



Episcopal Diocese
of Los Angeles

The Gun Violence Prevention Tool Kit



Introduction

I am a member of Bishops United Against Gun Violence, an ad hoc group of nearly 100 Episcopal bishops who came together to explore means of reducing the appalling levels of gun violence in our society, and to advocate for policies and legislation that save lives. We believe in a God of life in the face of death who calls our church to speak and act decisively against the unholy trinity of poverty, racism and violence.

Gun violence takes the lives of 92 people every single day in this country. Our faith traditions, sacred texts and baptismal covenant all call on us to engage in peacemaking, and in actions that honor the worth and dignity of every human being. So let us all engage in the work of gun violence prevention — in our parishes, homes, schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods.

This epidemic of gun violence calls out for bold and faithful action. The Program Group on Peace and Justice Ministries has provided us with resources to engage individuals and parishes in sustained action to help prevent all forms of gun violence: crimes, suicides, domestic violence situations, and unintentional shootings. I pray that you will review these materials to find ways to join in the effort to prevent gun violence. If by our collective actions we save even just one person's life, it will be truly worthy of our efforts.

Yours in Christ,

The Rt. Rev. John Harvey Taylor
Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles

The Gun Violence Prevention Tool Kit

This gun violence prevention tool kit is the work of the Joint Episcopalian and Lutheran Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention which is made of clergy and lay leaders in the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles and the Southwest California and Pacifica Synods, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The Task Force was formed through a resolution passed at Los Angeles Diocesan Convention, just three days after the December 2, 2015 mass shooting in San Bernardino, California.

This booklet contains a range of resources that address the various forms of gun violence and specific ways in which parishes can be engaged in its prevention. Included are tools for addressing gun suicides, unintentional shootings by children, guns used in domestic abuse situations, and situations in which a person is exhibiting behavior that might be a “red flag” for a gun tragedy. It is our hope that each person will be able to find at least one way among these pages to engage in the work of gun violence prevention. We begin with a question that we hope will one day be answered affirmatively by all persons of faith.

HOW ARE YOU CALLED TO ADDRESS GUN VIOLENCE IN YOUR CONGREGATION?

The following resources, articles, and publications can enable you to discern the possible ways in which you may be called to engage, as clergy, lay persons, individuals, or on behalf of your parish as a whole, in gun violence prevention.

1. Gun violence prevention is a faith issue aligned with our baptismal covenant “to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.” The epidemic of gun

violence, which each day kills 92 people, is an important peacemaking and justice focus of the church. An important resource for how to discuss gun violence as a faith issue is the Rev. Gary Hall's article, "Why Gun Violence is a Religious Problem." It is a chapter in the book *Reclaiming the Gospel of Peace: Challenging the Epidemic of Gun Violence*, Sharon Pearson, editor. You may also find Hall's article at this web address: <https://goo.gl/vTAigs>

2. Consider the many ways that gun violence impacts every area of parish life. Reducing and preventing violence weaves through every area of parish ministry. We hope that in reflecting on this list you will be inspired to begin the process of making your community safer for all.

- **Liturgy:** Through preaching, prayer, hymns, and anthems as well as participating in activities like the Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath in December, National ASK Day in June, or National Gun Violence Awareness Day in June, 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. All of those involved in pastoral care should be aware of the California Gun Violence Restraining Order which provides a way for firearms to be temporarily removed from someone at risk for gun violence.
- **Children/family/youth:** Emphasize safe storage for gun owners. Participate in the ASK Campaign that encourages parents to ask this question when they send a child to another home: "If yours is a home with a gun, is it securely locked up?"

- **Adult education:** Sponsor discussions, speakers, films, and book studies supporting gun violence prevention. Resources for speakers include Women Against Gun Violence, The Brady Campaign, and Moms Demand Action.
- **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, and support public events in your community to support gun violence prevention.

3. Suggestions for getting started:

- Engage the clergy and the church council or vestry to support the work on this issue. An example of a vestry resolution on Gun Violence Prevention, passed at All Saints, Pasadena in October 2013, is available from the Task Force.
- Read the policies of the Episcopal Church on gun safety and gun reform which contains links to the archives of the full resolutions: http://bit.ly/DFMS_GunSafety.
- Consider the ELCA Resolution on Community Violence (<https://goo.gl/sR44Kc>) which can serve as a model for violence reduction work.
- Provide educational materials for your congregation. The Task Force can provide educational materials on a range of gun violence prevention materials.
- Be intentional about incorporating music and liturgy that focuses on gun violence prevention.

- Learn about the experiences and activities of congregations that have a Gun Violence Prevention Task Force that can be replicated in your congregation.
- If you are interested in advocacy related to legislation, contact the Co-chairs of the Task Force about the status of current state and federal legislation.

4. Recommended resources:

- “Remaining Vigilant Against Gun Violence,” by former Bishop J. Jon Bruno, Diocese of Los Angeles, an article that encourages parishes to address gun violence, published in The Episcopal News Weekly, October 12, 2014. <https://goo.gl/EPw3qr>
- Former Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori’s testimony on “Proposals to Reduce Gun Violence: Protecting Our Communities While Respecting the Second Amendment,” presented to the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights on February 12, 2013. <https://goo.gl/LnMTYm>
- The Very Rev. Gary Hall, Dean of Washington National Cathedral through December 2015, preached this sermon on the Sunday following the shootings in Newtown, CT calling on communities of faith to confront gun violence. <https://goo.gl/t0UnH3>
- The ELCA Conference of Bishops adopted “A Pastoral Letter on Violence” on March 4, 2013. The bishops wrote this letter in the wake of the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School. It includes links to a short list of social statements on violence, peace, and criminal justice. http://bit.ly/ELCA_Pastoral_GunViolence

- Lutheran congregations' responses to gun violence in their communities are described in this article from the Living Lutheran, "Congregations Respond to Gun Violence," November 13, 2015. <https://goo.gl/93fhKN>
- "The Gun Violence 101 Cheat Sheet: Responding to the Call to Prevent Gun Violence," published by Church & Society, United Methodist Church. <https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/51>

RESOURCES FOR WORSHIP SERVICES, VIGILS, AND REMEMBRANCE EVENTS

The following are resources for worship, services, vigils and remembrance events:

- "A Litany for Gun Violence Prevention" was written by the Episcopal bishop of Maine in 2016. http://bit.ly/Litany_GunViolencePrevention
- Women of the ELCA provide resources to observe Rachel's Day, a time set aside to begin conversations in congregations about gun violence and its impact on children. The attached brochure gives ideas for Bible study and congregation events. It also includes a litany of lament and hope. <https://goo.gl/FByIKq>
- Alternate hymn texts that lament gun violence and that may be sung to familiar tunes can be found on The National Council of Churches' website. Two tunes are in Evangelical Lutheran Worship, and one is in the Episcopal Hymnal 1982. <https://goo.gl/rLFGjo>
- This guide to help faith leaders speak to congregants about gun

violence prevention is a publication of Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence. <https://goo.gl/0HLuJf>

- A range of faith-based resources, including a number of sermons from Episcopal parishes, is available at Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath website: <http://www.decembersabbath.org>
- “A Litany on the Tragedy of Gun Violence” was written for Martin Luther King Day in 2010 and published by the Presbyterian Church (USA). <https://goo.gl/0qe2hw>
- A liturgy for the burial of a child, which includes a prayer for a child killed by violence, can be found in “Enriching Our Worship 2” (Church Publishing Inc., 2000). Prayers for the death of a child by violence or suicide are included (see page 143-144). <https://goo.gl/LYfrMo>

STUDY GUIDES

1. Episcopal Peace Fellowship’s guide for several sessions of discussion, “Gun Violence Prevention,” is available for sale through their online store: <https://goo.gl/dphxH9>
2. “Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God’s Call,” is a study guide from the Presbyterian Church that provides an extensive faith-based foundation for engagement in this work. It can be ordered or downloaded here: <https://goo.gl/CynZB5>
3. *Reclaiming the Gospel of Peace: Challenging the Epidemic of Gun Violence*, edited by Sharon Ely Pearson (Morehouse Publishing, 2015), has questions for reflection and discussion for each chapter.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. Interfaith statements (from Buddhist, Muslim, and Jewish perspectives) on gun violence prevention are included in the guide from Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence on pages 8-11.

<https://goo.gl/0HLuJf>

2. “Heeding God’s Call,” a faith-based movement to prevent gun violence, has developed a “Covenant of Commitment to Act to End Gun Violence.” <https://www.heedinggodscall.org>.

EPISCOPAL CHURCH GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION GROUPS

1. Bishops Against Gun Violence is an ad hoc group of nearly 100 Episcopal bishops who have come together to explore means of reducing gun violence and to advocate for policies and legislation that saves lives. <http://bishopsagainstgunviolence.org> This group has published a paper in support of universal background checks: http://bit.ly/BUAGV_BackgroundChecks

2. Episcopalians Against Gun Violence is an ad-hoc group of bishops, clergy and lay people disseminating information about Episcopalians who are working, collectively and individually, to curb gun violence. It has joined forces with Bishops Against Gun Violence, and they share a Facebook page and Twitter account (@TheCrossLobby).

3. Episcopal Peace Fellowship’s Gun Violence Prevention Working Group has a range of resources: <http://epfnational.org/what-about-guns>.

Information about its study guide is included in the Study Guides section.

REGIONAL GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION ORGANIZATIONS

1. The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence has chapters throughout California. You can contact a chapter near you: <https://www.bradyunited.org/join>
2. 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. You can sign up for their e-newsletter through their website: <http://wagv.org>.
3. Moms Demand Action: You can connect to a local chapter through the website: www.momsdemandaction.org

THREE IMPORTANT WAYS TO PREVENT GUN TRAGEDIES

1. 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. For more information and to download brochures: <http://askingsaveskids.org>
2. Gun Violence Restraining Order (GVRO): In California you can request a GVRO to remove ammunition and guns from the possession of a relative or household member who poses a danger to self or others. If you can demonstrate to a judge that the individual exhibits dangerous or threatening behaviors, the judge can order that person not to purchase or possess any firearms or ammunition for up to one year. A lawyer is not necessary to obtain a GVRO. For more information, resources, and forms, see the Speak for Safety website: <https://speakforsafety.org>

The GVRO, also known as the Firearms Restraining Order (FRO), creates a mechanism for family members and household members to work with law enforcement to temporarily remove guns, and prevent the purchase of new guns, from persons who pose a potential risk to themselves or others. Family members are often the first to know when a loved one is in crisis and this new tool will give them the opportunity to take action when they believe there is such heightened anger, hate, despondence, substance abuse, or a mental or emotional crisis that when combined with the possession or access to firearms would be dangerous. Prevention is the key here, and everyone's rights are safeguarded with the due process of our court system. We can give a gun back; however, we cannot give a life back. Detailed information about the Gun Violence Restraining Order is found at: www.speakforsafety.org

Implications for congregations:

- Clergy and others involved in pastoral care should be familiar with the Gun Violence Restraining Order information and process for initiating the GVRO in their community, including the location of the nearest courthouse and hours when an application for a Gun Violence Restraining Order can be filed.
 - Make the Speak for Safety fact sheet or brochure visible in your parish. This one-page flyer, available in English and Spanish, can be made widely available in parishes: <http://bit.ly/SpeakForSafety>.
3. Gun Locks. Make gun locks available to parishioners, and to parents of preschoolers if your parish has a preschool.

PREVENTING GUN SUICIDES

A comprehensive approach to gun violence prevention includes suicides, the leading cause of gun deaths. It is essential to understand both the extent of gun suicides, as well as to provide accurate information about gun suicides in order to plan effective preventive strategies.

Means Matter is the focus of a program of the Harvard School of Public Health, which raises awareness about the use correlation between (1) the availability and use of guns as a method of suicide and (2) the rate of suicide.

Here are important facts from *Means Matter: Suicide, Guns and Public Health*, <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/>

- Suicides are approximately 2/3 of gun deaths.
- Although many people who die from suicide plan their act carefully, most don't. When people who nearly died from a suicide attempt are asked how much time passed between the time they decide to commit suicide and when they actually attempted suicide, 24% said less than 5 minutes, and 47% said an hour or less. About 3/4 of suicide incidents happen at home.
- More people use a firearm to suicide than all other means combined. 85% of firearm suicides are fatal. Other methods (with the exception of hanging) are much less likely to be lethal.
- Research shows that if a gun is available to someone considering suicide, a gun will be used.
- 90% of those who attempt suicide and survive—even though making very serious attempts — do not go on to die by suicide later.

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults ages 10-24, and guns are also the most common method of suicide for this group (44%).

SAFE STORAGE OF GUNS

The safe storage of guns can prevent gun tragedies and is a top priority in gun violence prevention. It can avert many gun tragedies, especially those involving children. As the blogspot. Kid Shootings says: “Every gun in the hands of a child must first pass through the hands of an adult.”

Consider these facts and implications for gun violence prevention:

1. 1 in 3 handguns in American homes is kept loaded and unlocked.
2. 76% of children ages 5-14 know where firearms are kept in the home.
3. Almost 2 children a week are killed in unintentional shootings. Almost 2/3 of these shootings take place in a home or vehicle that belonged to the victim’s family. Another 19% take place in the home of a relative or friend of the family.
4. 85% of youth under 18 who died by firearm suicide used a family member’s gun, usually that of a parent.
5. 69% of youth school shooters acquire their gun from their home.

HOW CONGREGATIONS CAN ADDRESS SAFE STORAGE

1. Make materials about safe storage available. The Everytown for Gun Safety “BeSMART” Campaign provides information about conversations parents can have with other parents about accessibility

to guns. You can download an information sheet, “Talking About Responsible Gun Storage,” at www.beSMARTforKids.org

2. Promote the ASK (Asking Saves Kids) Campaign, which encourages parents to ask this question when they send a child to someone’s home: “Is there an unlocked gun in your home?” Educational brochures and a tool-kit with information and other resources are available in the resource section of the ASKing Saves Kids website: <http://askingsaveskids.org>.

3. Observe National ASK Day annually in June. This is a key opportunity to raise awareness of the ASK Campaign in your congregation. Congregations can include ASK information in sermons, have a resource table near Sunday School classrooms, and ask parents to sign a pledge to “ask”. ASK Day materials and resources are available at <http://askingsaveskids.org>

4. Encourage youth who babysit to ask if there is an unlocked gun in a home where they will be caring for children. Youth may use a check-list, where this question is included in with other safety questions. This check-list is available from the Task Force.

5. Educate your congregation about the California safe storage laws and any local laws, if applicable. In California, people are criminally liable for negligently storing or leaving any unloaded firearm on their premises if a child is likely to gain access to it, regardless of whether the gun is actually used or taken away from the house.

6. Make gun locks available, especially to families with children in your parish or preschool. The Task Force can provide gun locks, as well as information about where to purchase California-approved gun locks.

7. Raise safe storage in pastoral situations when you think someone may be at risk for gun violence.

8. Contact your local law enforcement office to learn the procedures for voluntarily surrendering a firearm.
9. For a blog on all shootings that involve minor children, see: <http://kidshootings.blogspot.com>.
10. *Innocents Lost: A Year of Unintentional Child Gun Deaths*, Everytown for Gun Safety, 6/14: http://everytownresearch.org/reports/innocents_lost
12. Laws pertaining to child access to guns (as well as all California guns laws) are available on the website of Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence in San Francisco. See <https://giffordslawcenter.networkforgood.com>.

WOMEN AND GUNS

Both men and women are victims of violence, but violence against women looks very different from violence against men. One key difference in the violence against women is who commits it. In the United States, women are much more likely to be victimized by people they know, while men are more likely to be victims of violence from strangers.

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 94% of female victims were murdered by a male they knew. And more than half of those murdered were killed with a gun. (*When Men Murder Women*, Violence Policy Center, 2013)

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Homicide is also the leading cause of death for women on the job in the United States. In 2006, 77% of workplace homicides were committed with firearms. (2006 Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries).

DOMESTIC ABUSE

From 2001-2012, 6,410 women were murdered in the US by an intimate partner using a gun — more than the total number of US troops killed in action during the entirety of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars combined. (*FBI Supplemental Homicide Data*, U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2001-2013)

Women who are victims of domestic violence are eight times more likely to be killed if there is a gun in the home.

More than half of the mass shootings in recent years — 57% — have started with or involved the shooting of an intimate partner or family member. (Mayors Against Illegal Guns)

Being stalked is correlated with risk for physical violence and gun violence. One study of female murder victims found that 76% of women murdered and 85% who survived a murder attempt by a current or former intimate partner experienced stalking in the year preceding the murder. (*Women Under the Gun*, Center for American Progress, June 2014)

Whenever there is a situation of known or suspected abuse, asking about the presence of a gun is enormously important. In addition, women need to know the laws related to domestic abuse and guns.

The Brady background check system makes it illegal for someone with a felony conviction to purchase a gun. However, in the case of domestic abuse, anyone convicted of either a felony or misdemeanor domestic abuse crime is prohibited from purchasing a gun. This is a recognition of the extreme risk of gun violence when there has been any conviction related to domestic abuse.

WAYS TO HELP PREVENT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

1. Place domestic abuse posters with the toll-free phone number for a domestic abuse hotline in stalls in women's restrooms in all church buildings. The posters provide important information, and are a validation that abuse can occur in any parish.
2. Los Angeles City Attorney Mike Feuer's office makes available information cards in Los Angeles County that provide phone numbers as well as a summary of the most important laws related to guns and domestic abuse. These are available in English, Spanish, Korean and Chinese. These cards can be obtained from the Task Force
3. Increase awareness among clergy and pastoral care staff about the high risk of guns in situations of domestic abuse.
4. Disseminate information about the California Firearms Gun Violence Retraining Order.
5. Provide education about teen dating violence in youth groups.

A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Ours is a country with an epidemic of gun violence. Any factor causing death and injury of this magnitude is properly seen as a public health concern. Health care organizations and providers have long called for a public health definition and approach to gun violence prevention. An understanding of gun violence as a public health issue by the general public would help in reaching common ground on this often polarizing issue, as well as focus our national resources effectively on prevention.

The Center for Disease Control describes the public health approach as a four-step model: Define the problem, identify risk and protective factors, develop and test prevention strategies, and ensure widespread adoption of effective programs. Dr. David Hemenway elaborates on this by emphasizing that the public health approach is population-based, rather than individual based, and is broad and inclusive, examining all possible interventions, including changing social norms, passing new laws, and trying to engage as many people and institutions as possible in a multifaceted way.

Examples of a public health approaches to gun violence prevention are:

- Supporting research and data collection.
- Working to change social norms. Just as awareness has grown about having a designated driver, there can be increased awareness about attempting to remove access to guns by someone who might be at risk.
- Enlisting the entertainment industry in changing the way in which gun violence is portrayed in films and television shows.
 - Supporting research and data collection.
- Supporting “smart gun” or personalized gun technology which would only permit the owner of a gun to fire the weapon.
- Engaging health care providers in including access to guns in preventive health discussions.

Implications for Congregations:

Faith communities have been involved in a number of preventive health collaborations and initiatives. Parish Nurse programs are

a recognition of the importance of healing and care of the whole person. Recognizing gun violence as a public health epidemic can help faith communities move from “it’s too political” thinking to approaching the devastating loss of life and injuries caused by gun violence as a preventive health concern. We can use as models other successful public health campaigns and their effectiveness in reducing, for example, automobile fatalities and injuries, or deaths and illness from smoking.



HOW TO CONTACT THE TASK FORCE

The Joint Episcopalian-Lutheran Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention chairs are available as a resource to your congregation. Please feel free to contact:

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