

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT GUN VIOLENCE?

If you are ready to save lives by stopping or reducing gun violence, consider taking the following specific actions. The first fifteen actions listed below are from the policy adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA in 2010. See *Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing the Church for Action*.

1. Take responsibility to build public awareness of gun violence and the epidemic of preventable gun-related deaths.
2. Address the temptation to gun suicide and murder-suicide among both old and young people. Pastors especially should present practical theologies of peace as alternatives to fantasies of power, idolatries of force, strategies of vengeance, and the gravitational pull of nihilism or depression.
3. Design liturgies that call for periodic preaching on gun violence and include prayers for the victims and perpetrators of gun violence and confession of our own complicity in the perpetuation and toleration of violence in all its forms in our culture.
4. Develop focused initiatives that build urban-suburban ecumenical partnerships in order to better understand the problem of gun violence and take more effective action.
5. Lead and join ecumenical gatherings for public prayer at sites where gun violence has occurred. With appropriate law enforcement guidance, support models such as "ceasefire" and other urban gang intervention strategies based on the public health model of addressing the most vulnerable populations.
6. Work with local law-enforcement agencies and community groups to identify gun shops that engage in retail practices designed to circumvent laws on gun sales and ownership. Encourage full legal compliance, support higher marketing standards, take nonviolent action against gun shops and gun shows that are known to sell guns that end up in crime. Start a chapter of the faith-based campaign: "Heeding God's Call." (<http://heedinggodscall.org>)
7. Cooperate with colleges, universities, and seminaries to sponsor regular educational and summer conference events on gun violence and its prevention, in order to raise the awareness of the faith community and call it to informed action.
8. Display signs that prohibit carrying guns onto personal or church property. Due to recent expanded provisions in concealed carry laws in many states that now allow guns to be carried openly, including into houses of worship, we recommend that these provisions be employed.
9. Encourage citizens, hunters, and law-enforcement officials who regularly handle weapons properly to be wise examples in reducing risks and teaching how to prevent the misuse of deadly force.

10. Support state and national advocacy bodies in advocating for policies that receive wide public support to:
 - a. limit legal personal gun acquisition to one handgun a month;
 - b. require licensing, registration, and waiting periods to allow comprehensive background checks, and cooling-off periods, for all guns sold;
 - c. close the gun show loophole by requiring background checks for all gun buyers;
 - d. ban semiautomatic assault weapons, armor piercing handgun ammunition, and .50-caliber sniper rifles;
 - e. e. advocate for new technologies to aid law-enforcement agencies to trace crime guns and promote public safety;
 - f. raise the age for handgun ownership to twenty-one;
 - g. g. eliminate the Tiahrt Amendment attached to annual appropriations for ATF that impedes local law enforcement agencies in their use of gun traces and requires the Justice Department to destroy within twenty-four hours the records of buyers whose NICS (National Instant Criminal Background Check System) check were approved.
11. Follow the recommendations of the International Association of Chiefs of Police and support laws to "require judges and law enforcement to remove guns from situations of domestic violence, as well as from people whose adjudicated mental illness, drug use, or previous criminal record suggests the possibility of violence," and to increase police training in nonviolent proactive intervention.
12. Urge corporate church structures to develop a corporate engagement strategy for working with corporations in which the church may be invested that are producers or distributors of weapons that do not comply with its policies on gun violence prevention, recommending shareholder proposal; and divestment actions appropriate to the integrity and effectiveness the church seeks.
13. Include means through which church-wide faithfulness to these commitments can be monitored, supported, encouraged, and resourced, in order to strengthen especially those congregations most exposed to gun violence. Remain vigilant so that appropriate resources continue to be made; available to help in worship, pastoral care, and public policy work.
14. Partner with other faith institutions to create and sustain a national, activist faith-based social movement to save thousands of lives yearly. e.g. The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship,
15. Distribute studies and information on a regular basis for councils, congregations, and other educational and advocacy uses.

16. Use the 55 minute documentary, Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence (available from the Presbyterian Resource Division for \$20.00. Call 1-800-524-2612). Show it in your congregation, youth groups, book clubs, neighborhood gatherings, etc.
17. Read and engage others in a six weeks study of America and Its Guns: A Theological Expose using the study guide prepared by Rev. Jan Orr-Harter of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. This guide and an index of the book can be downloaded at the web sites of the Peacemaking Division of the PCUSA and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship.
18. Make a bulletin board of newspaper clippings of murders and shootings in your city and post in a prominent place in your church, synagogue, temple, mosque.
19. Join and support national and state advocacy groups like the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, the Brady Campaign, Mayors Against Illegal Guns, et. al. Contact these organizations for listings of responsible state organizations. Read and forward their messages to colleagues and friends and contact your elected representatives when encouraged to do so. (See # 10)
20. Download the "Congregational Toolkit for Gun Violence Prevention" on www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence and sign up for email alerts.
21. Cultivate contacts with our friends in the fields of law enforcement, medicine, mental health, education, psychology, and thoughtful gun owners. Work together to build safe communities by keeping dangerous weapons out of dangerous hands.
22. NEVER PERMIT LOVE FOR NEIGHBOR TO MORPH INTO SENTIMENTALITY AND A "FEEL GOOD ATMOSPHERE" BY AVOIDING TALKING ABOUT THE SUBJECT OF GUN VIOLENCE.

While we take some of the steps above and are convinced we are following God's call, we must never demonize our Christian brothers and sisters whose views about guns are the polar opposite of our own. We must never claim we are closer to God than they for there are earnest Christians on both sides of this issue. We need to walk together into the future in order to build the America we all want for our children and grandchildren. Neither side can have what it most desires for our society without respecting and accommodating the other. But, isn't that how God made the world? We must learn to speak the truth in love to those whose views are different. We must take heart because the polls tell us the vast majority of Americans are not far apart on guns and gun violence. Eighty-six percent of all gun owners and NRA members agree that Second Amendment rights and keeping guns from criminals and terrorists are complementary, not contradictory. What are we waiting for? Let the discussions and the healing begin!

To trust in God is to know that what ought to be done will be done!