



**New Hampshire Conference
United Church of Christ**

A Just World For All

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION RESOURCES



FOR IMPLEMENTING THE RESOLUTION

**Provided by the Peace with Justices Advocates
Mission Group of the
NH Conference United Church of Christ**

Additional Resources Are Welcome

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Introduction and Purpose

The Resolution “A Lamentation and Call to Congregations for Discussion and Action about Gun Violence Prevention” was presented to the 223rd Annual Meeting of the NH Conference UCC, on October 26, 2024. It was developed by the Peace with Justice Advocates Mission Group of the NHCUCC.

It is a lamentation and a call to the congregations of the Conference to mourn with the countless communities and families that have suffered terrible losses every year due to gun violence.

The churches of the Conference are called to become informed, discuss and be active regarding issues of guns in our communities and prevention of gun violence, for the purpose of taking actions toward preventing that violence, both individually and as organizations as consistent with our faith and practice as Christians. With nearly 43,000 Americans taken from us by gun violence in 2023, including over 650 mass shootings, the church of Jesus Christ cannot stand idly by.

The Resources in this document are intended to equip churches with the tools needed to become informed, for discussion and to take action.

Thank you for daring to explore how you and your congregation are called to help prevent gun violence.

Acknowledgement and Appreciation

The Peace with Justices Advocates is grateful to the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Gun Violence Prevention project for sharing the wealth of resources, links and discussion guide model they have developed. We appreciate the National Office of the UCC providing additional resource links. Appreciation also for the assistance of Don Bliss, security assessment specialist, for the church security resources and grant fund links, and to Nancy Brown, NH Guns to Gardens Organizer and to Zandra Rice Hawkins of the Granite State Progress. Together we are all working for the prevention of gun violence.

Cover Photo: Photo by Becky Field
of a volunteer chopping up a rifle
at a June 2024 Concord, NH Guns to Gardens event

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Implementation Plan = 4

A Cry for Peace, A Lamentation = 5

Six Session Discussion/ Study Guide

“Courageous Conversations on Gun Violence Prevention”

Introduction to this Faith-Based Guide for Small Group/Discussions & Study = 6

Session 1 - Courageous Conversations & The Citizen’s Test = 8

Session 2 - Getting Real about Gun Violence and Suicide = 15

Session 3 - Guns and Domestic Violence: A Taboo Topic = 20

Session 4 - Guns, Race and Racism = 25

Session 5 - Unmasking the Powers: Guns and Money = 31

Session 6 - Action: Creating a New World = 35

Additional Resources & Take Action

Resources of Gun Violence & the Work of Prevention = 38

Theological & Biblical Resources = 39

Congregational Action Resources = 39

Impact of Gun Violence = 39

Statistics = 40

Resources on Race, Racism & Gun Violence = 40

Discussion Models = 41

Hate Crimes and Gun Violence = 41

Youth & Child Resources = 41

Community Action Resources = 42

The Gun Lobby = 43

Gun Violence as a Public Health Crisis = 43

Second Amendment & The Courts = 44

Proposals for Responding to and Reducing Gun Violence = 44

Church Security = 45

Guns to Gardens – NH = 45

Pastoral Resources = 50

Emergency Response: Resources for Times of Gun Violence

A Sign That May Be Used = 56

Implementation of the Gun Violence Prevention Resolution

The NH Conference calls upon our congregations to study gun culture and lament gun violence in NH and beyond:

To study and discuss gun culture, gun violence and appropriate limitations on firearms in church spaces.

To use “A Cry for Peace” and other resources, in prayer and lamentation, one Sunday a month or at times of their choosing, over the next year.

To publicly renounce the prevalence of guns in US society and prevent the unnecessary presence of guns in and on our church premises.

To challenge gun culture and the prevailing tolerance of guns and grieve the resulting death rates in all sectors of our society.

The NH Conference calls upon our congregations to become leading peacemakers within their own communities and regions:

To actively confess our collective silence and inaction in responding to gun violence and the destruction and losses suffered across our communities.

To promote efforts to keep our children, communities and churches safe from gun-related anxiety and violence.

To utilize violence prevention resources on the Conference website, as collected and curated by the Peace with Justice Advocates of the Conference.

To assume leadership in emerging community discussions around avoidable deaths, horrific injuries and destruction resulting from gun violence.

The NH Conference calls upon our congregations to actively build awareness around this Resolution and encourage its implementation throughout the Conference:

To declare that Conference churches are places of safety for all people.

To implement this Resolution through awareness, discussion and concrete action, utilizing the Conference’s posted resources.

To prepare for discussion and action on a second resolution—to be presented to the 2025 Annual Meeting for discussion and vote—declaring the Conference and encouraging its churches to identify as gun-free places working within their communities for violence prevention.

To challenge gun culture and the prevailing tolerance of guns and grieve the resulting death rates in all sectors of our society.

**Implementation notes prepared by the Peace with Justice Advocates,
a Mission Group of the NH Conference.**

A Cry for Peace, A Lament

We sing your steadfast love, O God, forever. Your justice surges like an ever-flowing stream. How long, O God, will you deny us the river of the water of life? How long will you let your people suffer the swords, spears, and weapons of domination? How long will you allow the gun to imitate the path to peace?

There are more guns than people in our nation.

How long, O God, before you come to the valley of the shadow of death?

Freedom to bear arms is sacrosanct in our country.

How long, O God, will you withhold the true foundation of our being?

There are annually more than 40,000 gun-related deaths in our nation: 2,500 are children and teens.

How long, O God, must we suffer the grief of death by gun?

54% of gun deaths were suicide, 43% were murders.

How long, O God, will you let murder and suicide infect your creation?

There were more than 630 mass shootings in 2023.

How long, O God, must daily sorrow burden our hearts?

91% of people favor stricter gun laws, yet 25 states allow firearms without a permit.

How long, O God, before you listen to your people?

New Hampshire Legislators may carry handguns on the floor of the assembly.

How long, O God, will you let belligerence and fear reign over us?

Most firearm deaths are from handguns.

How long, O God, how long?

Look on us and answer, our Sovereign God. Give light to our eyes, or we will sleep in death. Take not your waters of justice from us, that we may drink in your love and peace for all creation. Do not withhold your shield of love from us. We sing of your wisdom, power, and grace. Come, be our refuge and our source of peace

A Six-Session Discussion & Study Guide for Congregations

developed by the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship for Gun Violence Prevention

“Courageous Conversations about Gun Violence Prevention”

Introduction to this Faith-Based Guide for Small Group/Discussions & Study

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

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

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

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

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

Technology: If done by an in-person group, the curriculum requires very little technology. The leader needs to carefully prepare for each session by noting what technology may be needed, such as smartphones to read the “Survivor Stories.” You might invite folks as they gather, or ahead of time, to find the story on their phone and read it. Or you could print them out. There is an important short video in Session 6. Try to arrange a larger screen for this video. Perhaps someone in the group can set this up ahead of time. Some sessions will need a Bible.

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

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

Follow Up: The goal of the discussion study guide is to bring congregation members together to share and learn about gun violence prevention and to identify interested individuals and action ideas for next steps. As part of the **NH Conference UCC's Gun Violence Prevention action**, we hope that every congregation will find something that they can do or contribute toward saving lives. <https://www.nhcucc.org/mission-groups/peace-with-justice>.

Session 1: Courageous Conversations about Gun Violence

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

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

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

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

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

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

Presenting & Exploring:

Stories: Assign participants with smart phones or laptops to read aloud these stories: <https://momentsthat survive.org/tribute/in-honor-and-memory-of-jojo/>
<https://momentsthat survive.org/tribute/sedona/>

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

The Citizen's Test on Gun Violence in America

Share copies of the Citizen's Test and give time for participants to mark their own answers. Take turns reading the test answers, giving time for any comments or questions.

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

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

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

Learn More/Pick One for Further Study:

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

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

Kaiser Family Foundation Research on Gun Violence 2023

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

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

2022 <https://www.rd.com/article/gun-violence-statistics/>

CITIZEN'S TEST ON GUN VIOLENCE IN AMERICA

Created by Jim Atwood Updated 2024, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

1.The Presbyterian Church (USA), most faith communities, and gun violence prevention groups are opposed to hunting and target shooting and are determined to ban all guns used in self-defense.

True _____

False _____

2.Since 1968, more Americans have died by gunfire within our own country than all servicemen and women killed in battle in all US wars since 1775.

True _____

False _____

3.After 9/11, it became impossible for those on the “no fly list” to legally buy guns.

True _____

False _____

4.Over the last four years, an average of _____ persons are killed by guns in the US.
a.17,000 b. 28,000 c. 52,000 d. 43,000

5.The most frequently used murder weapon is a:

a. handgun b. assault rifle c. shotgun d. knife

6.The annual overall cost of firearms violence for the US economy is:

a. \$876 million b. \$128.5 billion. c. \$250.4 billion. d. \$557 billion

7.The highest homicide rates per 100,000 population are in the

a. South b. West c. Midwest d. Northeast

8.Americans are more likely to be murdered or assaulted by

a. A friend, acquaintance, or family member
b. A person of another race or religion
c. A person with a criminal record.

1. The Second Amendment guarantees *law-abiding American citizens* the right to own any type of firearm with no restrictions.

True _____ False _____

2. Americans are deeply divided on issues of gun regulation.

True _____ False _____

3. The Consumer Product Safety Commission is prohibited by law from examining the safety of any gun or piece of ammunition.

True _____ False _____

4. A majority of gun owners lock up their firearms at home.

True _____ False _____

5. The NRA consistently supports the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives.

True_____ False_____

6. Thirty-eight states have some form of Stand Your Ground Laws which gives the right to use a gun against another without retreating if one “feels threatened.”

True_____ False_____

15. When New York City Police Officers fire their guns in shootouts with criminals or public offenders, they hit their targets what percent of the time?

a.50%_____ b. 45%_____ c. 18%_____ d. 72% _____

16. Regulating guns for public safety is impossible until we have finance reform for elections.

True_____ False_____

17.The United States has been prone to mass shootings since the Civil War.

True _____ False _____

ANSWERS FOR CITIZEN'S TEST

Updated January 2024

1. **False.** These entities never express opposition to hunting, sports shooting, or gun ownership. Their mission is to keep dangerous weapons out of the hands of dangerous people. The Presbyterian Church and many other faith groups do call for re-instating the ban on assault weapons and for restricting large magazine clips.
2. **True.** From the American Revolution to Iraq/Afghanistan, approximately 657,860 Americans died in battle. From 1968 to 2022, gun violence killed approximately 1,808,821 Americans.
3. **False.** Individuals on the FBI's Terrorist Watch List may legally buy guns from licensed dealers, if they pass the National Instant Criminal Background Check System database. If they cannot pass, they can buy guns from private sellers in 30 states and at 5,000 gun shows in the USA. (Twenty states, so far, have background checks on all gun sales.)
4. **D.** On average from 2019 to 2023, 43,084 Americans are killed by guns each year. More than half of these deaths are by gun suicide.
5. **A.** Handgun
6. **D.** \$557 billion. While no price can be put on lives taken, studies by the National Institutes of Health and our gross domestic product. This includes first responders, hospital costs, police, funerals, survivor long-term Everytown for Gun Safety show that the economic cost of gun violence is \$557 billion per year, or 2.6% of medical costs, lost wages and productivity, court costs and incarceration, and quality of life costs for surviving families. Local, state and federal governments are spending \$35 million every day to deal with the aftermath of gun violence. <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/>
7. **A.** a friend, acquaintance or family member. FBI Uniform Crime Report, Expanded Homicide Data Table 10, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2014/crime-in-the-u.s.-2014/offenses-known-to-law-enforcement/expanded-homicide>
8. **False.** In 2008 the Supreme Court interpreted the Second Amendment as an individual right, overturning 200 years of judicial history regarding militias. Justice Antonin Scalia, writing for the 5-4 majority stated, "Like most rights, the Second Amendment right is not unlimited. It is not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose: For example, concealed weapons prohibitions have been upheld under the Amendment or state analogues.

The Court's opinion should not be taken to cast doubt on longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill, or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings, or laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms."

9. **False.** Over 97% of Americans, including gun owners, support universal background checks, as well as 80% of NRA members. <https://poll.qu.edu/Poll-Release-Legacy?releaseid=2521>
10. **True.** CPSC can regulate toy guns, but not real firearms and ammunition. Due to the lobbying success of the NRA, gun makers were shielded from product liability by the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, which was signed into law in 2005 by President George W. Bush.
11. **False.** A study of gun owners showed that 58% did not use trigger locks or securely store weapons. An Assessment of Firearm Storage Practices in the US, 2022, JAMA Medical News:
<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2801915#:~:text=Among%20the%202152%20firearm%20owners,1%20firearm%20unlocked%20and%20unhidden>
12. **False.** For decades, the NRA drafted legislation to decrease the authority, budget, leadership and manpower of the ATF. For example, in 1972, the ATF had 2,500 agents charged with inspecting 60,000 dealers. An inspection was likely only every 8 years. Agents today are still at 1972 levels for the entire nation. By comparison, the New York City Police Dept. has 35,000 officers for the city.
13. **True.** In 38 states one is not obliged to retreat if one's home is attacked. Most states have expanded the law to assert that a person has no duty to abandon a place where he has a right to be. These laws have given rise to a shoot-first-ask-questions-later mindset.
<https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/guns-in-public/stand-your-ground-laws/>
14. **C. 18 %.** An analysis by the Rand Center on Quality Policing found that the average NYC police hit ratio was 18% when a subject fires back and 30% when a subject does not fire at police. Similar hit rates exist for highly trained US military. This casts concern on strategies like arming teachers and community volunteers.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9655518/>
15. **False.** Though financial incentives to lawmakers by affiliates of the NRA have impeded most gun-sense legislation, citizen advocacy did lead to a ten-year ban on assault weapons in 1994 until it expired in 2004. Twenty years later, many more citizens are concerned about gun violence and more NRA members and former members support reasonable gun safety laws. In 2022, the year of the highest gun violence on record, Congress passed the **Bipartisan Safer Communities Act**, the first major gun safety legislation in nearly 30 years. Among many steps, it provides funding for violence intervention programs and encourages states to adopt "Red Flag" laws to keep guns out of the hands of those who are a danger to themselves or others. This is not the end-all action to save lives. It's a beginning. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/fact-sheet-two-years-bipartisan-safer-communities-act>

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

For they sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.

Hosea 8:7



Session 2: Getting Real about Suicide and Gun Violence

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

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

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

Presenting and Exploring:

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

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

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

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

1. Courageous Conversation Questions: Leader asks each question separately.

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

2. Handout: “Myths & Realities about Suicide and Gun Violence” (below). Using Screen Share or with printed copies for each person, take turns reading aloud the **introduction and first five myths and realities**. When these five have been read, ask these courageous questions separately:

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

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

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

Action:

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

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

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

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

Myths and Realities about Suicide & Gun Violence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. A gun at home or one owned by a relative. A home with a gun is three times more likely to experience a gun suicide than a home next door, in the same neighborhood, without a gun. Nine out of ten suicides by children and youth are committed with a gun from their own home.¹⁰

2. Buying a gun at a gun show or a private sale that does not require a background check.

3. Delay or failure to report mental health issues to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). (Historic bipartisan legislation has encouraged prompt NICS reporting.)

4. Technical delays or understaffing at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) to promptly conduct background checks. If the check is not completed within three days by the ATF, a gun sale can proceed without a completed background check, except for buyers ages 18-21. Thanks to citizen advocacy, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act by Congress in 2022 now provides for enhanced background checks for these younger buyers.

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

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

How to Get Help

National Suicide & Crisis
Lifeline:

Call 988 or Text or Chat

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

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

Resources/Learn More:

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

For **LGBTQ youth**, see The Trevor Project at <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/> or text 678-67.
4. Download pdf or order packs of the **Gun Safety Card** at <https://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence-prevention#gun-safety-cards>
5. Go deeper into the issues raised in this session through this report from the Brady Campaign, ***The Truth about Suicide and Guns*** at <https://www.bradyunited.org/resources/research/the-truth-about-suicide-and-guns>

Sources:

- **“Duration of Suicidal Crises,”** Harvard School of Public Health, accessed May 1, 2019 <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/duration/>
- **“The Truth about Suicide and Guns”**
<https://www.bradyunited.org/resources/research/the-truth-about-suicide-and-guns>
- **Veterans and Suicide** <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/veteran-suicide-on-the-rise/>
- **“The ‘Mental Health Myth’ – The Role of Mental Health in Gun Violence and How the Media Often Gets it Wrong, Part Two”** with Dr. Beth McGinty, Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, as part of the webinar series, “Standing Our Holy Ground,” produced by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program in partnership with the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/videos/the-mental-health-myth-the-role-pt2-of-mental-health-in-gun-violence-and-how-the-media-often-gets-it-wrong/>

- **Centers for Disease Control**
<https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm> Grinshteyn E, Hemenway D. **Violent Death Rates in the US Compared to those of the Other High-income Countries**, 2015. *Preventive Medicine*. 2019;123:20–26.
- <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-violence-statistics/>
- <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/>

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

Session 3: Guns & Domestic Violence, A Taboo Topic

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

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

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

Presenting and Exploring:

Share this story aloud:

<https://momentsthatsurvive.org/tribute/kaylasmomma/>

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

Take turns reading aloud these sections:

The tragedy of domestic violence and guns - The minute a perpetrator brings a firearm into an abusive relationship, the victim is 500% more likely to die. While men can be victims of domestic abuse, women are the primary victims of domestic gun violence. Every 16 hours, an American woman is fatally shot by her partner, an average of 70 women each month. And 53% of all murdered women are killed by intimate

partners or family members. Women who acquire a gun for protection die at twice the rate of women who do not, often being killed with their own gun. In cases where the authorities intervene in an abusive relationship, the presence of a gun greatly increases the chances that a police officer will die responding to domestic violence.

Over two-thirds of parents worry that a shooting could happen at their child's school. But home is a far more dangerous place for kids.

In the five years ending in 2022, at least 866 kids ages 17 and younger were shot in domestic violence incidents and 621 of them died. In that same timeframe, 268 children were shot at school, 75 of them fatally. Even if the gun isn't ever used, introducing a firearm to an abusive setting has the potential to worsen PTSD symptoms in domestic violence victims of all ages, according to new research coming from Yale University.

92%

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

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

The Current Law - As federal law stands, anyone who has been convicted of the felony or misdemeanor crime of domestic violence towards a spouse, former spouse, cohabitating intimate partner, or person with whom the offender shares a biological child, or anyone with a permanent restraining order, cannot possess firearms. This federal law succeeds in banning domestic abusers from gun ownership by requiring background checks and creating processes that ensure abusers and stalkers must surrender the guns in their possession. This law has disarmed thousands of abusers, saving many lives, evidenced by the fact that in all states that require background checks for *all* handgun sales, there are 38% fewer women shot to death by intimate partners.

Due to citizen advocacy, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022 and the Violence Against Women Act tighten the "boyfriend loophole" by including some dating partners and stalkers in the restriction. These laws also provide incentives to the states to enact "Red Flag" laws (ERPOs-Extreme Risk Protection Orders) to complement the federal law.

The Challenge of Enforcing the Law - To save lives and to be fair, current laws need clearer definition and more consistent enforcement. Also, even if abusers are legally prohibited from owning a gun, they can evade the law. An abuser can easily escape gun law prohibitions by purchasing guns from unlicensed, private or online sellers, who may not conduct background checks. Offenders may also be able to pass a background check and purchase a gun because their local or their records are spread across multiple states. Due to citizen advocacy, bipartisan legislation has accelerated reporting to the background check system and expanded background checks overall.

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

Courageous Conversation Questions to Discuss:

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

Action:

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

Closing:

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

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

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

Let us pray:

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

As we seek to be your hands and feet in the world, we pray with hope in your name, Amen

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

NICS: National Instant Criminal Background Check System processes background checks for gun sales at federally licensed gun stores or dealers. A proposed new rule will expand requirements for background checks to

Sources for this Session:

How Gun Violence Influences Abuse <https://hawcdv.org/how-gun-violence-influences-abuse/>

Domestic Violence Child Deaths <https://www.thetrace.org/2023/03/guns-domestic-violence-child-deaths/>

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

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

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

Resources/Learn More:

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

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

Facts that Show How Guns Make Domestic Violence Even Deadlier, *The Trace*. <https://www.thetrace.org/2016/08/domestic-violence-gun-facts/>

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

Five Awake. Film (free) about a group of women in Louisiana who pursue federal law on domestic violence. <https://filmfreeway.com/823793>



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

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

Session 4: Gun Violence, Race and Racism

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

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

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

Presenting and Exploring:

1.Share these stories aloud:

- <https://momentsthat survive.org/tribute/juwan-small/>
- <https://momentsthat survive.org/stories/> (many more stories)

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

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

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

Courageous Conversation Questions:

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

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

Gun violence in Black communities is very concentrated in urban hotspots, only about 1,200 census tracts nationwide, in the same spots over and over. In Oakland, CA, a study shows that just 0.3% of the population is involved in 60% of homicides. But four and a half million Americans live in the cross-fire of these hotspot neighborhoods in a devastating sea of death, fear, injuries, and generational and community-wide PTSD.⁴

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

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

In the Presbyterian webinars⁶ on “**The Racial Divide in Gun Violence**” and “**The Ripple Effects of Gun Violence in Urban Contexts**,” the presenters ask and seek to answer:

What are the issues that cause someone in this context to pick up a gun in the first place?

They list: segregated neighborhoods abandoned by resources; investment and cohesion; failed education systems; poverty; gangs; 50% unemployment in many such areas; the trauma of children who are exposed to gun violence as a norm; missing fathers due to mass incarceration; the cyclical nature of violence; overwhelming numbers of guns and easy access to obtain guns.

Courageous Conversation Question: How do we determine who is a criminal?

When a white person commits gun violence, there is often an assumption of mental health issues. But when a Black person commits gun violence, there is often an assumption of criminal issues. Why is this?

What have been the implications of labeling gun violence by Black Americans as predominantly criminal and not rooted in mental health issues?

Or of labeling gun violence by Black Americans as predominantly criminal and not rooted in mental health issues?

1. **Police and Gun Violence** From 2013 to mid-2023

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

Courageous Conversation Question:

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

- **Seeking Healing – Three Approaches**

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

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



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

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

<https://empoweromaha.com/omaha-360/>

<https://apple.news/AiBwbuhaBToi2PgiYInfWNg>



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

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

Courageous Conversation Questions on these 3 Approaches:

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

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

Closing: from Psalm 122

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

Gather in a moment of silence.

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

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

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

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

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

All: But we know that we trust in you.

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

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

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

Sources for this Session/Learn More:

1. Second Amendment Ugly Origins: a Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FcOScwMqOo>

2. Childhood Firearm Injuries in the United States. CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7250a1.htm#:~:text=NVDRS%20identified%201%2C262%20unintentional%20firearm,persons%20aged%206%E2%80%939310%20years.>

3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Injury

Prevention and Control, 2014-2018 data. <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/index.html>

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

[https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2017/jan/09/special-report-fixing-gun-violence-in-america.](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2017/jan/09/special-report-fixing-gun-violence-in-america)

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

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1hMY1hzEcPhstGFLn2-lpfalpxQ09mvPMwmD9yCmeAxI/edit#slide=id.p3>

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

- **The Racial Divide in Gun Violence** Pittsburgh Theological Seminary professor Dr. R. Drew Smith and Rochester pastor Rev. Robert Hoggard explore the racial divide in gun violence and what churches can do about it, while lifting up the voices of those who experience it the most. <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/videos/the-racial-divide-in-gun-violence/>
- **The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence in Urban Contexts** –Baltimore residents, clergy, police and activists discuss how they are working to prevent gun violence. <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/videos/the-ripple-effect-of-gun-violence-in-urban-contexts/>

7. Mapping Police Violence <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/>

8. Cure Violence “Strategies for Safer Communities”

<https://cvg.org/>

9. From “What Have We Learned Since Rodney King? An interview by Bill Keller with Jill Leovy, author of “Ghettoside”

<https://www.themarshallproject.org/2016/03/03/what-have-we-learned-since-rodney-kin>

10. “Anti-crime Strategies Should Try to Fix What Makes Hotspots Prone to Violence”

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

More Resources: 2 Books

The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy by Philip

S. Gorski and Samuel L. Perry, Oxford University Press

What Kind of Christianity: A History of Slavery and Anti-Black Racism in the Presbyterian Church by William Yoo,

<https://www.pcusastore.com/Products/0664264670/what-kind-of-christianity.aspx%22>

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

Cease Fire [a Violence Interruption program] is a model.

These are folks who have been on the front lines, in relationship with those who may be prone to or on the verge of violence, to disrupt that pattern. It needs to be replicated much more widely.

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

Session 5: Unmasking the Powers: Guns and Money

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

Opening: Leader welcomes all and leads the Breath Prayer

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

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

Presenting and Exploring:

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

1. History of the Gun Industry: Early guns were made individually by gunsmiths until about 1800 when Eli Whitney opened the first gun factory in the US, mass-producing firearms with standardized parts. During the Civil War, the gun industry expanded rapidly, contracting at the end of the war. To survive, the industry developed generations of campaigns to sell guns to civilians, such as “The Boy Plan,” which defined a gun as an essential step to manhood.



When hunting declined in the 1970s, the industry began to promote handguns. After the Iraq war and the expiration of the original assault weapons ban, semi automatic assault style weapons were featured, with an estimated 25 million sold so far.

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

The firearms industry, alone among all US industries, has been protected for many decades by Congress from liability for the use of its product.

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

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

Courageous Conversations Question:

Even though most Americans do not own guns, the gun industry has been extremely successful in terms of the proliferation and “normalization” of its product.

- What role do you think that fear plays in the business model of this industry?

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

Since then, the NRA has been the key lobby group for the gun industry, with a political action arm that rewards and punishes state and federal candidates based on their opposition or support for gun regulation. For decades, NRA success led to: historic highs of gun sales and proliferation; complete opposition to compromise; difficulty in passing common sense federal or state gun regulation and liberalization of existing gun laws; prohibition on federal funding for research on gun violence; prohibition on gun industry liability; often preventing Congress from approving a director for Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, or from funding it at a level to conduct its work. The NRA also scuttled gun industry initiatives to make guns safer with new technology. The political power of the NRA has been such that Warren Cassidy, a past NRA executive said, “You would get a far better understanding if you approached [the NRA] as if you were approaching one of the great religions of the world.”⁵

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

Courageous Conversations Questions:

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

Closing Prayer:

One: Gracious God,

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

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

All: the children, the parents, the distraught,

One: as well as millions more injured, ruined,

All: orphaned, widowed, broken.

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

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

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

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

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

All: energy,

One: intelligence,

All: imagination

One: and love

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

One: In Christ's name we pray,

All: Amen.

Action:

Find out if your federal and state elected officials/candidates receive funding from NRA affiliates: See <https://www.opensecrets.org/orgs/national-rifle-assn/recipients?id=d000000082>

Sources/Learn More:

1. <https://www.ibisworld.com/united-states/market-research-reports/guns-ammunition-manufacturing-industry/>
2. The Challenge of Holding the Gun Industry Accountable, New Jersey Bar Foundation. <https://njsbf.org/2023/03/27/the-challenges-of-holding-gun-manufacturers-accountable/>
3. Sandy Hook Lawsuit, CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/16/us/alex-jones-sandy-hook-lawsuit/index.html>
4. Everytown Research & Policy, “The Economic Cost of Gun Violence,” July 19, 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/>
5. “NRA Insiders on the Politics of Guns” <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/nra-insiders-on-the-politics-of-guns>

6. Mike McIntire, The Secret History of Gun Rights: How Lawmakers Armed the NRA, 2023
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/30/us/politics/nra-congress-firearms.html>
7. Jessica Dawson, Shall Not be Infringed: How the NRA Used Religious Language to Transform the Meaning of the Second Amendment
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-019-0276-z>
8. Responsive prayer, adapted from the 223rd General Assembly, PC(USA)

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

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

To understand the ascendancy of gun culture in America, the files of Mr.

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

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

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

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

Session 6: Action – Creating a New World

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

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

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

Presenting and Exploring:

Read aloud this story: <https://momentsthat survive.org/tribute/a-mom/>

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

Courageous Questions for reflection:

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

Sessions:

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

Exploring Action: Presbyterian Decade to End Gun Violence

Take turns reading aloud:

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

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

Often sponsored by a church, this project also offers pastoral support and healing to persons and communities that have been traumatized by gun violence. See the NH Guns to Gardens information on Page 47 of this Resource Guide.

Secure Gun Storage: Directly prevent gun violence by promoting secure gun storage and other steps to thwart easy access to guns and ammunition. These steps reduce gun suicide and unintentional shootings by children and others, as well as preventing gun theft and access to guns by potential mass shooters. Learn about “gun smart” technology and how guns could be made safer so that only the owner could fire the gun. Provide free or low-cost gun locks at community events. Learn about a nationwide campaign to promote securing guns from child and teen access at <https://besmartforkids.org/>

Some churches combine Guns to Gardens with sharing a “Gun Safety Card” for gun owners. Others use the Gun Safety Cards in school backpack campaigns or to disseminate throughout a community. Find these cards as a pdf or as packets to order at <https://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence-prevention#gun-safety-cards>

Video: Watch the short video on the two Chicago congregations who received the Peace Fellowship’s **2019 Peace Seeker Award**.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBKK9qfbZm0>

Violence Prevention and Your Congregation:

Courageous Conversation Questions:

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

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

Action:

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

Seek to plan a next step in the near future.

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

Benediction --from Mark 10:46-52:

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

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

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

All: “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Resources/Learn More:

Gun Violence Prevention Congregational Toolkit, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship & Monthly Congregational E-News 80 pages of education, pastoral and action resources, plus groups at work in every state. The Toolkit includes receiving updates in the monthly E-News for Congregations. <http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence>

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

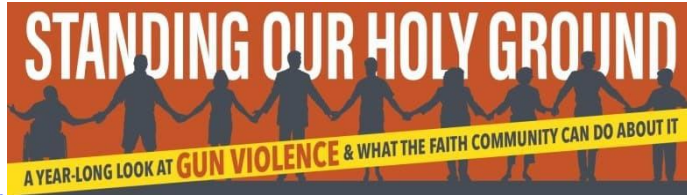
God has provided us with the elements to be agents of change in the world. The change needs to be comprehensive: we need to address the idolatry of guns, the violence that permeates our culture, our obsessions with personal rights over public responsibility, the practices of widespread and indiscriminate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

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

Resources & Take Action

Resources of Gun Violence & the Work of Prevention

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



<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/standing-our-holy-ground>

United Church of Christ National Office Gun Violence Prevention Resources:

This website contains numerous links. The 20th General Synod passage of a resolution entitled “Guns and Violence” inviting UCC members and congregations to advocate for legislation to strengthen licensing and registration of gun sales, strengthen regulations of gun dealers and ban semiautomatic assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition clips. Tested by our grief, resolute in our faith we remain committed to continuing this drumbeat. <https://www.ucc.org/understanding-the-issues/gun-violence-prevention/>

Revisionist History: Podcast by Malcolm Gladwell, Pushkin. Series covers doctors' perspectives, gun rights, the impact of TV westerns, assault weapons and more.

<http://www.pushkin.fm/podcasts/revisionist-history>

Mass Shootings in the United States: Everytown Research, 2023.

<https://everytownresearch.org/issue/mass-shootings/>

Gun Violence Archive: Nationwide gun violence data, recorded daily.

<http://www.GunViolenceArchive.org>

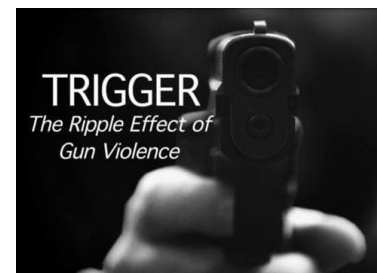
“The Trace”: Independent news source on gun violence. <http://www.thetrace.org>

Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence

Award-winning film by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance frames gun violence as a disaster and a public health issue, moving the conversation away from the polarizing extremes.

It lifts up the voices of those who seek common ground and a new way forward.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sz2a34f8cC4>



Theological & Biblical Resources

Kingdom Dreams: Violent Realities: Reflections on Gun Violence from Micah 4:1-4, a three session Bible Study from the United Methodist Church.

<http://www.umcjustice.org/news-and-stories/kingdom-dreams-violent-realities-bible-study-412>

Each Other's Keeper: Congregational study on gun violence from a biblical, faith and social perspective, Episcopal Diocese of Missouri.

<https://www.eachotherskeeper.org/chapter-3>

Beating Guns: Documentary film reflecting on faith and action in the face of gun violence, featuring Shane Claiborne and Mike Martin, co-founders of Guns to Gardens.

<http://www.beatingguns.com/documentary>

Faith VS. Fear:

UCC 5-Part Bible Study "A Faith Response to Gun Violence".

<https://www.new.uccfiles.com/pdf/faith-vs-fear-bible-study.pdf>

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

Congregational Action Resources

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

Peace Fellowship Video: the example of two Chicago congregations working to prevent gun violence, recipients of PPF's Peaceseeker Award, 8 Minutes.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBKK9qfbZm0>

The Intersection of Faith and Gun Violence PC(USA) Office of Public Witness webinar, uniting public health, theological and action aspects of gun violence prevention.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-9Kl0vTXt8>

Impact of Gun Violence

Ricochet: An American Trauma: PBS News Hour 2023 Special Report on a nation in trauma, 55 minutes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZ2KQhJX1cQ>

Beyond the Bullet: The Cost of Gun Violence - A documentary by WXYZ Detroit about the impact of gun violence on survivors and families, 26 minutes.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZ2KQhJX1cQ>

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

A Suicide Survivor Tells Her Story <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrmZ0wpcTVc>

The True Cost of Gun Violence in America by Mark Follman, Julia Lurie, Jaeah Lee, James West, looks at human and economic costs of gun violence.

<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/04/true-cost-of-gun-violence-in-america>

Statistics

Bloomberg News

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-25/how-many-guns-in-the-usbuying-spree-bolsters-lead-as-most-armed-country?embedded-checkout=true>

Everytown

<https://www.everytown.org/state/new-hampshire/>

Healthdata

<https://www.healthdata.org/news-events/insights-blog/acting-data/gun-violence-unitedstates-outlier>

NH Public Radio

<https://www.nhpr.org/nh-news/2024-01-03/nh-recorded-27-homicides-in-2023-including-four-police-shootings-according-to-attorney-general>

Axios

<https://www.axios.com/2024/01/09/mass-shooting-gun-violence-us-2023>

Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Center for Gun Violence Solutions

<https://publichealth.jhu.edu/center-for-gun-violence-solutions/research-and-reports>

This site addresses gun violence as a public health emergency and utilizes objective, non-partisan research to develop solutions which inform, fuel and propel advocacy measurably lower gun violence. Clear charts and statistics.

The Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence

<https://giffords.org/the-issue>

Interactive website: State by State gun violence charts & statistics; State gun laws; Interventions, Resources and Actions.

Resources on Race, Racism & Gun Violence

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

Gun Violence is a Racial Justice Issue <https://www.bradyunited.org/resources/issues/gun-violence-is-a-racial-justice-issue>

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

Discussion Models

Faith VS. Fear

A Faith Response to Gun Violence. A 5-Part Bible Study
<https://www.new.uccfiles.com/pdf/faith-vs-fear-bible-study.pdf>

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

Common Ground: Talking about Gun Violence in America by Donald Gaffney, a Disciples of Christ pastor from Newtown, CT who attended Sandy Hook Elementary School as a child. A resource for conversation across perspectives on guns and gun violence. <https://www.pcusastore.com/Products/0664264557/common-ground.asp>

Hate Crimes and Gun Violence

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

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

Youth & Child Resources

Youth Lead the Way on Gun Violence Prevention 2017 Resolution Guided in large part by the voices of youth, General Synod 2017 enthusiastically passed a resolution of witness Monday urging the recognition of gun violence as a public health emergency deserving of federal funding for scientific research.

Youth Speak Out about gun violence in a 1 hour and 50 min. video
https://www.ucc.org/gs_youth_voices_lead_the_way_on_gun_violence_resolution/

Statewide Youth Summit on Faith and Gun Violence, WI Council of Churches, Storytelling and Action

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ad9hBRubcm0>

Young People and Campuses Stand Up To Gun Violence a Video of discussion panel

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/videos/young-people-and-campuses-stand-up-to-gun-violence/>

Us Kids Documentary on students from Margery Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL and the March for Our Lives Movement over several years.

<http://www.imdb.everytownsupportfund.org/everytown-survivor-network/resources-for-victims-and-survivors-of-gun-violence/childrens-responses-to-trauma/>

Helping Children with Tragic Events, Fred Rogers

Productions https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/helping-children-with-tragic-events-in-the-news?utm_campaign=&utm_content=1653430501&utm_medium=pbsofficial&utm_source=twitter&fbclid=IwAR1XjAX-u2Bt7Mo-5PPBKorNFtNzE1TWwswSzRSiFAyvgAPVYx3GJouhLZL.com/title/tt1139419

Helping Children and Adolescents Respond to Trauma

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/helping-children-and-adolescents-cope-with-disasters-and-other-traumatic-events>

“For Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe in a Better World” – a Book by Michael W. Waters, illustrated by Keisha Morris, Flyaway Books. A children's book with an honest look at one family's response to racism and gun violence. **Activity and discussion guide to use with children** by the Muhammad Ali Center.

<https://www.pcusastore.com/Products/1947888080/for-beautiful-black-boys-who-believe-in-a-better-world.aspx%22>

Community Action Resources

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

Organize, Learn and Organize Again Lessons from the Gun Violence Prevention Movement. Interview with Miranda Viscoli, Co-President of New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence, PPF Peace seeker Awardee.

<https://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/presbyterian-peace-fellowship-1/organize-learn-and-organize-again-lessons-from-the-gvp-movement>

The Gun Lobby

Price of Freedom HBO film on the out-sized influence of the NRA and its relation to gun violence. View on HBO Max, available free for community groups.

<https://www.filmplatform.net/product/the-price-of-freedom/#:~:text=The%20Price%20of%20Freedom%20exposes,countless%20lives%20along%20the%20way.>

The Gun Machine: How America Was Forged by the Gun Industry by The Trace and WBUR. Podcast on the 250 year history of the US government and gun industry connections.

<https://www.wbur.org/short-run/2023/09/20/the-gun-machine-podcast-american-history-government>

Not Your Grandparents' NRA: How the Leadership of the NRA Puts Americans at Risk

The history of how the NRA changed from a hunting/sporting organization to the lobby for the gun industry. <https://www.everytown.org/press/not-your-grandparents-nra-everytown-for-gun-safety-debuts-new-television-ad-and-report-on-how-the-nra-leaderships-extremism-puts-american-lives-at-risk/>

The Gun Industry Created a New Consumer. Now It's Killing Us Originally published in *The Atlantic* by former gun industry executive Ryan Busse.

<https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/183553>

Unmasking the Powers on the gun lobby's role in creating conditions for a gun violence epidemic. <https://www.fapc.org/event/unmasking-the-powers-of-the-gun-violence-epidemic>

Making a Killing: Guns, Greed and the NRA, Brave New Films.

<https://www.bravenewfilms.org/makingakilling>

Gun Violence as a Public Health Crisis

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

A Public Health Approach to Preventing Violent Crime - an academic program for students of public health and medicine. <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/center-for-gun-violence-solutions/research-reports/the-public-health-approach-to-prevent-gun-violence/#:~:text=This%20approach%20brings%20together%20institutions,widespread%20adoption%20of%20effective%20strategies.>

Surgeon General V. Murthy declares gun violence to be a public health crisis.

<https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/firearm-violence/index.html>

Second Amendment & The Courts

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

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

Proposals for Responding to and Reducing Gun Violence

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

Nine Strategies to Guide Efforts to Reduce Youth Gun Violence,

The Urban Institute.

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

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

<https://giffords.org/report/the-uvalde-report>

The Violence Project: How to Stop a Mass Shooting Epidemic -a book

<https://www.theviolenceproject.org/about-us/our-book/>

Solutions to Gun Violence, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Policy Proposals. <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/departments/health-policy-and-management/research-and-practice/center-for-gun-violence-solutions/solutions>

There's a lot you can do to advocate for gun safety legislation

2- page guide of advocacy ideas: https://www.ucc.org/wp-content/uploads/unitedchurchofchrist/pages/11690/attachments/original/1565625479/Advocate_to_End_Gun_Violence.pdf?1565625479.

Brady

This site is bipartisan and made up of both gun owners and non-gun owners. It has a team of policy experts working at the local, state, and federal levels to pass comprehensive gun reform measures. The website has statistics, up to date status of gun laws by State and resources individuals and group can use to support laws to prevent violence.

<https://www.bradyunited.org/>

Everytown for Gun Safety

By introducing evidence-based solutions in every town, Everytown for Gun Safety works to end gun violence. <https://everytownsupportfund.org>

Church Security

Whom Shall I Fear? A book by Ohio Episcopal Priest Rev. Rosalind Hughes, covers the biblical and practical basis for a nonviolent plan for church security.

<https://upperroombooks.com/book/whom-shall-i-fear/?cn-reloaded=1>

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

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

Community Safety for All Toolkit Form

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScWv3Qu7bRwY4Hn2r0u0yzQX77SMk--i4tO6twyUUyebTeaZA/viewform>

DC Peace Team: De-Escalation Training for Congregations

<http://www.dpeaceteam.org>

House of Worship Safe Spaces Preparedness Resource

Resources from The Insurance Board: <https://www.insuranceboard.org/>

Risk Control Guide for Ministries: <https://www.insuranceboard.org/safety-central/>

Security Resource Guide: <https://www.insuranceboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2023-Security-Resource-Guide.pdf>

A Disaster Preparedness Manual for Churches: <https://www.insuranceboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/A-Disaster-Preparedness-Manual-for-Churches.pdf>

Active Intruder Preparedness Workshop: <https://youtu.be/wxoZHPYkeks>

Confronting Violence in Houses of Worship: <https://youtu.be/ahwlyARlpp8>

Resources from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security:

Protecting Houses of Worship Resources: <https://www.cisa.gov/topics/physical-security/protecting-houses-worship/resources>

Securing Your House of Worship: A Roadmap to Success: <https://youtu.be/54I4t4BdMJA>

DHS Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships: <https://www.dhs.gov/faith>

Guide for Developing High Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship: <https://www.fema.gov/node/guide-developing-high-quality-emergency-operations-plans-houses-worship>

Resources from NH Division of Homeland Security & Emergency

Management: https://prd.blogs.nh.gov/dos/hsem/?page_id=5994

House of Worship - Security Grant Program

New Hampshire UCC churches (as well as other houses of worship) are eligible to seek funding through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP). The program provides funding support for target hardening and other physical security enhancements and activities to nonprofit organizations that are at high risk of terrorist attack. The intent is to integrate nonprofit preparedness activities with broader state and local preparedness efforts. It is also designed to promote coordination and collaboration in emergency preparedness activities among public and private community representatives, as well as state and local government agencies.

What is Eligible?

Churches can apply for a wide range of equipment to strengthen the security of their facilities. Examples of eligible items include:

- Security alarm systems
- Panic alarms
- Shatter resistant and bullet resistant glass
- Security doors and locking devices
- Electronic door controls
- Security cameras
- Fencing
- Security lighting
- Training for active shooter intervention and other security related training can be funded.

How to Apply:

The NSGP is administered by the NH Department of Safety. The application period is typically announced in early spring. Information about the program, including application procedures, eligible equipment, and risk self-assessment forms can be found at this website:

<https://www.dos.nh.gov/grants/nonprofit-security-grant-program>

How Much Can a Church Apply for?

The total grant allocation is based on the Congressional appropriation for a given year and the competition for grants in the state. In recent years, the maximum amount allowed for any one facility has been \$150,000. All work must be completed within three (3) years of the grant award.



Guns to Gardens - New Hampshire

About Guns to Gardens:

Guns to Gardens is a nationwide, grassroots movement which began in response to gun violence in our country. It is an effort to reduce the number of unwanted guns and, thereby, gun deaths. National supporting organizations include tools and The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship.

Guns to Gardens events are hosted across the country, with a major day of action in June during Gun Violence Awareness Month.

Guns to Gardens - NH provides an opportunity for Granite Staters to responsibly remove *unwanted* firearms from their homes without putting them back on the market. Instead, these guns are transformed into garden tools and works of art - objects more useful, and less harmful to our community.

Why Guns to Gardens?

Under state law, New Hampshire law enforcement is prohibited from operating a voluntary gun give back or buy back or destroying firearms which come into their possession. Any firearm surrendered to the police may only be used by the police, stored, or sold at public auction.

Guns to Gardens provides an alternative for families seeking to voluntarily relinquish firearms without putting them back out on the market. Whether a veteran disposing of a firearm they no longer want in the home, new parents eager to protect their children, gun owners removing firearms from easy reach of family and friends **in** crises, or community members generally wary of escalating gun violence: previous NH Guns to Gardens participants have made it clear this is a valuable program in New Hampshire.

The Urgency of Our Work:

Firearms are now the leading cause of death for American children. More than 2/3rds of school shooters acquired the firearm(s) used in their attacks from **either their own home or that of a relative. Over 75% of firearms used in youth suicide attempts and unintentional firearm injuries came from the residence of the victim, a relative, or a friend.** Three out of four children know the location of their parent's gun in the home, while one in three of these children admitted to handling the gun unsupervised.

Meanwhile, in New Hampshire an average of 141 people die by guns each year, and another 133 are wounded. Of the gun deaths in our state, 88% are gun deaths by suicide. We have a gun violence problem in New Hampshire - particularly regarding gun deaths by suicide. According to the Annals of Internal Medicine, **access to a gun triples the risk of death by suicide.**

Our Success to Date:

Our first two events have already collected 50 firearms from Granite Staters.

In June 2023, GunSense NH, the NH Council of Churches, Kent Street Coalition, and other members of the NH Gun Violence Prevention Coalition hosted our first-ever "Guns to Gardens" event at the Concord Wesley United Methodist Church. Seventeen volunteers assisted Granite Staters in disabling unwanted guns, using ATF guidelines to cut them into pieces leaving only scrap metal and wood. There were 31 guns disabled during the inaugural event, including an AR-15 rifle and five handguns.

In June 2024, the NH Conference of the United Church of Christ and the Greater Concord Interfaith Council join as new sponsors, and a second Guns to Gardens event was held. Another 19 guns - including handguns, high-capacity rifles, and an AR-15 - were collected. Thanks to contributions from the UCC, the Greater Concord Interfaith Council and other donors, \$25 gas gift cards were offered to participants to help defray the cost of traveling to Concord.

Now, gunstocks from rifles collected at these events have been turned into beautiful small bowls by League of NH Craftsmen member Steve Frye. The rifle barrels have been hammered into garden tools and pendant necklaces by Jim Curry from Swords to Ploughshares NE, a part of the RAWtools network. Artisans Doug Finkel and Kathleen Dustin transformed parts of the guns collected into wooden spoons, a stunning necklace, and a flute.

These items were auctioned off at a celebration event in May and an online auction in June - providing funding for continuing our efforts in New Hampshire. The May celebration included a Guns to Gardens live forge demonstration of how to transform a rifle barrel into a garden tool; those in attendance also had the opportunity to make their own heart pendant necklace from a rifle barrel. Our committee hopes to continue the tradition of celebration and auction each year.

Growing NH Guns to Gardens

Our goal is to use our initial events as a catalyst to introduce and engage other organizations and churches around the state to host their own Guns to Gardens event with support from our team. Our statewide team has worked hard to secure equipment to loan and expertise to share, with the goal of expanding our reach together.

How You Can Help!

We have a small and mighty dedicated NH Guns to Gardens Statewide Planning Committee, but we need more help. Can you:

- Join our NH Guns to Gardens Statewide Planning Committee?
- Spread the word about NH Guns to Gardens?
- Make a donation or recommend funding sources for the project?
- Encourage your congregation or organization to host or sponsor an event?

Contact: nancybrown@granitestateprogress.org.

Thank you, and we hope you can join in this moving and transformational effort!



Volunteers chopping up a handgun



Volunteer chopping a rifle



Hammering a rifle barrel into a trowel



Volunteer playing flute he made from a rifle



Making a heart pendant



Our amazing volunteers



Volunteers creating art from pieces of dismantled guns

Photos by Becky Field

PASTORAL RESOURCES

Emergency Response: Resources for Times of Gun Violence

How to Respond to Public Violence:

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

Tapestry: Reweaving the Fabric of Community After Public Violence –

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

Tapestry Study Guide:

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

Responding to Human Caused Disasters:

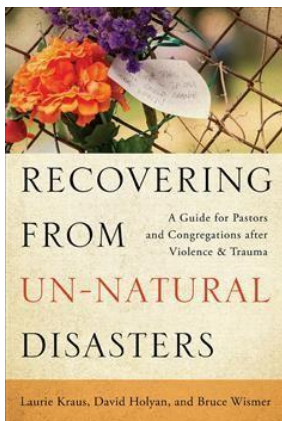
<https://pda.pcusa.org/situation/hcd/>

Worship Resources for Use in the Wake of Gun Violence: Bishops

United Against Gun Violence

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

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



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

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

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

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



Scripture Passages for Addressing Gun Violence

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

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

**from "This is My Father's World"*

OLD TESTAMENT

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

NEW TESTAMENT

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

Sample Sermon – Inaction is an Action (And Silence Speaks)

by Rev. Dr. Ben Trawick, Grace Presbyterian Church, Springfield, VA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFjlxCH65E8>

HYMNS Relating to Gun Violence

Isaiah the Prophet has
Written of Old

Comfort, Comfort You My
People

My Soul Cries Out/Canticle of the
Turning

Isaiah the Prophet has
Written of Old

Comfort, Comfort You My
People

My Soul Cries Out/Canticle of the
Turning

Isaiah the Prophet has
Written of Old

Comfort, Comfort You My
People

My Soul Cries Out/Canticle of the
Turning

Seek Ye First

God of Grace and God of Glory

Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life

O for a World

When Will People
Cease Their Fighting

When a Poor One

Near to the Heart of God

O Lord of Life

Where'er They Be Other

Let There be Peace on
Earth

O God, We Bear the Imprint of Your
Face

Live into Hope

Abide with Me

O Day of Peace

Make Me a Channel of Your Peace

If We Just Talk of Thoughts and Prayers

Tune: O WALY WALY

Hymn text by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. All rights reserved. Church use granted.

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

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

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

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

More Pastoral Resources are available at
[https://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/
gun-violence-prevention#ppf-toolkit](https://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence-prevention#ppf-toolkit)

See “Section 2” of this “Toolkit

God, Our Nation Feels the Loss

*Tune: Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me”) Hymn text
by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette*

*Written for the Children Taken by Gun
Violence in Uvalde, TX. All rights reserved.
Church use granted.*

God, our nation feels
the loss as our children
pay the cost for the
violence we accept, for
the silence we have
kept.

Rachel weeps for children
gone; God of love, this can't
go on!

Jesus, Lord, we hear you
say, “Don’t turn little ones
away!” May we build a
kinder land where our
children understand:

Every child here matters
more than the guns we
clamor for.

Holy Spirit, wind and
flame, send us out in
Jesus’ name.

May we shout and say,
“Enough!” May we build a
world of love — till the
sounds of weapons cease,
till our young can grow in
peace.

Tune: John Edgar Gould, 1871.

Author’s Note: “A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her
children; she refused to be consoled, because they
are no more” (Matthew 2:18). We are called to do

A Sign That May Be Used

**No Firearms
Authorized
In This Sanctuary
and
Church Building**

Following Jesus Christ's command,
"Put away your sword."
Jesus also said,
"Do not be afraid, for I am with you."