

**North Texas Conference Journey Toward Racial Justice (NTC-JTRJ)
Study Materials on Hate Crimes and Gun Violence**

In 2022, the Clergy of the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church approved a Resolution on Hate Crimes. The Laity of the North Texas Conference approved a Resolution on Gun Violence.

To honor and fulfill the vision of these important resolutions, the Journey Toward Racial Justice Study Materials Committee has written and compiled study materials consisting of theological insights, liturgy, teachings, sermon notes, and practical applications.

The purpose of these study materials is to (1) equip clergy and laity with biblical and theological foundations around the issues of hate crimes and gun violence, and (2) to offer opportunities for Wesleyan formation and Christian responses with respect to these issues.

We are grateful for the Study Materials Committee led by Rev. Danielle Buwon Kim and Committee members Rev. Jessica Wright, Rev. Emma Williams, Chris Stillwell, Sharon Spratt, Rev. Rosalyn Hilburn, and Rev. Dr. Frank Drenner. Thank you for sharing your expertise and time in bringing these study materials to life.

Grace and Peace in Christ,
NTC Journey Toward Racial Justice Coordinating Team

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Gun Violence study material is written by Rev. Jessica Wright.

The Hate Crime study material is written by Rev. Emma Williams.

The resources and next steps are discerned and organized by the study material committee: Rev. Emma Williams, Rev. Jessica Wright, Chris Stillwell, Rev. Sharon Spratt, Rev. Rosalyn Hilburn, Rev. Dr. Frank Drenner, and Rev. Danielle Buwon Kim

The sermon points are written by Rev. Dr. Frank Drenner.



Leaders, feel free to modify the lesson sequences to meet the needs of your context.

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GATHERING, INTRODUCTIONS, AND PRAYER (15 MINUTES)

Gathering with Intention - Touchstones for Creating Trustworthy Space

Leader: We've gathered to talk about a difficult topic. To help us frame our time, we will be leaning on at the Touchstones for Creating Trustworthy Space you received when you came in. I'll read the first one and then I invite us to take turns speaking them into the room as a way of building our foundation together.

Introductions

Invite participants to briefly introduce themselves.

Prayer - Invitation to Brave Space - written by Micky ScottBey Jones based on Beth Strano's original work

Leader: Let us pray together out loud this Invitation to Brave Space:
 Together we will create brave space.
 Because there is no such thing as a "safe space" —
 We exist in the real world.
 We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds.
 In this space
 We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,
 We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,
 We call each other to more truth and love.
 We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.

We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know.
We will not be perfect.
This space will not be perfect.
It will not always be what we wish it to be.
But it will be our brave space together,
And we will work on it side by side.

GUN VIOLENCE AWARENESS (10 MINUTES)

Leader: All forms of violence are detestable, but guns make violence more deadly and more frequent. Every day, more than 110 people in the United States are killed with guns and more than 200 are shot and wounded. The gun homicide rate in the U.S. is 26 times higher than that of other developed countries.

Leader: The effects of gun violence in America extend far beyond these casualties—gun violence shapes the lives of millions of Americans who witness it, know someone who was shot, or live in fear of the next shooting. Here are some statistics compiled from the Center for Disease Control and other organizations by Everytown Research.¹

- **Suicide**
 - When it comes to gun violence in America, 6 out of every 10 gun deaths are suicides. The U.S. gun suicide rate is nearly 12 times that of other high-income countries.
 - Access to a gun triples the risk of death by suicide. Gun suicides are concentrated in states with high rates of gun ownership.
 - White men represent 73 percent of firearm suicide victims in America.

- **Homicide**
 - Four out of every 10 gun deaths are homicides. The rate of gun violence in America is staggering: The U.S. gun homicide rate is 26 times that of other high-income countries.
 - Access to a gun doubles the risk of death by homicide.
 - Black Americans represent the majority of gun homicide victims. In fact, Black Americans are 10 times more likely than white Americans to die by gun homicide.

- **Children and Teens**
 - Firearms are the leading cause of death for American children and teens.

¹ <https://everytownresearch.org/report/gun-violence-in-america/>

- o More than 2,100 children and teens die by gun homicide every year. For children under the age of 13, these gun homicides most frequently occur in the home and are often connected to domestic or family violence.
- o Black children and teens are 14 times more likely than white children and teens of the same age to die by gun homicide.
- Domestic Violence
 - o Women in the U.S. are 28 times more likely to be killed with a gun than women in other high-income countries.
 - o Every month, an average of 70 women in the U.S. are shot and killed by an intimate partner, and many more are shot and wounded.
 - o Nearly one million women alive today have been shot or shot at by an intimate partner. Approximately 3.7 million American women alive today have been threatened with a gun by an intimate partner.

Leader: This is an issue that is important to us as people of faith. At our 2022 Annual Conference, laity from our conference offered a resolution addressing gun violence. The conference approved the resolution to “re-commit to our baptismal vows to resist the evil of resignation and work within our churches to educate and end the evil of gun violence.”²

HISTORY (20 MINUTES)

Leader: The Second Amendment was added to the Constitution as part of the Bill of Rights in December 1791. It reads: “A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” Like all of our constitutional rights, the interpretation of the Second Amendment has changed over time.

Select one of the following methods to share a history of the Second Amendment.

- Option 1 (preferred): Watch this video from PBS - <https://www.pbs.org/video/the-2nd-amendment-explained-syfwc4/>
- Option 2: [Overview: 7 Major Supreme Court Rulings on the Second Amendment](https://www.history.com/topics/second-amendment)³

² Full text is available at https://ntcumc.org/Laity_Resolution_on_Gun_Violence3.pdf

³ The History of Gun Control and The Second Amendment
([https://www.history.com/topics/second-amendment/](https://www.history.com/topics/second-amendment))

Using the information included in the appendix, offer a brief overview of how we have arrived at this moment in history in our country.

Small Group conversation

Leader: Break into groups of no more than five and reflect on these questions:

- What has been your relationship/interaction with guns in your lifetime?
- Did anything surprise you from the background/historical information shared?

SCRIPTURE (20 MINUTES)

Putting the text in context: Use the historical, contextual information below to provide background for the scripture text.

Not much is known about the eighth-century BCE prophet Micah, yet his words and imagery are some of the most memorable in the Bible. Throughout the book of Micah, prophecy alternates between condemnation for injustice and opportunities for repentance. Micah 4:1-2 begins a message of repentance. To appreciate its meaning, we set it in context.

The backdrop for Micah's words was the political situation within and outside of ancient Israel. Micah lived at a worrisome time for Israel. Powerful nations like Assyria lurk in the shadows, ready to invade the Kingdom of Judah.⁴ These external threats mirror the rockiness of the internal situation. Previous years of economic development, coupled with corrupt leaders, have led to serious inequality and violent injustice within the nation.

Micah condemns the political and religious leaders who are actively involved in the oppression of the poor. They “hate the good and love the evil” (3:2) and declare war against the hungry (3:5). Micah accuses them of being cannibalistic towards the people (3:2) and desiring personal gain to the extent of causing bloodshed and widespread corruption. Justice in the courts is skewed towards the affluent and religious teaching can be bought. As a result of such fraud, God chooses to remain hidden and unapproachable: “Then they will cry to the LORD, but God will not answer them; God will hide God's face from them at that time, because they have acted wickedly” (3:4).

Israel is in peril. Their outward security is compromised as powerful nations lie in wait, and their inward security is likewise at risk as widespread injustice has separated them from God. Violence due to self-interest threatens from

⁴ Klaus Koch. *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, p. 104.



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outside and inside the nation. The security compromise is so great that Micah prophesies the flattening of the stronghold of Zion, the utter ruin of Jerusalem (3:12).

The message of Micah 4 comes amidst this desperate situation for the people of God. Against the closing image in chapter 3 of God's city being brought low, the opening to chapter 4 envisions the "mountain of the LORD's house...established as the highest of the mountains, and...raised up above the hills" (4:1). The reestablishment of God's rule is not limited to Israel or Judah. Instead, the unsurpassable height of the mountain declares the limitless reach and universal recognition of God's power and transcendence.

This universal recognition is not only of God's greatness, but also the error of people's ways. Micah's vision foretells of a deep desire among the peoples for change: the heartfelt pangs of earnest repentance. There is a universal hunger for something more, something higher than where they have been mired. The path of violence has led nowhere. Seeking out one's own welfare against others - whether fueled by fear, self-protection, or self-interest - has failed. God's ways and paths are needed.

Micah's prophetic dream points to a time when all peoples will journey to God's presence so God "may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths" (4:2). Micah describes God as the final judge and the nations will travel to God's presence out of their desire to live in peace without violence and bloodshed.

Invite a participant to read Micah 4:1-4 (NRSV):

In days to come
 the mountain of the Lord's temple
 shall be established as the highest of the mountains
 and shall be raised up above the hills.
 Peoples shall stream to it,
² and many nations shall come and say:
 "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
 to the house of the God of Jacob,
 that he may teach us his ways
 and that we may walk in his paths."
 For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
 and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.



³ He shall judge between many peoples
and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation;
neither shall they learn war any more;
⁴ but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid,
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

Small Group Conversation

Leader: Break into groups of no more than five and reflect on these questions:

- What parts of our identities, as individuals or as communities, are intertwined with an unhealthy relationship with violence?
- Where in our world have you seen people coming together to seek out God's justice?

Come back together to share and reflect.

THEOLOGY (20 MINUTES)

Leader: The imagery of Micah's dream is the transformation of weapons into instruments of harvesting food that occurs after the judgments are handed down to the nations. The transformation is not complete until the nations participate in their own transformation. The work that went into creating the weapons will be matched by the human effort it will take to transform those weapons into peaceful instruments.

It is not God who will remove the weaponry. God does not treat the nations as if they are small children who cannot be trusted, taking the weapons away; nor does God magically change the culture. The nations themselves participate in the hard work of their own transformation, changing weapons and cultures of violence into vehicles of peace and provision supporting the welfare of all. This is a picture of corporate conversion – a full, universal repentance.

What is repentance?

Show Chuck Knows Church ep. 108 "Repentance": <https://chuckknowschurch.com/archive/108repentance>

Leader: In Micah's vision of God's Kingdom, security is achieved not through arming oneself and overpowering or intimidating one's enemy, but rather, in acknowledging that our ways of arming ourselves, attempting to overpower or

intimidate our real or perceived enemies, is going to end in our own destruction. Our confession, as will be the nations' one day, is that God's ways are not our ways. Our weapons will not bring us the security we desire. That will only come with the reality of God's Kingdom in our world.

Full Group conversation

- How does our understanding of repentance inform our relationship to gun violence?
- In what ways, large or small, are you and/or your church already engaging in this work?

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE (10 MINUTES)

Leader: At the 2016 General Conference of The United Methodist Church, we passed “Our Call to End Gun Violence” resolution. This resolution calls for the following responses from United Methodists:

1. For congregations to make preventing gun violence a regular part of our conversations and prayer times. Gun violence must be worshipfully and theologically reflected on, and we encourage United Methodist churches to frame conversations theologically by utilizing resources such as “Kingdom Dreams, Violent Realities: Reflections on Gun Violence from Micah 4:1-4” produced by the General Board of Church and Society (<https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/37>)
2. For congregations to assist those affected by gun violence through prayer, pastoral care, creating space, and encouraging survivors to share their stories, financial assistance, and through identifying other resources in their communities as victims of gun violence and their families walk through the process of grieving and healing.
3. For individual United Methodists who own guns as hunters or collectors to safely and securely store their guns and to teach the importance of practicing gun safety.
4. For United Methodist congregations that have not experienced gun violence to form ecumenical and interfaith partnerships with faith communities that have experienced gun violence in order to support them and learn from their experiences.
5. For United Methodist congregations to lead or join in ecumenical or interfaith gatherings for public prayer at sites where gun violence has occurred and partner with law enforcement to help prevent gun violence.
6. For United Methodist congregations to partner with local law enforcement agencies and community groups to identify gun retailers that engage in retail practices designed to circumvent laws on gun sales and ownership, encourage full legal compliance, and to work with groups like Heeding God's Call that organize faith-based campaigns to encourage gun retailers to gain full legal compliance with appropriate standards and laws.
7. For United Methodist congregations to display signs that prohibit carrying guns onto church property.



8. For United Methodist congregations to advocate at the local and national level for laws that prevent or reduce gun violence. Some of those measures include:
 - Universal background checks on all gun purchases
 - Ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty
 - Ensuring all guns are sold through licensed gun retailers
 - Prohibiting all individuals convicted of violent crimes from purchasing a gun for a fixed time period
 - Prohibiting all individuals under restraining order due to threat of violence from purchasing a gun
 - Prohibiting persons with serious mental illness, who pose a danger to themselves and their communities, from purchasing a gun
 - Ensuring greater access to services for those suffering from mental illness
 - Establishing a minimum age of 21 years for a gun purchase or possession
 - Banning large-capacity ammunition magazines and weapons designed to fire multiple rounds each time the trigger is pulled
 - Promoting new technologies to aid law-enforcement agencies to trace crime guns and promote public safety.

PREVENTION (15 MINUTES)

- Gun trafficking
 - Investigate the impact of gun trafficking in your neighborhood, state, country, or community. Find out what laws, if any, target trafficking and what community action has been or is being pursued, if any. Advocate for the effective criminalization of and end to trafficking.
- Universal background checks
 - Find out whether universal background checks are required in your state or country. Advocate for their adoption.
- Background check loopholes: “boyfriend loophole” and others
 - Is domestic violence taken into account in laws around guns in your community? Advocate for awareness of this major topic in gun law – closing loopholes in access, background checks, or other issues.
- Gun violence as a public health issue
 - Learn more about what it means to understand gun violence as a public health issue. Advocate against the cultural and political resistance to approaching gun violence in a public health framework. Support better access to mental health services and suicide prevention programs.

- **Arms Trade Treaty**
 - The United States signed the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty in 2013, but rescinded that signature and its obligations in 2019. The focus of this treaty is to prevent arms from being traded into already dangerous situations. The treaty does not regulate the trade of small arms within nations. Express your support of our nation's ratification of this treaty with your elected officials.
- **Responsible gun ownership**
 - Consider the role guns play in your culture. If owning a gun is part of your culture, make ownership part of a responsible process. Simple steps—such as those around safety, access, and the type of guns available—can ensure that the cultural obsession with self-preservation through the use of violence is not legitimized.

Lift up the further resources for education and engagement listed on the participant sheet.

NEXT STEPS

Full Group conversation

(or with partners as group size/time allows)

- What is ours to do, right now in our community (local, state, or federal)?
- What encouragement and accountability could we offer to each other as we move forward?

CLOSING PRAYER

God, our hearts are broken with pain at the senseless deaths caused by gun violence. Families mourn, children live in fear, and some in our nation respond by arming themselves with more guns with greater capacity to end life. Our disconnection and alienation has caused some to turn to guns for protection and safety.

We ask that you touch our hearts with your love, heal our brokenness, and turn us away from violence toward peace. Help us to transform our own hearts and to seek peaceful ways of resolving our differences. Let our hands reach out and connect with those who feel alone, those who live in fear, and those suffering from mental illness. Let our voices be raised asking our legislators to enact gun laws to protect all in our society, especially those most vulnerable. Let our pens write messages demanding change while also scripting words of hope and transformation. We ask this in the name of the God who desires that we live together in peace. Amen⁵

⁵ Prayer: Let the Shooting End from the Sisters of Mercy
(<https://www.sistersofmercy.org/resource/prayer-let-the-shooting-end-2>)

FURTHER RESOURCES

Organizations

- The General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church: www.umcjustice.org
- Everytown for Gun Safety: www.everytown.org
- Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence: www.faithsunited.org
- Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America: www.momsdemandaction.org
- Community Justice Reform Coalition: www.communityjusticerc.org
- Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence: www.bradycampaign.org
- Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence: www.smartgunlaws.org
- Guns to Gardens: www.gunstogardens.org
- Faith Forward Dallas – Gun Sense: <https://www.faithforwarddallas.org/gun-sense>

Books

- *Collateral Damage: Changing the Conversation about Firearms and Faith* by James E. Atwood
- *Beating Guns: Hope for People Who Are Weary of Violence* by Shane Claiborne & Michael Martin

Movies/Documentaries/Videos

- What's Faith Got to Do with It? Speaker Panel on Gun Violence Prevention (3/20/2022) from Grace Presbyterian Church (Springfield, VA) and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCp1gXfBemg> (particularly 18:50 to 39:40)
- The Armor of Light (2016)
- Frontline: The Interrupters (2012)

GUN SAFETY TIPS

from Safe Kids Worldwide⁶

Store Guns and Ammunition Safely

1. Keep guns out of the reach and out of sight of children by storing them securely. Leaving guns unsecured – on a nightstand, table, or other place where a child can gain access – can lead to injuries and fatalities.
2. Store guns unloaded and secured with effective, child-resistant gun locks in a locked container out of the reach and sight of children.
3. Store ammunition in a separate locked container out of the reach and sight of children.

⁶ <https://www.safekids.org/tip/gun-safety-tips>



4. Use combination locks and safes, or safes that use fingerprint recognition locks. Keep the combinations carefully hidden.
5. When a gun is not being stored, keep it in your immediate possession and control at all times. Otherwise, store the gun unloaded, locked and separate from ammunition.
6. If you carry a gun in your car, make sure to outfit your vehicle with a lockable container so you can securely store the gun when you exit the vehicle.
7. If a visitor has a gun in a backpack, briefcase, handbag or an unlocked car, provide them with a place to store it securely (locked, unloaded, and separate from ammunition) while they are in your home.
8. If a family member or loved one is in crisis and may be a risk to themselves or others, consider temporarily removing firearms from your home. Such crises can involve people who are depressed, suicidal, or abusing drugs or alcohol.

Talk to Your Kids and Their Caregivers

1. Explain to your kids how a gun they see on television or a video game is different from a gun in real life. “A gun, in real life, can really hurt people.”
2. Teach kids that if they see or find a gun to immediately tell an adult about it. Urge them not to touch it.
3. Talking to children about gun safety is important, but it is not a substitute for storing guns securely.
4. Talk to the grandparents and parents of your children’s friends about guns in the home and how to safely store and secure them.

Dispose of Guns You Don't Need

1. If you decide that you no longer need a gun in your home, dispose of it in a safe way. Consult with local law enforcement on the best way to do so.

Other Kinds of “Guns”

1. Apply similar care to non-powder and air-soft guns including BB guns, paintball guns and pellet guns. Used improperly, these other kinds of “guns” can cause serious injuries, particularly to the head, neck, abdomen or eyes.

Overview: Seven Major Supreme Court Rulings on the Second Amendment

Case 1: United States v. Cruikshank (1875)

(KKK and States Rights after the Civil War)

- This case had its origin in disputes over the outcome of the 1872 gubernatorial election in Louisiana — disputes that led to such violence that more than 100 Black people were killed. The federal government charged some of the white vigilantes with violating an 1870 statute making it unlawful to conspire to deprive anyone of their constitutional rights. Part of the charges were that the defendants had taken away the arms with which those killed were defending themselves.
- The justices unanimously freed the vigilantes, saying that the constitutional curbs on seizing guns do not apply to actions of individuals. The Second Amendment, they said, doesn't give anyone the right to own firearms, it merely prohibits *governmental action* to take away their gun as a safeguard against potential tyranny.

Case 2: Presser v. Illinois (1886)

- Herman Presser, a member of an armed citizen militia of Chicago workers of German background organized to counter the armed private guard squads formed by local employers. He headed some 400 of the members as they marched through Chicago streets carrying rifles.
- That violated a state statute against any private militia not licensed by the governor. Presser insisted that prosecuting him infringed on his Second Amendment's right to bear arms, but the justices were having none of it. The Supreme Court ruled that while the federal government cannot limit "well-regulated militias," state governments could. Reiterating the Cruikshank stance, in Presser v. Illinois Justice William B. Woods wrote unequivocally: "[T]he amendment is a limitation only upon the power of Congress and the national government, and not upon that of the state."

Case 3: United States v. Miller (1939)

- This was the first time the Justices looked directly at a Second Amendment challenge to a gun control law; without dissent they continued to emphasize that the amendment leaves lots of leeway for government regulation.
- Under scrutiny was the very first significant federal curb on gun ownership. The 1934 National Firearms Act, passed in reaction to bloody criminal gang shootouts, imposed no bans; it did demand that various guns (those mostly used by criminals) be registered for a \$200 fee. Two men arrested for bringing an unregistered sawed-off shotgun from Oklahoma into Arkansas argued that the law was an invalid incursion on their right to bear arms.

- But the decision found that right was a very narrow one. The opinion by Justice James C. McReynolds interpreted the amendment as applying only to a defensive militia and found that a sawed-off shotgun does not have “some reasonable relationship to the preservation or efficiency of a well regulated militia.”

Shift from Federal Government v. States' Rights and Militias to Individual Right to Bear Arms

- 1968: Haynes Case – found that the 1934 National Firearms Act violated the 5th amendment since those registering banned/restricted guns to the Treasury Department were reported to state governments, who pursued prosecution. Since then, the NFA has been virtually unenforceable.
- 1977: National Rifle Association (NRA) shifted their agenda. Prior to the “Revolt at Cincinnati,” the NRA’s agenda had primarily focused on hunting, conservation, and marksmanship. As new leadership rose to power at the 1977 convention, the agenda shifted to individual gun ownership and a narrower interpretation of the Second Amendment. This began its work as a powerful lobby group from a bipartisan hobby association.

Case 4: United States v. Lopez (1995)

- Alfonso Lopez Jr. appealed his conviction for bringing a concealed handgun and bullets to his high school in San Antonio, Texas — a violation of a 1990 federal law banning possession of any firearm “at a place that the individual knows, or has reasonable cause to believe, is a school zone.”
- The high court threw out the conviction and held the law invalid as reaching beyond the powers the powers Congress claimed it had to regulate commerce. The Second Amendment was not at issue at all. However, this case is a significant part of gun rights history because it was the very first time the Supreme Court struck down a firearms control law.

Case 5: District of Columbia v. Heller (2008)

- This decision invalidated a broad gun control law in the District of Columbia that barred possession of handguns and required that other firearms be registered and kept unassembled, even in the owner’s home. Robert A. Levy, a lawyer who sensed that the Supreme Court was ready to change its views of gun control laws, had rounded up a diverse group of six local residents to challenge the law.
- At the high court, a five-justice majority agreed with Levy’s clients. The opinion written by Justice Antonin Scalia specifically rejected the interpretation that the Second Amendment was exclusively about owning firearms that could be used by a militia, calling that language only a “prefatory clause.” In fact, he wrote, “the Second Amendment right is exercised individually and belongs to all Americans” whether or not they have an intention of participating in a militia.
- In other words, as a general rule, neither the federal nor state or local government can put curbs on individual gun ownership. Scalia did go to pains to make clear that that rule was not absolute — that some gun controls were valid, albeit only narrow ones.



- “Nothing in our opinion should be taken to cast doubt on the 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,” he wrote.

Case 6: McDonald v. Chicago (2010)

- Because the District of Columbia is a federal enclave, some argued that Heller did not apply to the state and local laws. But in 2010, the court held that the same standard applies to all jurisdictions, thereby invalidating a Chicago policy that for 50 years had effectively banned the acquisition of handguns.

Case 7: New York State Rifle and Pistol Assn. v. Bruen (2022)

- A 1905 New York law required people interested in obtaining a concealed carry license to show “proper” or “good” cause for doing so, i.e. a legitimate need for self-defense. The law required that a person go beyond making a blanket self-defense claim and provide context for their need to carry a gun. Similar laws exist in other states including California, Massachusetts, Hawaii, Maryland, and New Jersey. Challengers claimed that these types of laws violate the Second Amendment by placing unconstitutional burdens on gun owners.
- In the majority opinion, Justice Clarence Thomas wrote that “individual self-defense is the central component of the Second Amendment right.” That majority decision stands as a sharp contrast to the high court’s view of the Second Amendment in the first 200 years of its history.



JOURNEY TOWARD RACIAL JUSTICE

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GUN VIOLENCE CURRICULUM Participant Guide

TOUCHSTONES FOR CREATING TRUSTWORTHY SPACE

Based on the Circle of Trust® approach of Parker Palmer and the Center for Courage & Renewal¹

Touchstones are our operating guidelines for holding the meaningful conversations of inner work and trust building. They are Touchstones to form strong boundaries for interactions and are designed to help us reconsider the different ways we relate to ourselves and to others.

Give and receive welcome.

People learn best in hospitable spaces. In this space we support each other's learning by giving and receiving hospitality.

Be present as fully as possible.

Be here with your doubts, fears, and failings as well as your convictions, joys, and successes, your listening as well as your speaking.

Extend invitation, not demand.

This is not a "share or die" time! Do whatever your soul calls for and know that you do it with our support. Your soul knows your needs better than we do.

Speak your truth in ways that respect other people's truth.

Our views of reality may differ, but speaking one's truth does not mean interpreting, correcting, or debating what others say.

Speak using "I" statements.

No fixing, saving, advising, or correcting each other. This is one of the hardest guidelines for those of us who like to "help." But it is vital to welcoming the soul, to making space for the inner teacher.

Practice asking honest, open questions.

Instead of offering counsel or corrections, asking honest, open questions helps us "hear each other into deeper speech." An honest, open question invites an answer beyond yes or no. It also does not have a "right" answer anticipated by the asker.

¹ <https://couragerenewal.org/library/courage-renewal-touchstones/>



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When the going gets rough, turn to wonder.

Turn from reaction and judgment to wonder and compassionate inquiry. Ask yourself, “I wonder why they feel/think this way?” or “I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?” Set aside judgment to listen to others - and to yourself - more deeply.

Attend to your own inner teacher.

We learn from others, of course. But as we explore stories, questions, and silence in this space, we have a special opportunity to learn from within. So pay close attention to your own reactions and responses, to your most important teacher.

Trust and learn from the silence.

Silence, or stillness, can be a gift in our noisy world, and a way of knowing in itself. Treat silence as a member of the group. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words.

Commit to and maintain deep confidentiality.

Safety is built when we can trust that our words and stories will remain with the people with whom we choose to share and are not repeated to others without our permission.

Know that it's possible...

to leave this space with whatever it was that you needed when you arrived, and that the seeds planted here can keep growing in the days ahead.



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Participant Guide

AWARENESS

Notes:

HISTORY

Notes:

Questions for discussion

- What has been your relationship/interaction with guns in your lifetime?
- Did anything surprise you from the background/historical information shared?



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SCRIPTURE

In days to come

the mountain of the Lord's temple
shall be established as the highest of the mountains
and shall be raised up above the hills.

Peoples shall stream to it,

² and many nations shall come and say:

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob,

that he may teach us his ways

and that we may walk in his paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,

and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

³ He shall judge between many peoples

and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;

they shall beat their swords into plowshares

and their spears into pruning hooks;

nation shall not lift up sword against nation;

neither shall they learn war any more;

⁴ but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,

and no one shall make them afraid,

for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

- Micah 4:1-4

Questions for small group conversation

- What parts of our identities, as individuals or as communities, are intertwined with an unhealthy relationship with violence?
- Where in our world have you seen people coming together to seek out God's justice?



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THEOLOGY

Notes:

Questions for large group discussion

- How does our understanding of repentance inform our relationship to gun violence?
- In what ways, large or small, are you and/or your church already engaging in this work?

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Notes:



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PREVENTION

Notes:

Next Steps:

- What is ours to do, right now in our community (local, state, or federal)?
- What encouragement and accountability could we offer to each other as we move forward?

THREE SUGGESTED ACTION ITEMS FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. Gun owners – ensure that your guns are safely stored. If you no longer want your guns, participate in a local gun buyback program such as Guns to Gardens.
2. Contact legislators to encourage universal background checks. Go to the following website and click “Elected and Appointed Officials” to find out your legislators. <https://www.ballotready.org/>.
3. Connect with one of the organizations listed under “Further Resources” for further action or with your local Board of Church & Society.



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FURTHER RESOURCES

Organizations

- The General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church: www.umciustice.org
- Everytown for Gun Safety: www.everytown.org
- Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence: www.faithsunited.org
- Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America: www.momsdemandaction.org
- Community Justice Reform Coalition: www.communityjusticerc.org
- Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence: www.bradycampaign.org
- Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence: www.smartgunlaws.org
- Guns to Gardens: www.gunstogardens.org
- Faith Forward Dallas – Gun Sense: <https://www.faithforwarddallas.org/gun-sense>

Books

- *Collateral Damage: Changing the Conversation about Firearms and Faith* by James E. Atwood
- *Beating Guns: Hope for People Who Are Weary of Violence* by Shane Claiborne & Michael Martin

Movies/Documentaries/Videos

- What's Faith Got to Do with It? Speaker Panel on Gun Violence Prevention (3/20/2022) from Grace Presbyterian Church (Springfield, VA) and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCp1gXfBemg> (particularly 18:50 to 39:40)
- The Armor of Light (2016)
- Frontline: The Interrupters (2012)

GUN SAFETY TIPS

from Safe Kids Worldwide²

Store Guns and Ammunition Safely

1. Keep guns out of the reach and out of sight of children by storing them securely. Leaving guns unsecured – on a nightstand, table, or other place where a child can gain access – can lead to injuries and fatalities.
2. Store guns unloaded and secured with effective, child-resistant gun locks in a locked container out of the reach and sight of children.
3. Store ammunition in a separate locked container out of the reach and sight of children.

² <https://www.safekids.org/tip/gun-safety-tips>



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4. Use combination locks and safes, or safes that use fingerprint recognition locks. Keep the combinations carefully hidden.
5. When a gun is not being stored, keep it in your immediate possession and control at all times. Otherwise, store the gun unloaded, locked and separate from ammunition.
6. If you carry a gun in your car, make sure to outfit your vehicle with a lockable container so you can securely store the gun when you exit the vehicle.
7. If a visitor has a gun in a backpack, briefcase, handbag or an unlocked car, provide them with a place to store it securely (locked, unloaded, and separate from ammunition) while they are in your home.
8. If a family member or loved one is in crisis and may be a risk to themselves or others, consider temporarily removing firearms from your home. Such crises can involve people who are depressed, suicidal, or abusing drugs or alcohol.

Talk to Your Kids and Their Caregivers

1. Explain to your kids how a gun they see on television or a video game is different from a gun in real life. “A gun, in real life, can really hurt people.”
2. Teach kids that if they see or find a gun to immediately tell an adult about it. Urge them not to touch it.
3. Talking to children about gun safety is important, but it is not a substitute for storing guns securely.
4. Talk to the grandparents and parents of your children’s friends about guns in the home and how to safely store and secure them.

Dispose of Guns You Don't Need

1. If you decide that you no longer need a gun in your home, dispose of it in a safe way. Consult with local law enforcement on the best way to do so.

Other Kinds of “Guns”

1. Apply similar care to non-powder and air-soft guns including BB guns, paintball guns and pellet guns. Used improperly, these other kinds of “guns” can cause serious injuries, particularly to the head, neck, abdomen or eyes.



2016 Book of Resolutions, #3428

TAs followers of Jesus, called to live into the reality of God's dream of shalom as described by Micah [Micah 4:1-4], we must address the epidemic of gun violence so, "that he may teach us his ways that we may walk in God's path." Therefore, we call upon United Methodists to prayerfully address gun violence in their local context.

2013 Pew Research on The Demographics and Politics of Gun-Ownning Households

"Overall, about a third of all Americans with children under 18 at home have a gun in their household, including 34% of families with children younger than 12."¹

The conclusion of a 2013 study across 27 nations concludes: "The number of guns per capita per country was a strong and independent predictor of firearm-related death in a given country, whereas the predictive power of the mental illness burden was of borderline significance in a multivariable model.

Regardless of exact cause and effect, however, the current study debunks the widely quoted hypothesis that guns make a nation safer."²

"About half (48%) of gun owners said the main reason they owned a gun was for protection, according to a Pew Research Center survey conducted in February 2013. About three-in-ten (32%) said they owned a gun for hunting. That was a turnaround from 1999 when 49% said they owned a gun for hunting and 26% said they had a gun for protection in an ABC News/Washington Post poll."³

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Is there a connection between the right to own a gun and the right to take a life? What about the right to defend oneself (does such a right even exist) and the right to take a life?

BIBLICAL TEXTS

Psalms 130, Mark 13:1-8, John 16:16-24

What is the purpose of the biblical tradition of lament? How can the tradition of lament speak to the national crisis of gun violence? What conversation can be had between the Mark text, seeing a time of violence and destruction in

¹<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/07/15/the-demographics-and-politics-of-gun-owning-households/>

²<https://www.google.com/url?q=https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24054955/%23~:text=Conclusion%253A%2520The%2520number%2520of%2520guns.significance%2520in%2520a%2520multivariable%2520model&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1673468652857846&usq=AOvVaw36e0QpuOdNjMD5NxVpUpfY>

³<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2013/03/12/why-own-a-gun-protection-is-now-top-reason/>



the future, and the John text, Jesus' words of assurance during times of trial?

Psalm 22

In two of the Passion accounts, Jesus quotes the first verse of this psalm (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34). Why does Jesus quote from this particular psalm?

SUPPORTING QUOTATIONS FROM CONTEMPORARY VOICES

“One thing that we have not done well -- and sometimes are even afraid to do -- in our congregations and pulpits is to tackle biblical texts that are violent. And this is also why we hesitate to talk about gun violence -- we haven't figured out how to talk about violence, and violence in Scripture. Talking and teaching about gun violence has to begin with our willingness to tackle texts in the Bible that are violent. If the text, and our faith, values life -- the sanctity of life, the imago Dei in every individual -- then somehow that has to hit the ground today. If we say that gun violence leads to disregard for human life and dignity and does not recognize the image of God in every person because it takes life away so carelessly, then we begin talking about gun violence as people of faith.”

- Lisa L. Thompson, associate professor and the Cornelius Vanderbilt Chancellor Faculty Fellow of Black Homiletics and Liturgics at the Divinity School and Graduate Department of Religion of Vanderbilt University

“Six, spiritual/moral/ethical reasons the church should work to stop gun violence.

Every person killed by gun violence is born in the image of God.

Every person killed by gun violence is a precious son or daughter of God.

Every person killed by gun violence is a brother or sister in God's human family.

Every person killed by gun violence is a neighbor whom God commands us to love.

Every body that is violated is a temple of the living God.

Every religion in the world, including our own, proclaims a golden rule.

It is impossible to say that we love God and ignore what is maiming and killing our neighbors. It is impossible to love God if we casually accept 30,000 gun deaths every year. We cannot love God, no matter how much we are devout, if we don't care that a mentally ill person in Louisville can buy an assault weapon as easily as going to McDonalds and buy a Big Mac.”

- Rev James Atwood, The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

“Gun violence is most prevalent in areas of the country where slavery was dominant; the same is true for capital punishment; the so-called Bible belt has the highest number of evangelical Christians. What is the connection



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Sermon Notes

between various forms of violence and evangelical faith? Or is this just a coincidence? Jesus was a victim of capital punishment\state violence. How does the Crucifixion speak to our culture of violence?

- Rev Shane Claiborne

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/service-of-holy-communion-in-a-time-of-national-or-international-tragedy>
- <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/sometimes-i-feel-like-a-motherless-child-a-21st-century-worship-resource-fo>
- <https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/51>
- <http://www.gbod3.org/musicdownloads/Gillette-McIntyre-WePrayforYouthOWALYWALY.pdf>
- <http://www.gbod3.org/musicdownloads/Gillette-WePrayforYouthWeDearlyLove-lyricsandcomentary.pdf>
- *Allow Me to Retort: A Black Guy's Guide to the Constitution*, Elie Mystal, 2022