

Gun Violence Prevention February 2019 Worship-Action Kit for Presbyterians

**Engaging Presbyterian Congregations in Prayer and
Action to Observe:**

**One Year since the Marjory Stoneman Douglas
High School Shooting in Parkland, FL, February 14
&
The Universal Day of Prayer for Students
Sunday, February 17, 2019**



UDPS
UNIVERSAL DAY OF PRAYER
FOR STUDENTS



*Presbyterian
Peace
Fellowship*

**Prepared by the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship
Gun Violence Prevention Ministry
presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence**

Dear Friends in Christ,

On February 14, 2018, a former student entered the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida with an AR-15-style semi-automatic weapon. In 7 minutes, he killed 17 students and adults. In February of 1893, Presbyterians first participated in the Universal Day of Prayer for Students, lifting to God the lives of children, teenagers and young adults. In February of 2019, these two anniversaries coincide in a way that calls the church to take seriously the steps needed to protect students and all of us from the crisis of gun violence in our nation.

In June 2019, the 223rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) marked 50 years of GA statements calling for practical steps to prevent gun violence in America, beginning in 1968. Over these five decades of GA statements, most of us in our local congregations have done little, if anything, to respond. We have not known how to help on this issue. Now our country faces an epidemic of gun violence with over 36,000 Americans killed by guns in the last year alone. Mass shootings claim the headlines but there is also the daily despair of murders, accidents, suicides and domestic gun violence. God calls the church to find its unique role in helping our nation both grieve and change. Dare we pray for our students and not protect them from gun violence?

There is no single solution to gun violence. But, out of the Parkland, FL shooting, a movement has arisen among students to lead us to a new consensus on a range of actions that can work together to save lives. This new consensus requires communities that can bring together those of us who own guns and those of us who do not to find middle ground for change and to see it through. Perhaps this task of bringing people together is the unique role that the church and other communities of faith can offer our students and our nation.

On February 14 and 17, 2019, please use the enclosed materials in ways that best serve your congregation; you are free to reproduce these materials for your worship, study and action needs. Additional resources for education, pastoral care and action can be found at www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence

Sincerely Yours,

Rev. Emily Brewer, Executive Director, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

Rev. Margery Rossi, Chair, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Gun Violence Prevention Ministry



This Kit Contains:

1. A Responsive Version of the Prayer Commended to Presbyterian Congregations by the 223rd General Assembly (PCUSA)
2. Prayers Created by Presbyterian Students for the 2019 Universal Day of Prayer for Students
3. Scripture Reflections
4. Hymn Suggestions
5. Creative Worship Ideas
6. Templates for "Count Me In!" Bookmarks and Prayer Cards
7. More Action Suggestions

A Presbyterian Prayer for Action

From the 223rd General Assembly, PC(USA), June 2018, Marking 50 Years of Presbyterian Witness to Prevent Gun Violence

Responsive Prayer Adapted by Cheryl and Doug Hunt, Stockton, CA
Option: Provide each worshipper with a small Post-It note and pen or pencil

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

We confess our past willingness to abide the deaths
of over one million, six hundred thousand souls

lost to gun violence in the last 50 years:

the children,

the parents,

the distraught,

as well as millions more injured,

ruined,

orphaned,

widowed.

Help us to comprehend this carnage

and not become numb.

We give thanks for the long witness of the General Assembly
and all Presbyterians who are already engaged in preventing gun violence.

We thank you for raising up the students to lead us with marches, walk-outs and a passion born of pain.

We call upon you, Lord;

we have nowhere else to turn.

Galvanize all of us,

every congregation in the Presbyterian Church.

Wake us up in our pews and our lives;

do not let Christ find us asleep on this watch.

Rather, Lord, grant to our church members, both those of us who own guns and those of us who do not, a unity of purpose to change the national debate on gun violence.

Show us the path.

At all the places where you are proclaimed,

give us courage to stand against principalities and powers.

Grant us the joy

of using the gifts that you provide –

energy,

intelligence,

imagination

and love—

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

In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

******Option: At this point in the prayer, let us stop and think for a moment and remember a person you know (or a group of people) who has been a victim of gun violence. Write that name on your Post-It note.*

Option: Later during the worship, invite worshippers to bring or pass their Post-It note forward to place the notes on a central table or cross or a sign to be displayed.

Prayers for the Universal Day of Prayer for Students

These prayers were written by students in the First Presbyterian Church of Yorktown, NY Middle and High School Youth Groups. There are two Prayers of Confession, a Psalm of Lament and a Litany of Remembrance and Advocacy. We thank the adult leaders who worked with these students: Timothy Wotring, Jen Burns, Stephen Thompson, Christian Pisco and Rev. Margery Rossi. We also thank Rev. Tami Seidel and Stephanie Hare, for permission to distribute these prayers throughout the denomination.

Prayer of Confession #1

Gracious God,
You are generous in forgiveness
You are with us, lovingly guiding us
You encourage us to be our best

We confess that we have not done our best in protecting our children.
Lockdowns in school put students in a negative, stressed, and pressured environment;
they distract them from their education and goals.
Gun laws could improve a lot,
yet lawmakers seem more concerned with money than people's lives.
Mental Health, too, is not being addressed in schools;
students are suffering in silence.

Yet, you, O God, call us to do right and create a world at peace.

To do so:
We should create a culture where peers can talk to each other without fear of being judged.
Group discussions should be the norm, and not the exception.
Teachers should also be trained in facilitating such conversations.
Schools should have more accessible therapists;
ones who make the first move in talking with students;
ones who are authentic and genuine.
We should educate others on how guns should not be used for clout
and the danger of these weapons.

May we strive to live without fear and strife.
God, grant us a good and fresh start. Amen.

- Joshua, Grade 6; Lionel, Grade 9; Marina, Grade 9; Tiffany, Grade 11

Prayer of Confession #2

Almighty God,
We confess that we can't solve the problem of gun violence, that we started,
and we aren't ready for anything that is to come.
All of our "solutions" are just avoiding the *real* problem.
We ask for forgiveness, for instead of finding solutions for gun violence,
we practice non-effective lockdown drills.
This is not good enough and it keeps happening.
We hope that we can find permanent solutions to stop gun violence,
such as having a better understanding of mental illnesses;
figuring out where the guns are going,
who has them and what they plan to do with them.
We hope we can convince people to stop using guns for violence. Amen.

-Anthony, Grade 9; Brynne, Grade 7; Jonathan, Grade 9; Kithara, Grade 6

Psalm of Lament

Dear God,
Students everywhere are suffering
Bullets are raining down on them and nothing is changing.
We have faith that through your work in the world, things will get better.
We have faith that you will end the cycle of gun violence.
Please help our leaders to create sensible gun laws
and bring safety into our hallways and classrooms.
We praise you in our everyday lives and give thanks for your never ending love.
-Ben, Grade 9; Emma, Grade 9; Ethan, Grade 10; Julia, Grade 7

Litany of Remembrance and Advocacy

Let us remember our fellow students
who have fallen to people with malcontent in their hearts and guns in their hands.
We will stand up against gun violence.
Let us remember the teachers, school administrators and others
who have died trying to keep kids safe.
We will stand up against gun violence.
Let us remember the innocent people who die every day from needless gun violence.
We will stand up against gun violence.
Let our students go to school without fear of violence
or lockdown drills that don't solve anything.
We will stand up against gun violence.
Let us take a stand and get guns out of the hands of people who could abuse them.
We will stand up against gun violence.
Let us take action against racism,
a primary cause of unreasonable police shootings of young people of color.
We will stand up against gun violence.
Let us take *real* action and stand behind our "thoughts and prayers"
instead of speaking empty words.
Let this be a call to all people in the community to work for a new era of gun laws.
We will stand up against gun violence.

-Faith, Grade 9; Luke, Grade 11; Natalie, Grade 12; Sam, Grade 7



Scriptures

Isaiah 11

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat...
and a little child shall lead them....
They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain
and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God
as the waters cover the sea.

Matthew 18:1-6

The disciples came unto Him, saying,
“Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”
And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them
and said, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little
children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.
Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest
in the kingdom of heaven.
And whosoever shall receive one such little child in my name receives me.
But whosoever shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were
better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were
drowned in the depth of the sea.”

Lectionary Scriptures for Feb. 17, 2019

Both Jer. 17:5-10 and Psalm 1 ask: In what do we place our trust? Where does our security and well-being come from? How does this relate to gun violence?

1 Cor. 15:12-20 challenges us to affirm that the witness of Christ has not ended with death, but that resurrection is real and present.

Luke 6:17-26 offers the teaching of Jesus in the “Beatitudes and Woes.” In the context of gun violence, what does it mean to us to say, “Blessed are you who weep now” and what strength for action do we receive from these words?



Student Walkout at Wachtung Hills High School, NJ

Hymns

Gun Violence Prevention Hymns by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette www.carolynshymns.com
Permission Given for Worship/Action Use:

I Cried to God Tune: Finlandia
https://www.carolynshymns.com/i_cried_to_god.html

If We Just Talk of Thoughts and Prayers* Tune: O Waly, Waly
https://www.carolynshymns.com/if_we_just_talk_of_thoughts_and_prayers.html

God of Mercy, You have Shown Us Tune: Beach Spring
https://www.carolynshymns.com/god_of_mercy_you_have_shown_us.html

God, We Have Heard It Tune: Ah, Holy Jesus
https://www.carolynshymns.com/god_we_have_heard_it.html

From the blue *Presbyterian Hymnal*:

- 3 Comfort, Comfort You My People
- 332 Live into Hope
- 333 Seek Ye First
- 337 Isaiah the Prophet has Written of Old
- 385 O God, We Bear the Imprint of Your Face
- 386 O for a World
- 401 When Will People Cease Their Fighting
- 407 When a Poor One
- 408 Where Cross the Crowded Way of Life
- 420 God of Grace and God of Glory
- 434 Today We All Are Called to be Disciples of the Lord
- 450 O Day of Peace
- 543 Abide with Me
- 527 Near to the Heart of God
- 530 O Lord of Life, Where'er They Be

From *Glory to God Hymnal*:
100 My Soul Cries Out/Canticle of the Turning
753 Make Me a Channel of Your Peace

Other:
Let There be Peace on Earth

***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.
--Carolyn Winfrey Gillette**

Photos, Left: High School Student Walk Out, 2018.
Right: Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Student Survivors and Parent of one of the Shooting Victims on a panel discussion about student action to prevent gun violence.



Creative Worship Ideas

1. Hearts of Prayer



This activity reminds us that the shooting in Parkland, FL occurred on Valentine's Day, 2018. Include a foam or cardboard or construction paper heart with each bulletin. Provide a basket with markers in it at the end of each pew. At the front of the sanctuary, on the communion table set up an unadorned wreath and containers with pearl-headed sewing pins.

Invite worshippers to write a name or names on the heart for a student or other person whose safety and well-being they want to lift before God. Offer the following prayer, and the opportunity to come forward and pin hearts to the wreath. You could do this before or after the Offering, or as the Prayers of the People.

Loving God, you care for all of us. You calm our hearts and quell our fears. We lift up to you the young people in our care, in our Sunday Schools, our home, our local schools and our lives. We lift up to you the children we know, and those we don't and never will know. We lift up to you the students who fear for their safety and long to know they can learn in communities of peace and security. We place them in your loving hands, naming aloud and in our hearts those for whom we especially care:

(At this time, you may bring forward to your heart, saying the name/s aloud, or simply attaching them with the decorative pins to the wreath in silence. Once all have had the opportunity to come forward, continue with these words:)

We thank you for your abiding love and trust in your grace and peace, now and forever, Amen.



After worship, hang the wreath in a place that recognizes the importance of children and youth – on the CE Director's office door, the entrance to the nursery or Youth Group Room, etc.

2. Prayer Flags

Materials needed: rope or ribbon, fabric squares about 5 x 7" in different colors, markers or pens and some way to clip, sew or glue the flags to the rope. Participants can write or draw a message or prayer for the well-being and safety of students or others. Display the prayer flag.

After an incident of gun violence in America, make prayer flags and send them to the Presbyterian Church or Presbytery office nearest the attack, inviting them to hang the flags outside their building as a sign of our mutual grief and support.

See this idea in the Gun Violence Prevention Congregational Toolkit on p. 46 at <https://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence/congregational-toolkit/>



The Count Me In! Campaign

The Count Me In! Campaign encourages more and more Presbyterians to make a commitment to **do something** in their local church and community to help prevent gun violence. We are looking for thousands of local Presbyterians to hear God's call to them.

The campaign resources below can be used in your local church or presbytery, as helpful to you. Prayer is a key part of this campaign, asking God to help us become **active solution-finders** and not passive observers of the gun violence epidemic in our country. Find "Count" resources at www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence/count-me-in



Count Me In! 10 Ways Your Church Can Help Prevent Gun Violence

1. Form a study group with the help of the Gun Violence Prevention Congregational Toolkit presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence/resources
2. Invite church youth to form a chapter of Students Demand Action
3. Host a screening of the documentary *Trigger* or *The Presbyterian Outlook* webinar, "Engaging the Holy Work of Gun Violence Prevention" at pres-outlook.org
4. Hold an "Offering of Letters" service.
5. Take and share the **Citizen's Test on Gun Violence in America**. See tinyurl.com/ppfgvpquiz
6. Visit elected officials on background checks & banning assault weapons
7. Hold a prayer vigil for victims of gun violence
8. Create a public display, like a t-shirt memorial.
9. Host an open candidates' forum on the topic of gun violence.
10. Post a **No Guns in God's House** sign.

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

1. Bookmark – 2 sides: Ten Ways Your Church Can Help Prevent Gun Violence & Prayer for Action, download and print.

2. Prayer Card – 2 sides: Ten Ways America Can Prevent Gun Violence & Prayer for Action, download and print.

3. Count Me In! Buttons and Logo – Download the Count Me In! logo for newsletters, church bulletin, etc. Order buttons for \$1 each, including postage.

4. Gun Violence Prevention E-news Sign-Up – A nationwide online network to share our local church gun violence prevention projects, challenges and to encourage one another in this holy work. If you order or download any of these Count Me In! resources, or the PPF Toolkit, you will receive a short, periodic e-news with updates on what churches are doing, new education resources and action efforts. Or sign up at JanOH4@aol.com

A Presbyterian Prayer for Action

Gracious God, whose mercy never ends, whose Spirit brings the Kairos moment for change: We confess our past willingness to abide the deaths of over one million, six hundred thousand souls lost to gun violence since 1968 -- the children, the parents, the distraught, as well as millions more injured, ruined, orphaned, widowed. Help us to comprehend this carnage and not become numb.

We give thanks for the long witness of the General Assembly and all Presbyterians who are already engaged in preventing gun violence. We thank you for raising up the students to lead us with marches, walk-outs and passion born of pain.

We call upon you, Lord; we have nowhere else to turn. Galvanize all of us, every congregation in the Presbyterian Church. Wake us up in our pews and our lives; do not let Christ find us asleep on this watch. Rather, Lord, grant to our church members, both those of us who own guns and those of us who do not, a unity of purpose to change the national debate on gun violence. Show us the path.

At all the places where you are proclaimed, give us courage to stand against principalities and powers. Grant us the joy of using the gifts that you provide -- energy, intelligence, imagination and love-- to help our communities and our nation heal from this tragedy and sorrow. In Christ's name we pray, **Amen**.

Commended to the Churches by the 223rd General Assembly, PC(USA)

More Action Suggestions

This February 2019 Kit will have updates as more national actions for February 2019 are announced. As we go to press, the March for Our Lives Parkland student-led organization has not yet announced its plans for the one year anniversary of the shooting. Stay tuned.

1. Find Local Actions Near You: www.everytown.org/act

Everytown for Gun Safety is the national organization that sponsors Students Demand Action and Moms Demand Action, with chapters in all 50 states.

2. Memorial to the Lost – This idea involves a public display of personal items that symbolize gun victims, such as pairs of shoes for each victim. You can do this for a single incident or for all victims in your city/state over a period of time. Collect donated shoes for the display. Contact your local media and officials.



3. T-Shirt Display Witness – Photo, *right*, shows the T-Shirt Display Witness at the Druid Hills Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, GA after the Feb. 14, 2018 shooting in Parkland, FL. Enlist several groups in your church --- youth, adults, men, women, choir, others –to work together to assemble crosses or other displays, as well as t-shirts. You might want to create a hand-out for those who view the display to explain it and to share the vision of your congregation for preventing gun violence in America.

4. March 2019 -- Anniversary of March 24, 2018 March for Our Lives – Watch for announcements and start planning your own local actions. Photo, *right*, Bethany Presbyterian Church, San Bruno, CA at the March for Our Lives 2018. www.marchforourlives.com



5. Offering of Letters Service –See the Gun Violence Prevention Congregational Toolkit for a worship service that includes letters to your elected officials as an act of faithfulness. www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence/congregational-toolkit

6. Legislation for Universal Background Checks -- National and local gun violence prevention groups are joining together in 2019 for a national campaign for Universal Background Checks on all gun sales, including gun shows. See #BreakThePattern

In 2018, we have accomplished two national steps on the long road to preventing gun violence: the action of Congress to fix the National Background Check System and the decision of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to prohibit the future sale of “bump stocks,” such as the device used by the 2018 Las Vegas shooter to kill 58 people and to injure 851 others. For 2019, please join in the work for Universal Background Checks, supported by over 90% of Americans.

7. Mothers’ Day 2019 Actions – Moms Demand Action and other groups will plan actions around May 12, 2019. What can you plan? Please send your ideas to share with other congregations to: gvp@presbypeacefellowship.org

8. E-News -- Learn what other congregations are doing in the monthly Peace Fellowship Gun Violence Prevention E-news. To subscribe, download the free Congregational Toolkit at www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence/congregational-toolkit or contact janoh4@aol.com

9. Need encouragement or advice on this journey? Contact Deanna Hollas of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Gun Violence Prevention Ministry at 214-702-2265.