

Considerations for Engaging Congregations in Gun Violence Prevention

Gun violence prevention touches every area of congregational life: prayer and worship, pastoral care, children/family/youth, adult education, and social justice advocacy. The daily toll on human life, in deaths, injuries, and the families, loved ones and communities affected, is a concern for all members of faith communities.

Consider how gun violence prevention can be woven through many areas of your congregation:

- **Liturgy:** Through preaching, prayer, hymns, anthems, participating in activities like Rachel's Day, and the Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath, communities of faith are reminded of our calling to stand with the victims of gun violence and to work to prevent deaths and injuries.
- **Pastoral Care:** A healing response to gun violence addresses tragedies in the congregation and community and helps raise awareness of gun suicides and the intersection of gun violence and domestic abuse. Share information on resources like the new California Firearms Restraining Order that provides a way for firearms to be temporarily removed from someone at risk.
- **Children/family/youth:** Emphasize safe storage for gun owners. Participate in the ASK (Asking Saves Kids) Campaign where parents are encouraged to ask about gun safety when they send their child to play at another home.
- **Adult education:** Sponsor discussions, speakers, films, and book studies supporting gun violence prevention.
- **Social justice advocacy:** Engage in letter writing and attend meetings with elected officials to support gun violence prevention, particularly from a faith-based perspective.
- **Public witness:** Display banners, hold vigils, support public events in your community to support gun violence prevention.

Some suggestions on how to bring this work into your congregation:

1. Frame gun violence prevention from a faith perspective, consistent with our honoring the sacred in every human being, and the vision for peacemaking in our sacred texts.
2. Commit to on-going involvement with gun violence prevention as part of the peace and justice agenda of your congregation.
3. Use the language of "gun violence prevention" rather than "gun control." Gun violence prevention focuses on all forms of gun violence: homicides, suicides, unintentional

shootings. Support for reasonable, sensible gun laws is a crucial part of this, and is one of many approaches to gun violence prevention.

4. Be familiar with your denomination's resolutions and resources on gun violence prevention.
5. Avoid the false dichotomy of pro-gun/anti-gun. The movement needs to include people who own guns as well as those who do not own guns. The focus is keeping dangerous weapons out of the hands of those who should not have them.
6. Define gun violence as a public health crisis, consistent with positions of the American Medical Association and other major medical and public health organizations.
7. Educate congregants and the wider community about the importance of, and laws pertaining to, safe storage of firearms.
8. Encourage parents to ask, when their child goes to another home, if that is a home with an unlocked gun. The question can be included with other safety questions that parents often ask. Brochures and hand-outs about the ASK Campaign (Asking Saves Kids) are available at: <http://askingsaveskids.org>
9. Show a film and hold a discussion. (Suggestions are included in resource list below).
10. Hold a discussion using one of the faith based study guides. (Suggestions are included in resource list below).
11. Schedule a speaker and hold a forum. The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence Chapters and Women Against Gun Violence are potential resources for speakers.
12. Sign up for Action Alerts from one or more of the following gun violence prevention organizations: Women Against Gun Violence, the Coalition Against Gun Violence, the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, or Moms Demand Action.
13. Plan now to have your parish participate in the Concert Across America to End Gun Violence on Sept. 25. www.remembersept25.org A bulletin insert that will guide your congregation's participation is available from the Gun Violence Prevention Task Force of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles (contact information below).
14. Plan now to observe the annual Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath, held each year in early December.

GROUNDING OUR WORK IN OUR FAITH

Faith-based Resources for Worship Services, Vigils and Remembrance Events

Christian Worship Resources is the Children's Defense Fund's 40-page collection of liturgies, litanies, prayers, and scripture readings, some of which focused on gun violence:

http://www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/data/2013-sabbath-manual/documents/sabbath-2013_christian.pdf

This guide to help faith leaders speak to congregants about gun violence prevention is a publication of Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence:

<http://faithsagainstgunviolence.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/GVP-Faith-Leader-Guide-Sept2014.pdf>

A range of faith-based resources is available at the March Sabbath website:

<http://marchsabbath.org/#Christianity>

A Litany on the Tragedy of Gun Violence:

https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/peacemaking/pdf/litany-on-the-tragedy-of-gun-violence.pdf

Interfaith Resources on Gun Violence Prevention

Interfaith statements on gun violence prevention are included in the guide from Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence.

A Covenant of Commitment:

http://heedinggodscall.org/sites/default/files/4_pink_Covenant_of_Commitment_to_Act_to_End_Gun_Violence_ver2.pdf

Gun Safety Information

By accurately framing gun violence as a public health epidemic we can more easily look more broadly at the wide range of prevention strategies and incorporate those into our congregation.

Consider these statistics:

- 85% of youths under 18 who died by firearm suicide used a family member's gun, usually a parent's.
- 68% of school shooters used a gun from their own home or that of a relative.
- 60% of all child and teen gun deaths happen in a home.
- Prohibiting access to guns by children is a crucial step in reducing gun violence.

The ASK (Asking Saves Kids) Campaign: Because unsecured guns can result in unintentional shootings, often involving children, this national campaign encourages parents and others with children in their care to raise the issue of safe storage of guns when they send a child to play in another home. The ASK materials include brochures and posters that can be obtained from the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, ksimon@bradycampaign.org

Study Guides

Episcopal Church: Episcopal Peace Fellowship's guide for several sessions of discussion, "Gun Violence Prevention", is available for \$7.50 through the EPF store:

<http://epfstore.myshopify.com/products/gun-violence-prevention-curriculum>

Presbyterian Church (USA): "Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call", is a study guide from the Presbyterian Church USA that provide an extensive faith-based foundation for engagement in this work. It can be ordered or downloaded here:

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

United Church of Christ: Faith Not Fear is a 5-part scripture-based study guide, with resources for worship. <http://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/faith-vs-fear-bible-study.pdf>

United Methodist Church: "Kingdom Dreams, Violent Realities" is a 3-part scripture-based study guide produced by the General Board of Church and Society. <http://umc-gbcs.org/faith-in-action/kingdom-dreams-violent-realities>

California Gun Violence Prevention Organizations

-- Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence has chapters throughout California and the country. You can contact a chapter near you:

<http://www.bradycampaign.org/chapters>

-- Women Against Gun Violence, a Los Angeles based organization, has a Speaker's Bureau, and sends out e-newsletters with information about important actions and local events.

wagv@wagv.org, 310-204-2348. By signing up for the e-newsletter you will get information about local events and timely actions.

The Second Amendment

A factsheet on the Second Amendment is available from the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence in San Francisco:

<http://smartgunlaws.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/2nd-Amendment-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

“The Battle Over the Right to Bear Arms” is a presentation on the Second Amendment by Adam Winkler, UCLA Law professor, constitutional scholar, and author of Gunfight: The Battle Over the Right to Bear Arms in America. This presentation was given at the Rector’s Forum at All Saints Church, Pasadena, CA, on May 12, 2013.

<http://www.allsaints-pas.org/archives/forums/battle-over-the-right-to-bear-arms.htm>

Sign up for Action Alerts

By signing up for Action Alerts from one or more of these organizations you will be notified of timely, effective actions that you can take:

Women Against Gun Violence, www.wagv.org

Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, <http://www.bradycampaign.org>

Moms Demand Action, <http://momsdemandaction.org>

Everytown, <http://everytown.org>

Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, <http://csgv.org>

The Gun Violence Prevention Task Force of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles is available as a resource to your congregation. Contact: Former PCU board member Virginia Classick, vclassick@aol.com or 818-225-0410.