

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

CURRICULUM - ILLEGAL SALES



GOALS & OBJECTIVES:

To Explore the issue of illegal gun sales, specifically becoming familiar with the practice of “straw purchasing.”

By the end of the session, participants will have:

- learned how guns are illegally traded in the US.
- reflected on our relationship to the illegal gun market.

Setting	Adult Christian Education Forum, small group or committee meeting	
Materials	___ Candle ___ Match ___ Obituaries ___ Computer w/internet connection	___ copies of <i>In Our Communities</i> handout ___ Paper ___ Pen/Pencil ___ Bibles

opening

- **Read the obituaries** for three different, recent gun violence victims—try to stay as close to the local community as possible. After each is read, **light a candle in memorial of the incident.**

- **Lead the group in this or your own prayer:**

Holy God, we come together today to learn more about our world and your presence in it. We ask that you be with the families and friends of ___ (naming people about whom we have just read) ___. We pray also for the perpetrators, broken people, just like ourselves. Please give us ears to hear and eyes to see your light in the midst of this pain and darkness. Amen.

- **Read Matthew 26:36-52**

presenting & exploring

- **Ask the group:** Have you noticed violence in our community differently than you did before our discussion last week?
 How do you feel about the presence of guns in our communities?
 How do you understand people to acquire guns?

- **Watch the video:**

Lost and Stolen trailer
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xdw3Ttzrmw&feature=related>

Or

Think Again: Straw Purchasing
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKNVGxtU0-0>



- **Review** the *Straw Purchasing* handout below
- **Lead the group in discussion**, going around the room to answer the following questions.

—Note: allow a moment of silence after each question is asked so that introverts may have the opportunity to consider their answers. It is okay for the discussion to veer from these specific questions as the Spirit leads.—

- o Was there anything that surprised you in the movie trailer or handout?
- o For what purposes are unregulated guns needed?
- o For what purposes are guns needed to be bought in bulk?
- o What is our relationship to gun violence in the community, and specifically the illegal sales of guns?

closing

- **Reread** Matthew 26:36-52
- **Invite the participants to reflect** on what they've learned and how they feel called to move forward in the coming week.
- **Name** a time to come back together for further discussion.
- **End the group in this or your own prayer:**

God, may your life-giving Spirit move through us and inspire us. It is hard to hear about the suffering of our world. We know that you promise a better life, a better way of being together. Help us to find hope in the midst of such sadness and hear your call to action. Amen.

STRAW PURCHASING

What is “straw purchasing?”

A straw purchase is an illegal firearm purchase where the actual buyer of the gun, being unable to pass the required federal background check or desiring to not have his or her name associated with the transaction, uses a proxy buyer who can pass the required background check to purchase the firearm for him/her.

The straw purchasing cycle is the most common way that guns are trafficked and sold to individuals who are restricted from owning them. According to a 2000 report, “nearly 50 percent of ATF (Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) investigations involved firearms being trafficked by straw purchasers either directly or indirectly.”¹

So what’s the big deal?²

“Virtually every crime gun in the United States starts off as a legal firearm,” stated Bradley Buckles, former director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) in 2000.³

In a 1997 report, the ATF looked at how guns then “pass through the legitimate distribution system of federally licensed firearms dealers” before ending up in the hands of criminals. The ATF con-

1 Department of Justice Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. *Following the Gun: Enforcing Federal Laws against Firearms Traffickers*, June 2000.

2 The information in this section comes directly from Mayors Against Illegal Gun’s report, “Inside Straw Purchasing: how criminals get guns illegally,” April 2008.

3 Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives. *Following the Gun: Enforcing Federal Law Against Firearms Traffickers*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2000

cluded, in part, that, “there is a large problem of diversion to the illegal market from licensed gun establishments.”⁴

When a gun is recovered in a crime, the ATF can use the serial number on the gun to trace back to where it first left the legal market - tracing from the first sale of the firearm by an importer or manufacturer, to the wholesaler or retailer, to the first retail purchaser. In some cases, that first retail purchaser is the link between the legal and illegal markets.⁵

Looking at trace information from 1998, the ATF found that “a small group of dealers accounts for a disproportionately large number of crime gun traces.”⁶

More than 85 percent of dealers in the U.S. had no crime guns traced to them at all in 1998, while about 1 percent of licensed firearm dealers accounted for 57 percent of traces that same year.⁷

The ATF also concluded that “sales volume alone cannot be said to account for the disproportionately large number of traces associated with those dealers.”⁸

Guns get from dealers to criminals in part through trafficking. “ATF’s trafficking investigations show that trafficked firearms are diverted to prohibited persons and are subsequently used in serious crimes,” according to an ATF report.⁹

4 Department of Justice Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. *A Progress Report: Gun Dealer Licensing and Illegal Gun Trafficking* (1997).

5 Department of Treasury Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. *ATF Snapshot 2007*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2007.

6 Department of Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. *ATF Regulatory Actions: Report to the Secretary on Firearms Initiatives*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2000.

7 Department of Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. *Commerce in Firearms in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2000.

8 Department of Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. *ATF Regulatory Actions: Report to the Secretary on Firearms Initiatives*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2000.

9 Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives. *Following the*



Courtesy of Francois Polito



In trafficking investigations between 1996 and 1998, 25 percent involved guns used in an assault and 17 percent involved guns used in homicides.¹⁰ Nearly 5 million Americans were victims of violent crimes committed with firearms between 1993 and 2005.¹¹

The ATF examined gun-trafficking investigations from July 1996 to December 1998 and found that 46 percent of trafficking investigations during this period involved straw purchasers.¹² This was

Gun: Enforcing Federal Law Against Firearms Traffickers. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2000.

¹⁰ Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives. *Following the Gun: Enforcing Federal Law Against Firearms Traffickers.* Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2000. (Percentages do not total to 100 because some investigations involved guns used in multiple types of crimes

¹¹ Department of Justice. "Nonfatal firearm-related violent crimes, 1993-2005." DOJ. <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/glance/tables/firearmnonfataltab.htm>; Department of Justice. "Homicide trends in the U.S." DOJ.

¹² Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol,

nearly double the percentage of the next closest source.

Our Security is Connected

Advocates for gun violence prevention should acknowledge regional differences in gun usage and gun violence prevalence. Many guns used on the streets of cities were originally purchased in rural areas. Similarly, illegally sold guns frequently flow across state lines as well. Gun sales in one area can affect gun violence in others. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny." Even if we do not see this activity, we must stand with those in our community who suffer.

Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives. *Following the Gun: Enforcing Federal Law Against Firearms Traffickers.* Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 2000; This was the only comprehensive study of its kind.

STRAW PURCHASING—the short version

STEP 1:

Illegal arms dealer seeks out someone with a clean record to make firearms purchase in their stead. This buyer is called the "straw purchaser."

STEP 2:

Illegal arms dealer provides the straw purchaser with money, both to pay for the firearms and their services.

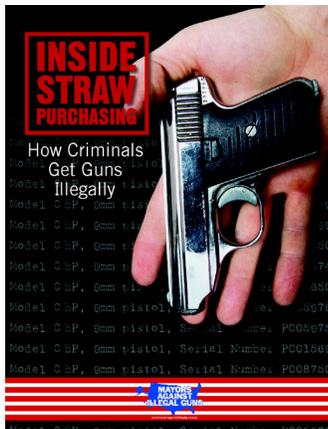
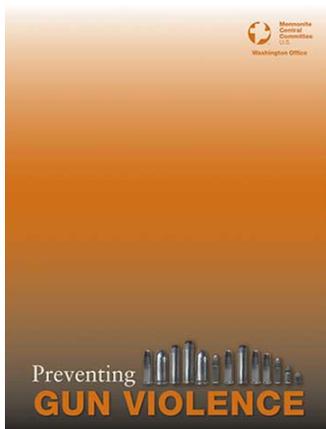
STEP 3:

The illegal arms dealer sells the guns to individuals who would not otherwise be able to buy weapons legally.

STEP 4:

When guns used in a crime are traced back to a straw purchaser, they claim the guns were lost or stolen. In some states, this gets them off the hook and able to continue supplying guns to the underground market.

OTHER GOOD RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY:



NOTES

NOTES



**THIS IS A FREE GIFT,
BUT WE NEED YOUR HELP TO CONTINUE THIS WORK.**

Please donate to



*Presbyterian
Peace
Fellowship*

<http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/two/giving>
and designate the funds to our work with Gun Violence Prevention.

If you would like to get more involved with PPF's work with Gun Violence Prevention, please contact us at gvp@presbypeacefellowship.org.

This curriculum was written and edited by Rev. Margaret Leonard and Sara Dorrien.
Cover photo by Katie Rains.