters" Worship Service. (See Toolkit Educational Resources) After the service, invite those who are interested in learning more or committing to action to meet a week later at a predetermined location. As a group, work your way through PPF's "Gun Violence Prevention Curriculum" or Jim Atwood's book, "America and Its Guns: A Theological Exposé," using the study guide questions.

For congregations that aren't as familiar with the issue and need more time to learn, digest, and discern how they are called to respond, you might plan a screening of the movie *Trigger* OR an educational session using PPF's "Gun Violence Prevention Curriculum," Session # 1. After the meeting, explain what the Offering of Letters worship service is, and provide the participants with the sample letter. Invite the participants to join you for the service, set at a later date. If they feel called to do so, they may write their letters in advance or write them within the service itself. Then hold the Offering of Letters Service, as outlined below, and afterwards invite those who are interested in learning more or committing to action to meet a week later at a predetermined location. As a group, work your way through PPF's "Gun Violence Prevention" Curriculum or Jim Atwood's book, "America and Its Guns: A Theological Exposé," using the study guide questions.



Outline for 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.**

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.

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 darkness, and free us to be agents of your peace. Amen.

OR (especially for services NOT preceded by a screening of *Trigger* or any educational forum)

Prayer of Confession:

One: God of justice and of 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,

Many: **Forgive us.**

One: God of justice and of grace, sometimes 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,

Many: **Forgive us.**

One: God of justice and of grace, sometimes we feel far from bearing your image. 30,000 Americans die from guns every year in the U.S. This is far more than the total of servicemen and women killed in the war in Iraq. Lord, in your mercy,

Many: **Forgive us.**

One: God of justice and of grace, sometimes we feel far from bearing your image. 40% of the guns bought in the United States are bought from private sellers, mostly at Gun Shows. Neither background checks nor firearms safety classes are required in these private exchanges. Lord, in your mercy,

Many: **Forgive us.**

Words of Assurance (The Minister may use the words that are most familiar to him/her)

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 (A list of scripture suggestions can be found below)

The Word Proclaimed

(Because time needs to be left for the Offering of Letters, the message should be on the shorter side, 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. He/She should also make it clear that if a worshipper does not finish his or her letter within the time allotted, they may 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, affirmed, and invited to use the time for prayer or meditation.)

Letter-writing

(Instrumental music, so as not to distract, may be played. This should take approximately 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 all we can ask or imagine, to God be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Scripture Suggestions: Psalm 140 Romans 12:2 Isaiah 11:9 Psalm 25:4 Galatians 5:1 Isaiah 58:6-9

WHAT YOU'LL NEED for the Offering of Letters Service

1. Review Worship, Scripture and Hymn suggestions in this Toolkit
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 Congressional Representative or a Senator right now?

- b. *Paper* to write on, a pen, a stamped envelope.
- c. *A Sample Letter.* (See below.)

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. 33,000 Americans are killed every year by guns. That includes 10 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 our elected servant of the common good, to work especially for the passage of universal background checks and closure of the "gun show loophole" 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 him, I strive to fulfill that calling every day, and I will continue to advocate for that which creates peace in our society. I urge you to join me in this mission, following whatever or whomever it is that compels you to live in light of love instead of fear.

Sincerely,

Case Study of a Congregation

First United Church of Oak Park, IL

848 Lake St. Oak Park, IL 60301 <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 in November. 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. Their process was to invite in speakers. Speakers included a Presbyterian leader for community collaborations, who spoke of our engagement with gun violence as it fits into the larger theme of justice. Rev. Wilson 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.

To learn more about First United of Oak Park, contact Lois Thiessen Love at lois@thiessenlove.com

Case Study of a Congregation:

Stony Point Presbyterian Church

125 West Main Street Stony Point, NY 10980

<http://www.stonypointpres.org>



Gun Violence, Gospel Values: One Congregation's Response to God's Call

The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed planted in the soil. It is the smallest of all the earth's seeds, but once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of all shrubs ... - Mark 4:31-32

June 26, 2012

After the horrific shootings in Tucson, AZ in January 2011 and our small congregation's subsequent conversations about gun violence, church member Rick Ufford-Chase asked if we would consider seriously addressing the subject *together, as people of faith*.

Due to some historical issues in the congregation, we knew that addressing such a controversial topic had the potential to be divisive and damaging, so we set about designing a "curriculum" that would invite open, theologically-based dialogue, while minimizing the potentially polarizing rhetoric that often dominates – and shuts down – any reasonable discussion about gun violence.

We based our curriculum on the excellent PC(USA) document, ***Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call***² (GVGV) and sought input from the congregation on specific gun violence issues during a Lenten reflection during worship on the spiritual discipline of "Non-Injury." We then used the congregation's input to design a year-long, monthly curriculum. The curriculum was approved by session in May 2011 and endorsed by the congregation at our Annual Meeting in June 2011.

In September 2011, Reverend Jim Atwood (one of the GVGV authors) came to Stony Point, preached at worship and led an afternoon kick-off event introducing the document and the reasons it was written. He also gave us much encouragement and wise insight.

Throughout the following months, a group that ranged in age from teenagers to senior citizens and varied in racial, ethnic, socioeconomic backgrounds and political beliefs, grew to include 14 congregants and several occasional guests. We engaged in theological discourse and scripture-based reflection about the spiritual impact of the pervasive violence in our culture. We learned, lamented, resisted and grieved. We were challenged, as the document asked us, to wake up and to act. *"To honor the silenced voices we must pay attention, speak out, and give witness to God's "No" to gun violence. (GVGV, p. 18)*

We learned, to our enormous shock, that even in our small, "safe" suburban community, that *each and every one of us had been touched by gun violence at some point in our lives*. One of our group members, a bank manager, was tied up and held at gunpoint in a vault during an armed robbery. This realization led the group this year during Lent to tell their stories and raise awareness in the larger congregation of the many ways that gun violence has touched our lives. We wrote up a bulletin insert that gave an update on our process, notifying the congregation that group members would be giving testimonials during worship throughout Lent, and invited the congregation to join our group, pray with us and pray for us as we continued learning together. It was at this point that we experienced some "push-back." It was fine for us to study the issues of gun violence *after*

² ***Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call***, Office of the General Assembly, PC(USA), 2011. <http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/acswp/pdf/gun-violence-policy.pdf>

worship as a group, but the desire to keep the discussion at an arm's length became a problem when we began to witness "publicly."

This uncomfortable and upsetting situation gave us the opportunity to address the underlying reasons for the resistance and find compassionate, pastorally appropriate ways to stay in relationship in a time of disagreement and distress. It was a time of healing and relationship building, as well as a strengthening of resolve for members of the GVG group.

After Easter, we met to begin thinking about our next steps as our study period drew to a close. It was at this point that we decided to write a "position statement" to describe the process we had been through together, to state where we agreed, disagreed and the kinds of actions we feel called to, as a result of our study *together, as people of faith*.

It took a few drafts to find just the right words that accurately and appropriately expressed our process, feelings and commitments. The dialogues and debates involved in writing this statement proved to be another high point of the process – we demanded theological reasoning from each other for the decisions we made in writing and editing in a painstaking effort to avoid inflammatory and divisive rhetoric.

A few weeks ago, one of the group members (who is also a ruling elder) brought the statement to the session. She spoke with eloquence and passion, asking the session's approval of the statement and the group's desire to take action in response to what we have learned. During a Spirit-filled discussion, we wrestled with the same historical issues that have caused us anxiety for decades. When everyone had had the opportunity to express their views, we voted on the motion before us. The motion to approve the position statement and the group's actions was passed unanimously. We stopped to pray and acknowledge what a significant step this was for us in the life of our congregation, and before I knew it, we were talking about writing up a procedure policy for how to handle our *next* position statement! It was *beautiful* to behold the Holy Spirit fill these faithful servant-leaders with confidence and faith.

This past Sunday, the position statement was presented once again, to the congregation at our Annual Meeting. Group members were prepared to speak to key areas of potential difficulty. Only one question was raised – a point of confusion over vocabulary. Once we clarified the language, the congregant made a motion to amend the document so that it would be a clearer, stronger position statement. That motion passed unanimously, as did the motion to endorse the statement. (see below)

With full "permission" from our faith community to act in response to God's call, our GVG group will soon meet to determine how to live out our Christian witness as peacemakers with loving, non-violent action. We won't be alone in doing so. We have received a request from another church in the Hudson River Presbytery to help them undertake a similar study process; our 4-church youth ministry coordinator will soon address the issues of gun violence with our youth and their families; *and* we have been invited to make a presentation at an upcoming presbytery meeting.

It seems that the kingdom of God has come among us, just like that tiny mustard seed that took root in the field and eventually grew to take over. Each step along the way helped us learn to how to partner with one another, with God and with our community more effectively, and gave us the confidence and trust to take the next step into the future that God calls us – a future that is largely unrevealed. If you would like to engage your congregation in a similar study of gun violence and we might be of assistance to you, please contact us. We would welcome the opportunity to further help manifest God's kingdom.

I give thanks to God, to the GVG group, to the elders at Stony Point Presbyterian Church, to my co-facilitator Elder Rick Ufford-Chase, to the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship and to all who have prayed with and for us, offered us wisdom, encouragement and advice throughout an amazing year of learning, reflection and growth. Finally, I lift up our prayers for all who have suffered from gun violence. May our grief be grief that transforms and brings life. So be it. Amen.

In Christ, Reverend Margery Rossi, Pastor, Stony Point Presbyterian Church

**Stony Point Presbyterian Church
Commitment to Work to End Gun Violence
Spring 2012**

Let us love, not in word or speech, but in deed and in truth. – 1 John 3:18

Introduction

Our commitment as a congregation to study the matter of gun violence began with the shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and eighteen others, six of whom died, including nine-year-old Christina Taylor Green, in Tucson, Arizona in January of 2011.

Our year of discernment has come to an end with the shooting of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed seventeen-year-old in Sanford, Florida.

In between, shootings have been a daily occurrence in communities all across our country – so common, in fact, that they don't even warrant a news story unless they are particularly sensational, like those that occur in schools or workplaces.

Throughout this year, we have read and studied the PC(USA) document, ***Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call***.³ We have engaged in theological discourse and reflection about the spiritual impact of such pervasive violence in our culture. We have learned, lamented, resisted and grieved. We have been challenged, as the document has asked us, to wake up and to act. "To honor the silenced voices we must pay attention, speak out, and give witness to God's "No" to gun violence. (*GVGV, p. 18*) At this point, we feel ready to do just that: to commit ourselves to action.

We respectfully request the session and congregation to endorse our efforts to be peacemakers in the world around us.

We offer the enclosed statement as a summary of our study to date and the actions we feel called to, as a community of believers with "open hearts, minds and doors."

Gun Violence Study Group Facilitators:

Margery Rossi

Rick Ufford-Chase

³ ***Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call***, Office of the General Assembly, PC(USA), 2011.
<http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/acswp/pdf/gun-violence-policy.pdf>

Our Statement on Gun Violence

We, as members of Stony Point Presbyterian Church, in an effort to model the love and the care of Jesus Christ in the world, commit ourselves to work actively to reduce gun violence in our community and across our nation. We hear Jesus' call to us to be peacemakers and lift up this special concern as we pray, worship, study and take action together in the world.

We concur with the PC(USA) document, ***Gun Violence, Gospel Values***, that our country has made an idol out of our historic, constitutional commitment to protect the right to own guns. We are clear, however, that neither the study nor actions of our small group are an attempt to challenge the constitution of the United States of America, but instead, bear witness to the spiritual, emotional, physical, mental and financial consequences of such idolatry. We are also clear that this discussion is not about guns used for hunting. (GVGV, p. 17)

We differ:

We are not of one mind about the appropriateness of owning handguns for personal safety, but we have agreed to disagree on this matter – in love for one another and an effort to create a Christian community that allows for differences of opinion.

We are of one mind:

In a country where 100,000 people are shot by guns *each year*, resulting in 30,000 deaths *each and every year* – through murder, suicide, and accidents – we will do all that is within our power to stop the madness.

- ⌘ **We oppose the proliferation of assault and military style weapons** in our community and in all communities across our country.
- ⌘ **We support creation and enforcement of laws requiring full background checks** in all gun stores and at all gun shows, and we will hold businesses in our community accountable to perform those background checks before the sale of every weapon.
- ⌘ **We condemn, and will work to thwart those gun dealers who act irresponsibly** by allowing the practice of “straw buying” to flourish, thereby undermining responsible laws that are in place to protect our public servants and all members of our communities.

Our Commitments:

Together, we will **continue to pray** for an end to our nation's addiction to guns, and for an end to the epidemic of gun violence in our country.

We will continue to **lift these concerns to God** as we worship together.

We will continue to **educate ourselves** in an effort to be thoughtful, thorough and prepared as we take action.

We will seek opportunities to **work in partnership** with law enforcement agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other churches to stop gun violence.

We will **witness publicly** about our concern through nonviolent vigils and demonstrations.

We will be watchful for opportunities to **act together to reduce the violence**.

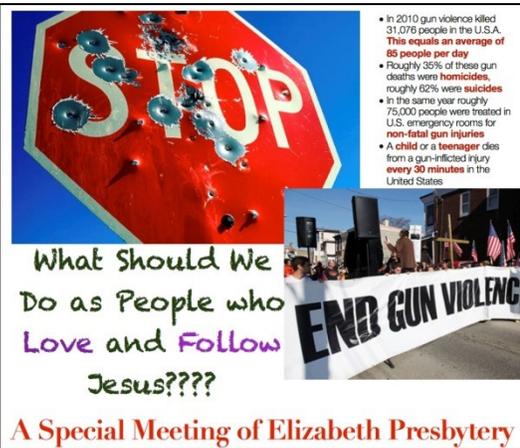
God has given us so much, and we have Good News to share with one another and with others. Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God is among us, and that we are called to the daily task of creating that Kingdom. We pray that others will join us as we step boldly into the life lived in tension between enjoyment of the good gifts God has given us and work in the world because of all Jesus has called us to do and be.

Let us be clear: this is not a call to arms but to community. (GVGV, p. 17)

Case Study of a Presbytery – Elizabeth Presbytery

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, mother of a school-age daughter, pastor of Watchung Ave. Presbyterian Church in North Plainfield and a member of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. Shannan had just been elected Vice-Moderator of the Presbytery. “I thought that preventing violence like Newtown should be the business of the church,” she says. So at a January 2013 meeting, 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.”



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, PPF Executive Director and Moderator of the 216th PC(USA) General Assembly, 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 6 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 current denominational Peace Discernment Process.
4. Info on study-action resources from The Thoughtful Christian and on the Gun Violence Prevention Toolkit created for churches by the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship.

“We also had Jim Atwood’s wonderful book for sale, *America and its Guns*,” said Shannan. “Ten people are now on the 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.

Connecting with Others

National Groups & Contacts in all 50 States

There are many ways to get involved in preventing gun violence. You can start a group or chapter in your church or with others in your community. Below we list national groups, as well as a contact in each state, someone already working near you on this issue. These groups work together on significant anniversaries, such as the 5th anniversary of the Newtown School Shooting in Dec. 2017 and the anniversary of the Orlando Nightclub shooting on June 12. Many groups provide resources for “National Gun Violence Awareness Day” in June and for holding “Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath” in your community on various days throughout the year. Please help us add to and update this list. Email suggestions to: JanOH4@aol.com

Coalition to Stop Gun Violence - <http://www.csgv.org> Founded in 1974 and based in Washington DC, a coalition of 47 national organizations working together to prevent gun violence. The Presbyterian Church (USA) is a member and Presbyterian author Rev. Jim Atwood is on the national board of directors.

Everytown for Gun Safety - <http://www.everytown.org> 646-324-8250 Based in NY, NY, created from a merger in 2013 of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America and Mayors Against Illegal Guns, Everytown has contacts in every state in the US. Moms Demand Action sponsors the Gun Sense Action Network in every state and the Mother’s Dream Quilt Project. Everytown promotes National Gun Violence Awareness Day in June, asking Americans to wear orange and to create local events to raise awareness.

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 has launched a goal to cut American gun deaths in half by 2025 through a combination of public policy, safety and public awareness changes. Based in Washington DC, they also sponsor the Legal Action Project to use the court system to support sensible gun policy. With 94 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.”

States United to Prevent Gun Violence - <http://www.ceasefireusa.org> or <http://www.supgv.org> Established in 2010 to create a 50 state solution on gun violence. Based in NY,NY, States United maintains a clearinghouse of 31 states so far, with groups working together on gun violence prevention. They can help you get started in your state. Their website also offers a quick check on which popular investment funds are profiting from the gun and ammunition industry and how to find a fund that isn’t.

Americans for Responsible Solutions - <http://www.americansforresponsiblesolutions.org> Founded by Gabby Gifford and Mark Kelly in 2012, ARS sponsors education, advocacy and a significant Political Action Committee (PAC). ARS has merged with the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, which has worked for over 20 years to mobilize lawyers to help strengthen gun laws. The 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

Violence Policy Center - <http://www.vpc.org/> The Violence Policy Center does investigation and analytical work to provide accurate statistics on gun violence, information on the gun industry and steps to prevent gun violence.

The Newtown Action Alliance - <http://www.alliance.newtownaction.org> Founded in Newtown, CT after the 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting, the Newtown Alliance exists to “provide comfort, education, scholarship and other support and resources to people and communities impacted by or living in the aftermath of gun violence in American society, and to help them lead the way toward positive cultural change.”

Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence - <http://www.faithsunited.org> Over 50 national religious groups working 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 America. Their website "Other Resources" includes an excellent *Gun Violence Guide for Faith Leaders*.

National Gun Violence Victims Action Council – <http://www.gunvictimsaction.org> After originating action to compel Starbucks to change their gun policy, NGVAC works to involve economic power and corporate behavior to change the gun violence culture in America.

Gun Violence Archive - <http://www.gunviolencearchive.org> The GVA provides free public access to accurate reporting on gun-related incidents in America. 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

State Contacts: (Please help us update this list. Send new local contact info to JanOH4@aol.com)

Alabama Contact www.momsdemandaction.org to connect with their AL chapter
<http://www.facebook.com/MomsDemandActionAL>

Alaska We are Anchorage <http://www.weareanchorage.org>

Arizona Arizonans for Gun Safety <http://www.azfgs.com> 9920 S. Rural Rd,
Suite 108, PMB #36, Tempe, AZ 85284 602-547-0976 info@AZFGS.com

Arkansas Arkansas Stop the Violence, PO Box 94578, North Little Rock, 501-351-1066
walter.crockran@lrsd.org

Brady Campaign of Arkansas, Diane Bunten, centralarkansas@bradymail.org

Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, Kathleen Hills, Little Rock h.kathleen@gmail.com

California Women Against Gun Violence <http://www.wagv.org> Los Angeles, CA 90034 (310) 204-2348
University of California at Davis Violence Prevention Research Program
<http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/vprp>

Colorado Colorado Ceasefire <http://www.coloradoceasefire.org>
Colorado Progress Now <http://www.progressnowcolorado.org>
Hunters Against Gun Violence <http://www.huntersagainstgunviolence.com>
Faith Communities United to End Gun Violence <http://www.cfcu-co.org>

Connecticut Connecticut Against Gun Violence <http://www.cagv.org> 203-955-1009 info@cagv.org
Asylum Hill Congregational Church, Hartford, CT. (Stand Up- Speak Out)
Mothers United Against Violence, Hartford, CT Nancy Kirchmyer, 860-228-4390 or 860-670-4078
or nkirchmyer@hotmail.com

Delaware Delaware Coalition Against Gun Violence <http://www.decagv.org>

Florida Florida Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence, founded by the League of Women Voters following the Pulse Nightclub massacre, the worst mass shooting in American history
<http://www.preventgunviolenceflorida.org> pbrighamlwvoc@gmail.com 850-224-2545

Georgia Georgians for Gun Safety <http://www.gunsafetygeorgia.org> PO Box 55099
Atlanta, GA 30308 404-483-9745

Hawaii Hawaii Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence <http://www.facebook.com/Hawaii-Coalition-to-Prevent-Gun-Violence-1431037223812676/>

Idaho Contact <http://www.momsdemandaction.org> to connect with their ID chapter
<http://www.facebook.com/MomsDemandActionID>

Illinois Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence, founded 1975. <http://www.ichv.org>
22 S. Morgan Street, Suite 4A Chicago, IL 60607 312. 243. ICHV (4248)
Cure Violence <http://www.cureviolence.org>

Indiana Hoosiers Concerned About Gun Violence <http://www.hcgv.org>
PO Box 40265 Indianapolis, IN 46240 info@hcgv.org

Iowa Iowans for Gun Safety <http://www.facebook.com/IA4GS> (515) 402-8973

Kansas Grandparents Against Gun Violence <http://www.moksgagv.wildapricot.org> info@moksgagv.org
P.O. Box 11193 Overland Park, KS 66207

Kentucky Sowers of Justice Network, Louisville <http://www.sowersofjusticenetwork.org>
Doug Lowry info@sowersofjustice.org

Louisiana Contact <http://www.momsdemandaction.org> to connect with their LA chapter

Maine Maine Gun Safety Coalition <http://www.mainegunsafety.org>
PO Box 92, Portland, ME 207-780-0501

Maryland Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence <http://www.mdpgv.org>

Massachusetts Stop Handgun Violence <http://www.stophandgunviolence.org>

Michigan Coalition for Common Ground <https://www.facebook.com/CCGKZOO/>
Michigan Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence 517-927-8392
<http://www.facebook.com/MichiganCoalitiontoPreventGunViolence>

Minnesota Protect Minnesota <http://www.protectmn.org> St. Paul, MN 55114 (651) 645-3271

Mississippi Contact <http://www.momsdemandaction.org> to connect with their MS chapter
<http://www.facebook.com/momsdemandactionms>

Missouri (and Kansas) Grandparents Against Gun Violence <http://www.moksgagv.org>
info@moksgagv.org P.O. Box 11193 Overland Park, KS 66207

Montana BigSkyRising@groups.facebook.com
Jeanette Rankin Peace Center, Missoula, MT <http://www.jrpc.org> 406-543-3955

Nebraska Nebraskans Against Gun Violence <http://www.nebraskansagainstgunviolence.org> info@nagv.org

Nevada Nevadans for Background Checks <http://www.safenevada.org>

New Hampshire Granite State Progress <http://www.facebook.com/granite.progress/zandra@granitestateprogress.org>

New Jersey Cease Fire NJ <http://www.peacecoalition.org/campaigns/ceasefire.html>

New Mexico New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence <http://www.newmexicanstopreventgunviolence.org>
mviscoli@yahoo.com NMTPGV@gmail.com
<https://www.facebook.com/NewMexicansForGunSafety?fre=ts>

New York New Yorkers Against Gun Violence <http://www.nyagv.org>
 87 Lafayette Street, 3rd floor, NY, NY 10013 nyagv@nyagv.org 212-679-2345
 Buffalo: Paul McQuillen PaulMcQEsq@nyagv.org
 Hudson Valley: Alexandra Dubroff Alex@nyagv.org
 Capital Region: Pat Tuz Pat@nyagv.org
 Utica: David Roefaro David@nyagv.org

North Carolina North Carolinians Against Gun Violence <http://www.ncgv.org>

North Dakota Contact <http://www.momsdemandaction.org> to connect with their ND chapter

Ohio Ohio Cease Fire <http://www.ohioceasefire.org> (614) 769-7386 (419) 244-7442
info@ohioceasefire.org Ohio Coalition Against Gun Violence P.O. Box 16836 Columbus, OH 43216
 God Before Guns <http://www.godbeforeguns.org>

Oklahoma OK Gun Sense <http://www.facebook.com/groups/527444644007433/>

Oregon Cease Fire Oregon <http://www.ceasefireoregon.org> 503.451.3630 info@ceasefireoregon.org

Pennsylvania CeaseFire PA <http://www.ceasefirepa.org> P.O. Box 60095, Philadelphia, PA 19102
info@ceasefirepa.org (215) 923-3151

Rhode Island Rhode Island Coalition Against Gun Violence <http://www.ricagv.org>
ricoalitionagainstgunviolence@gmail.com

South Carolina South Carolinians for Responsible Gun Ownership <http://gunsensesc.org>
gunsensesc@gmail.com

South Dakota Contact <http://www.momsdemandaction.org> to connect with their SD chapter

Tennessee Safe Tennessee Project <http://www.safetennesseeproject.org/>

Texas Texas Gun Sense <http://www.txgunsense.org> P.O. Box 9297 Austin, TX 78766
andrea@txgunsense.org 512) 565-4480

Utah Gun Violence Prevention Center of Utah <http://www.gvpc.org>
 Gun Sense Utah <http://www.facebook.com/GUNSENSE.ACTION>

Vermont Gun Sense Vermont <http://www.gunsensevt.org> info@gunsensevt.org

Virginia Virginia Center for Public Safety <http://www.vacps.org> Norfolk, VA info@vacps.org

Washington Washington CeaseFire <http://www.washingtonceasefire.org>

West Virginia Dee Price Childers, <http://www.MomsDemandAction.org>

Wisconsin Wisconsin Anti-Violence Effort <http://www.wisconsinceasefire.org>

Wyoming Contact <http://www.momsdemandaction.org> to connect with their WY chapter
<http://www.facebook.com/momsdemandactionwy>

Nonviolent Direct Action?

“Our thoughts and prayers are no longer enough. What will it take?”

--Sen. Tammy Baldwin, WI during the Senate’s 14 Hour Filibuster on Gun Violence in 2016

This Toolkit offers educational, pastoral and action projects for Presbyterians and others. The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship has worked for many decades in projects such as these and we thank you for using this Toolkit. In addition to these suggestions, we also lift up the tradition of Nonviolent Direct Action as a possible answer to the question, “What will it take?”

Examples of Nonviolent Direct Action from other efforts would include the Colombia Accompaniment Program; Rosa Parks and the Montgomery, AL Bus Boycott; divestment from companies and banks supporting *apartheid* in South Africa; risking arrest by a witnessing at the School of the Americas or the US Nuclear Weapons Test Site and other nuclear weapons installations.

If you or your congregation have suggestions on discerning nonviolent direct action on gun violence prevention, please contact PPF. This is not a simple issue. It will take multiple strategies and repeated acts of conscience to finally, finally, finally get Americans to wake up and work together to prevent gun violence.





Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

Find this Toolkit On-Line or in Print: Download Free PDF or Order Print Copies at:
<http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence/resources>

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Toolkit Editor: Jan Orr-Harter Send new resources and action ideas to JanOH4@aol.com

This Toolkit PDF is a free gift from PPF at
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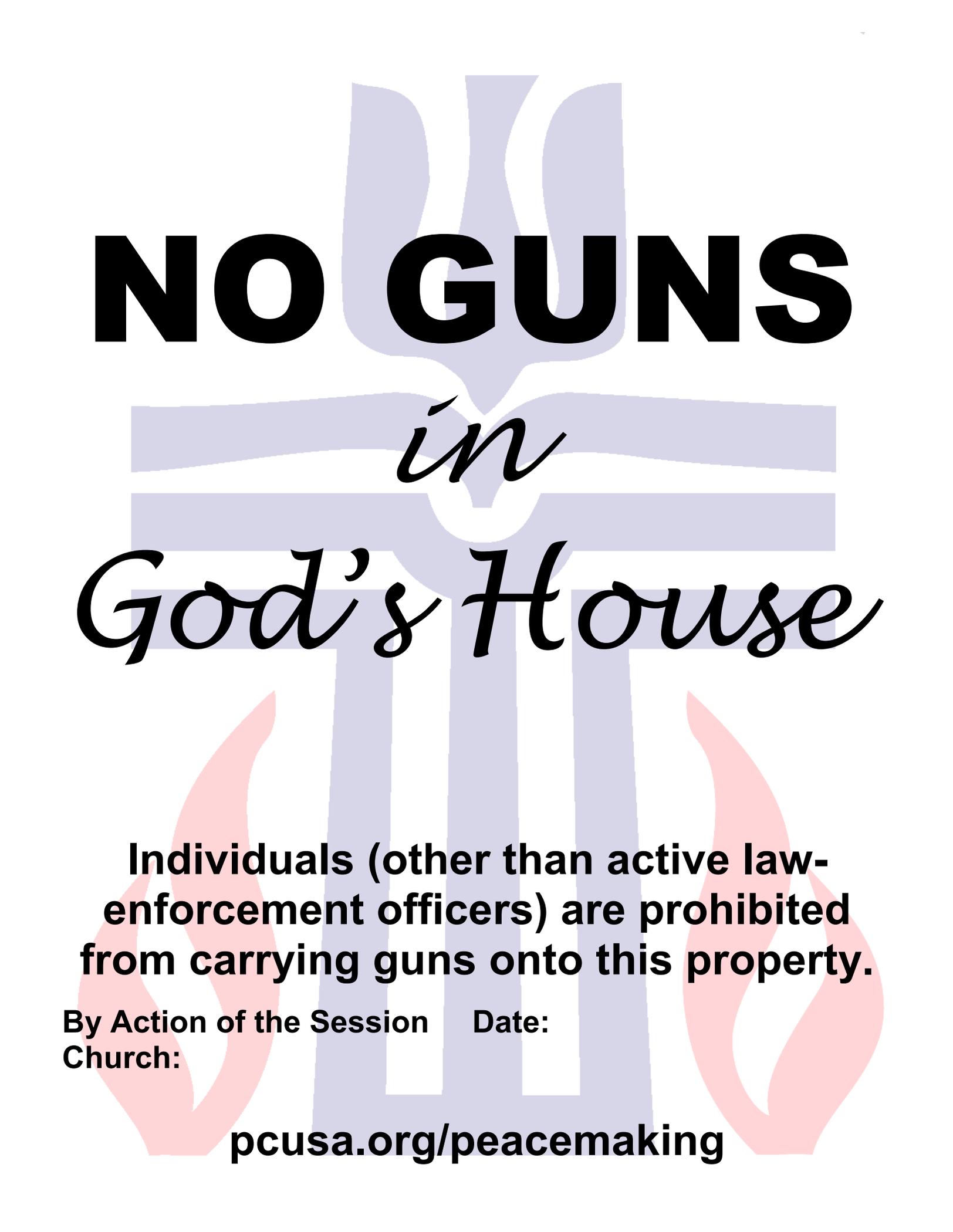
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Gifts are tax-deductible. Please donate to the
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<http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/giving>

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To learn more about the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, or to become more involved,
 please contact us at info@presbypeacefellowship.org or call 845-786-6743



NO GUNS *in* *God's House*

Individuals (other than active law-enforcement officers) are prohibited from carrying guns onto this property.

By Action of the Session Date:
Church:

pcusa.org/peacemaking

No Armas de Fuego

en

La Casa de Dios

Individuos (que no sean oficiales activos de la ley) se prohíben llevar armas en esta propiedad.

**Por Acción del Consistorio, Fecha: _____
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