**Dear Committee on Addressing Violence in the USA**,  

Greetings from the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship as you prepare to serve at the 225th General Assembly. We share grief with you on the need for this new GA committee. Violence in our nation brings sorrow daily. But we also share gratitude for the presbyteries and agencies that have prepared items for you to consider which show the readiness of Presbyterians to help reduce violence and start healing our nation. **With a few editing suggestions below, we support every item of business before your committee.**  

Because reducing violence is the focus of our work, we offer a few comments here. Thank you for reading.

As you act, have courage! And have a great experience in this hybrid GA. Please call on us if we can help or join the Facebook community: presby's following GA225  

Sincerely,  

Rev. David Ensign, PPF Interim Executive Director  
info@presbypeacefellowship.org

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**[VIOL-01] Regarding Our Commitment to Gun Violence Prevention** This excellent overture was referred from 2020. We are grateful to the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy & the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program for taking initiative in 2021 to fulfill the intent of Overture [VIOL-01] by creating the report in [VIOL-07] below, rather than waiting another two years. Sharing their sense of urgency, PPF suggests that [VIOL-01] could be answered by passing [VIOL-07] **Gun Violence Report and Recommendations** below. If the agenda does not accommodate this, one option is for committee members to move, second and vote that item [01] be tabled until after the vote on item [07].

**[VIOL-02] A Resolution on Preventing, Reporting, and Responding to Bullying, Harassment, and Assault – from the Advocacy Committee on Women’s Concerns** The entire issue of bullying merits our focus. PPF supports passage of this item about bullying and abuse in the church. We support and encourage actions to make all PCUSA gatherings such as General Assemblies more transparent to all and more protective of all participants from abuse and exploitation.

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**[VIOL-04] On Encouraging Our Churches to Counter Polarization in Our Society** This action could be strengthened with editing by the committee to clarify that the church is not calling for the absence of conflict, but rather for setting an example of respectful disagreement. We support the focus on repentance for words spoken in disrespect, discernment in navigating pain and conflict, and respect in times of disagreements. We value unity, but we also know that Christian witness has included taking prophetic stances on issues that were highly polarized in their time, such as standing up for women’s ordination as Ruling and Teaching Elders, those who opposed popular wars or supported LGBTQIA+ affirmation and antiracist social action over many years. **PPF supports committee editorial improvement to VIOL-04**, such as a change of its thesis statement from “encouraging our churches to counter polarization” to “encouraging our churches to engage difference with intentionality and respect.”

**[VIOL-05] On Advocating for a Reduction in Firearm Violence** We support this overture as written over two years ago. Though it re-states current General Assembly positions on gun violence prevention, we appreciate the need to honor the pain of the Synod of the Covenant and other synods and presbyteries that have experienced mass shootings. We welcome this action to remind us that no single step will end gun violence, but that several steps working together can reduce mass shootings, suicide, homicide, accidents and domestic gun violence.  

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[VIOL-06] Resolution on “Lift Every Voice: Democracy, Voting Rights, and Electoral Reform” from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy. PPF supports this action. We will lift up these issues on Sun. July 3 when PPF presents the 2022 Peacemaker Award to Rev. Bart Smith of Tucson, AZ for his participation in a hunger strike for voting rights.

[VIOL-07] Gun Violence Report and Recommendations Calls for a 10-year project, the Decade to End Gun Violence, for all levels of the church and new resources for congregations and pastors. It updates the pioneering 2010 policy, “Gun Violence, Gospel Values,” to reflect new thinking about the intersection of gun violence, race, poverty and racism, as well as the rise of mass shootings with assault weapons. We welcome this new policy and, as part of the Presbyterian family, our group pledges to help. Advocacy points include law enforcement reform. The committee could expand this to endorse local community efforts for alternatives to armed policing where possible.

We support funding for this mission, including funds for Presbyterian Disaster Assistance to create a timely sequel to their award-winning film, “Trigger.” The Presbyterian Peacemaking Program has expertise on this difficult issue and will use this funding to put that expertise into action. Praise be to God for this action.

[VIOL-08] On Living in Healthy Relationships Free of Violence and Coercion From the Harvard Law & Policy Review in 2020: “Guns and domestic violence are a deadly combination. Every 16 hours, a woman is fatally shot by her intimate partner in the United States; the mere presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation increases the risk of homicide for women by 500 percent.”

Item VIOL-08 endorses the new National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Firearms’ Gun Relinquishment Protocol to standardize and improve how guns are removed from domestic abusers by the courts and law enforcement. In states with Domestic Violence “red flag” laws to protect victims, these current laws are not evenly or well-applied. This new protocol provides practical steps to improve relinquishment, starting at the very first court appearance. It allows abusers to surrender guns without the presence of the gun being used against them in court. This prioritizes victim safety by getting guns out of domestic abuse situations.

[VIOL-09] On Commending and Recommending the Guns to Gardens Movement -- commends Guns to Gardens churches and asks all PCUSA congregations to discern whether they are called to participate in a movement to dismantle unwanted guns and convert them to garden tools. PPF supports this overture and this new movement.

Guns to Gardens is a direct action to responsibly dispose of unwanted guns without returning them to the gun market. It offers hope, healing and is a prophetic voice to undermine the power of the gun lobby. As a new action, the more churches do it, they more we learn the best ways to do it. After 14 Guns to Gardens events in New Mexico, and dismantling 1,037 guns, our 2021 PPF Peacemaker Award recipient Rev. Harry Eberts says, “People are so relieved to be rid of the guns.” These visionary congregations, among others, have held Guns to Gardens events, as of 6/11/22:
- Community Grace Presbyterian Church, Sandy UT
- Community United Church of Christ, Boulder, CO
- First Community United Church of Christ, Columbus, OH
- Las Mesa Presbyterian Church, Albuquerque, NM
- Mosaic Church, Aurora, CO
- Weaving Home, Woodgate, NY
- United Church of Christ, Longmont, CO
- Church of the Epiphany, Euclid OH
- Midvale Community Lutheran Church, Madison, WI
- Oakhurst Presbyterian Church, Decatur, GA
- Church of the Covenant, Cleveland, OH
- Heritage Christian Center, Aurora, CO
- First Presbyterian Church, Stockton, CA
- Houston Mennonite Church, Houston, TX
- St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Oakland, CA
- Park Plate Church, Denver, CO
- Washington City Church of the Brethren, DC
- The University Church, Toledo, OH

The largest event was held by the Denver Broncos team at Mile High Stadium, transforming 189 guns. Many more congregations are preparing Guns to Gardens events to come.

At a time of unprecedented gun violence, the PCUSA’s voice can help this new movement to grow. One of our members, Hannah Johnson of Philadelphia Presbytery, writes: “As a young woman and lifelong Presbyterian, I am terrified about what every day will bring.” The Guns to Gardens movement is a radical and practical way to break down and destroy unwanted weapons, turning them into tools of growth and creation. It is a way to turn unholy devices into instruments of the divine.”

Please support VIOL-09 and take it home to your own church to consider. As in Isaiah 2:4, when we have had enough violence, the people will use their own hands to turn swords into plowshares. The time is now.

See brochure “Information for Congregations” at https://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence

Who we are:
Founded in 1944, the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship is a nation-wide community of over 3200 Presbyterian households who believe that Jesus calls the church to help reduce war, violence and exploitation in the world. We are a non-partisan group, open to all Presbyterians, funded by our members, many of whom have been mission workers across the world, past General Assembly participants and activists on war and peace issues in our churches and communities.

Except for a small staff, we are volunteers whose time and participation in GA is given freely. We do not work for or represent any government or outside lobby group. We see divestment as a tool for peacemaking. And we see climate change as the greatest threat to peace ever. We have divested our Peace Fellowship Endowment Fund at the Presbyterian Foundation of all fossil fuel companies and over 20 companies that profit from or enable the Occupation of Palestine by Israel. To us, this is nonviolence at work, a movement of the spirit. Be Bold! Nonviolence Works.