Gun Violence Prevention

Heeding God’s Call
INSPIRING HOPE, RAISING VOICES, TAKING ACTION TO END GUN VIOLENCE

Our Mission and Objectives
Heeding God’s Call is a new faith-based movement to prevent gun violence. We unite people of faith in the sacred responsibility to protect our brothers and sisters and our children. We seek to do so through:

- Helping local faith communities organize advocacy campaigns to encourage gun shops to adopt a code of conduct to deter illegal purchasing and trafficking of handguns;

- Providing support and resources of faith communities to form multi-racial, ecumenical, and interfaith partnerships to work together to actively support gun violence prevention on both social and legislative levels;

- Serving as a ‘connection point’ for these congregations and partnerships to connect with, learn from and support the work of gun violence prevention organizations and efforts already in place;

- Advocating for faith communities to make commitments to raise voices and take action to end gun violence prevention.

Our Goal
Save lives by ending gun violence

Our Ministry
Raise moral and social barriers to handgun trafficking and to inspire hope by giving people the ability to do something that makes a real difference.

Our Belief
As people of faith...

- We embrace Dr. Martin Luther King’s hope for peace and safety in our communities.

- We resist apathy to this epidemic of violence, because fear, closed doors, and separation will not end it.

- We unite to bring God’s vision of a peaceful kingdom, without the violent loss of over 30,000 American lives by gunfire each year.

Our Witness
Handguns reach streets and neighborhoods through a highly developed illegal trade – gun trafficking. These are the guns used to threaten, wound, maim and kill. The linchpins of gun trafficking are criminal entrepreneurs, traffickers, the straw buyers who stand in for them to make their purchases and the gun dealers who look the other way and enjoy the profits from volume sales.

Heeding God’s Call helps faith communities organize to publicly pressure local gun stores to adopt a set of practices to deter straw purchasing.
Your Invitation

_Because_ we are losing eight children a day to gun-related deaths;

_Because_ too many children, families and communities are thrown into desperate grief and trauma; _Because_ too many congregations have buried children and sought to bring the comfort of God’s peace to families wracked by this epidemic of violence;

_Because_ we cannot do this work alone...

We join in covenant with other communities of faith to raise awareness of gun violence as a spiritual and moral crisis. We call on every congregation, synagogue, mosque, and gathering of people of faith to work toward a peaceable society where all children have the opportunity to grow and prosper, and where everyone can live without fear of being cut down by firearm violence.

We invite you to become a Partner Faith Community and join an interfaith coalition of religious groups to raise awareness and put faith into action.

The Commitment

- Take steps to educate Faith Community members and attenders about gun violence.
- Adopt a Covenant of Commitment to Act to End Gun Violence.
- Work with local gun shops to adopt a “Code of Conduct” to eliminate legal purchases of guns for illegal resale (straw purchases).
- Partner with other faith communities across geographic, religious and racial lines to develop programs, promote awareness and develop legislative and other strategies.

Resources

- Connection with other Faith Communities for collaboration and joint action
- Speakers and storytellers to visit your faith community
- Help with advocacy in working with local gun shops
- Information and support for legislative advocacy campaigns
- Connection and collaboration with community action and advocacy groups
- Information sharing between Partner Faith Communities about events & strategies
- Gatherings of Partner Faith Communities to share experiences, ideas and materials
- Staff support through both Heeding God’s Call and Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

Contact Info

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“Create positive energy, take positive action, and make positive change!”
THE EPIDEMIC: It’s a surprise to no one that our country suffers from an epidemic of gun violence. More Americans die from gun violence annually in each of several large American cities than in any other entire developed country. Contrary to the impression of many, gun violence besets all portions of the country, large cities, small towns and rural areas. In fact, studies show per capita rates of gun violence in urban and rural areas to be nearly identical.

Cities and towns of any size across the country are negatively impacted by gun violence, fueled by gun trafficking and the straw purchasing that makes it possible.

Handguns reach streets and neighborhoods through a highly developed illegal trade – gun trafficking. These are the guns used to threaten, wound, maim and kill. The linchpins of gun trafficking are criminal entrepreneurs, traffickers, the straw buyers who stand in for them to make their purchases and gun dealers who look the other way and enjoy the profits from volume sales. Many such rogue gun dealers are located in markets throughout the country.

For many reasons, it is likely to be difficult to gain enactment of meaningful legislative barriers to the illegal gun trade by a number of state legislatures for several years. Yet there is action citizens can take that may go far to disrupting the illegal gun business.

BACKGROUND TO ACTION: The retailer who sells the most guns nationally, Wal-Mart, recently signed a Partnership Agreement with the coalition of Mayors Against Illegal Guns, intended to make straw purchasing far less likely. The coalition includes mayors from across the country.

The Partnership Agreement is a ten-point Code of Conduct that Wal-Mart has promised to follow for all gun sales. Analysts believe it will go far toward severely diminishing the trafficking of guns from Wal-Mart stores.

If Wal-Mart can act as a good corporate citizen in the interest of preventing straw purchasing of guns and resulting gun violence, so can gun shops across the country. Doing so would make a serious and permanent dent in the illegal gun business, making illegal guns far less available on streets and in neighborhoods, which would be likely to cut into the current carnage.

PUBLIC WITNESS: We propose that local faith communities organize public demonstrations in front of certain gun stores with a record of selling many guns that have eventually been recovered from crimes and call for all gun shops to adopt a Code of Conduct identical to the Wal-Mart/Mayors Coalition Agreement. Such an event has several attractive features, including:

- It is radically different from the usual call for legislation, so is likely to gain substantial press coverage and appeal to many citizens who oppose activist government;
- The ‘ask’ is not punitive to gun dealers and will be seen by press and public as reasonable. The fact that Wal-Mart has already adopted a similar Code will also provide excellent justification.
- The ‘ask’ can and should be taken back to local faith communities, for churches, youth groups and etc. to seek adoption by local gun shops.
Heeding God’s Call: Starting a Movement

**Step 1 - STUDY** - Invite 1-4 friends/co-congregants to a commitment-free conversation about gun violence and its prevention.

- Organizing around an issue is about building relationships and connections between people.
- Use information from this packet and at www.heedinggodscall.org, personal stories and timely local reports about gun violence to build interest and concern.
- Seek to move discussion to the responsibility of all Christians to care for fellow sisters, brothers, and children.
- Emphasize that Jesus was an activist, working among the people and confronting evil directly.
- [with Presbyterians] Introduce and hand out copies of Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing to Heed God’s Call (GV2).
- Determine which discussion members are prepared to take next steps.
- Define the next step as seeking a meeting with appropriate clergy and any relevant congregational committee.
- Divide contact responsibilities up among members.
- Those with energy for the work should invite other friends and/or co-congregants to a second/third/etc. commitment-free conversation.

**Step 2 - NETWORK** - Pursue outreach to other local Presbyterian congregations and those of other faiths.

- Ask pastors to contact their local interfaith colleagues and invite them to an informal ‘open house’ at a local coffee shop to discuss local gun violence and the Heeding God’s Call model.
- Ask heads of social witness committees to contact comparable committees of other faith bodies to arrange an educational meeting about gun violence, its prevention, and Heeding.
- Enlist clergy and laity to participate in a Planning Committee to create a Heeding coalition; ask willing congregations to sign the Covenant of Commitment.

**Step 3 - INVESTIGATE** - Explore the gun shop culture of your community and decide your strategy

- Reach out to and include churches in the neighborhood where the shop in question is located into the conversations; folks in the immediate community will know best - let’s do this mission in partnership!
- Devise a plan for which shop(s) you want to contact and why - has there been an investigative report about illegal sales? Will you contact everyone in a specified area? What is the strategy that works for your area?

**Step 4 - ORGANIZE** - Develop planning committee meetings and move plans toward a ‘Call to Action’ within a month’s time.

- Planning committee should divide up responsibilities among members for liturgy, publicity, outreach, sign making, speakers and etc.
- Planning committee should meet frequently until Call is held. Each meeting should include short educational piece.
- Determine frequency of gun shop witnesses.
- The Call to Action is a rally day with all Covenanted churches and faith communities in attendance.
- The Call should be a multi-faith service at which church and the wider community is called to affirm and become aware of the call to participate in gun shop action.
- The event should include singing, prayers, education about gun violence, and sign making for future vigils.
- During run up to Call, planning committee should continuously engage local faith bodies in conversation about future plans, hopes, and partnership.

**Step 5 - CONTACT** - Pursue outreach to selected gun shop owner.

- Write to shop owner to schedule initial meeting and talk about the possibility of the owner signing the 10-point Code of Conduct; templates are available on Heeding website.
- Follow up letter with phone calls.

*If the gun shop refuses to sign the Code of Conduct......

**Step 6 - CALL TO ACTION** - gather for initial gun shop witness and begin sustained gun shop action.

Important: The above steps are simply brief guides and are not meant to be rules. Do not hesitate to customize your program to make it best fit your needs and locality. Please stay in continuous touch with PPF as you move forward. PPF and Heeding stand eager to help you with ideas, advice, materials and enthusiasm.
Covenant of Commitment

to Act to End Gun Violence

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life, so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him and holding fast to him.

- Deuteronomy 30: 1

Through these words, we are called to order our communities and human relationships to reflect God’s justice and the promise of Shalom. We are deeply committed to upholding the value of human life and opposing those forces which threaten it. The overwhelming presence of guns in our national consciousness cannot be separated from the communal despair we feel as we witness our self-destruction. It is time to address this helplessness with action to reverse the unrestricted proliferation of guns in our communities.

We, the congregation of ________________________________ covenant to work with our
(community name)
sisters and brothers in the common pursuit of ending gun violence in the _________________
(city/region)
area through the following acts of faith:

• We will embark upon a program of teaching and preaching about the scourge of gun violence upon our communities.

• We will partner with other faith communities across geographic, religious, and racial lines to develop programs, promote awareness and develop community and legislative strategies.

• We will actively support and collaborate with Heeding God’s Call in ________________ as well as other gun violence prevention organizations and efforts in our local communities.

• We will pray as a community for the work of Heeding God’s Call, for the victims of gun violence and for the retailers who participate in the proliferation of illegal firearms.

• We will identify local gun shops with high sales of crime guns and engage them to adopt a “Code of Conduct” which will eliminate straw purchasers of guns for illegal resale (straw purchases).

• We will organize and/or actively support actions of nonviolent prophetic witness to bring spiritual and public pressure to certain gun stores with records of selling many guns that have been recovered from crime scenes.

Signed: _______________________________ Date: __________________

Print Name: _______________________________

Position: _______________________________
The 10 points of the Responsible Firearms Retailer Partnership are:

1. **Videotaping the Point of Sale for All Firearms Transactions.** Participating retailers will videotape the point-of-sale of all firearms transactions and maintain videos for 6 months to deter illegal purchases and monitor employees.

2. **Computerized Prime Gun Trace Log and Alert System.** Participating retailers will maintain a computerized log of crime gun traces relating to the retailer. Once the program is in place, if a customer who has a prior trace at that retailer attempts to purchase a firearm, the sale will be electronically flagged. The retailer would have discretion to proceed with the sale or stop the sale.

3. **Purchaser Declaration.** For sales flagged by the trace alert system, participating retailers will ask purchasers to fill out a declaration indicating that they meet the legal requirement to purchase the firearm.

4. **Deterring Fake IDs.** Participating retailers will only accept valid federal- or state-issued picture IDs as primary identification. Retailers will utilize additional ID checking mechanisms.

5. **Consistent Visible Signage.** Participating retailers will post signage created by the Responsible Firearms Retailer Partnership to alert customers of their legal responsibilities at the point-of-sale.

6. **Employee Background Checks.** Participating retailers will conduct criminal background checks for all employees selling or handling firearms.

7. **Employee Responsibility Training.** Participating retailers will participate in an employee responsibility training program focused on deterring illegal purchasers. The Responsible Firearms Retailer Partnership will create an online training system based on Wal-Mart’s training program.

8. **Inventory Checking.** Participating retailers will conduct daily and quarterly audits. Guidelines will be based on Wal-Mart’s existing audit procedures.

9. **No Sales Without Background Check Results.** Participating retailers would prohibit sales based on "default proceeds," which are permitted by law when background check has not returned a result within 3 days.

10. **Securing Firearms.** Participating retailers will maintain firearms kept in customer accessible areas in locked cases or locked racks.

Participating retailers will phase in the provisions of Responsible Firearms Retailer Partnership over time.

SIGNED:_________________________________________________ DATE:_________________
Make Friends with the Press
• Call each media outlet for the name and contact information of the person who considers submissions for editorials or would cover events such as Heeding God’s Call vigils.

Write a Press Release
• Make sure it is well written and free of spelling and grammar mistakes.
• Keep it short.
• Highlight the human/local angle.
• Stay true to the story, don’t exaggerate events.
• Do not format the release like an advertisement.
• Have a great headline and/or subject line.
• Distinguish yourself from the other pitches. Be concise, be creative, and be smart!
• Date the release.
• Provide contact information for others to follow-up with the local Heeding God’s Call movement.

Initial Contact with Media Sources
• Do your homework - find out who specifically would cover an event like a Heeding God’s Call vigil.
• Familiarity - when you contact a reporter, be familiar with that reporter’s work. Talk about a specific article or subject matter that reporter has written about and how Heeding God’s Call events would fit in well with the kind of stories she has already written.
• You’re the expert - help with finding information - provide links to other articles written about the Heeding movement, information about gun violence in our communities and informative and entertaining quotes.

Understand the Newsroom
• Give editors/assignment desks at least 24 hours’ notice before a press conference or special event.
• If you have more than 24 hours to inform the press of an event - email a formal invitation to all the primary media contacts, and their editors.
• Email/fax a secondary press release, company information and another invitation to your primary press contacts. Exclude the editors this time. If you haven’t hooked them yet, chances are a 10-page fax won’t do it, but it could give the beat reporter enough information to do a small story, even if she is not planning to attend your event.
• Follow-up the next day with a phone call to inquire as to whether or not the media contact plans to attend the event.
• Greet reporters as they arrive at the event; help them get situated and offer to provide any additional information your press contacts may need for a story.
• Provide a spokesperson who is well informed about Heeding God’s Call activities and gun violence prevention work.
• Answer media requests in a timely manner - reporters have strict deadlines and will not run a story if they don’t get the information they need.
• Typically, newspapers and TV stations have a 2 or 3 pm deadline.
• Follow up after the event by sending thank-you notes to everyone, even before you see the story they wrote.
• Try to develop a rapport with the editor and/or reporter.
• Always look out for breaking news or events that relate to gun violence prevention. Contact the media as soon as possible after such events.
• Follow up any written or e-mail correspondence with a phone call. Don’t forget to put in a reminder call the day before your event and the morning of the event.

Types of Press
• Make and maintain a file of contacts.
• Local paid-for newspaper.
• Local free community paper.
• Local radio station.
• Local television station.
MEDIA ADVISORY
For Immediate Release
November 19, 2010
Contact: Deb Milcarek
(410) 404-8320

HEEDING GOD’S CALL ANNOUNCES PRESS AVAILABILITY DURING CLYDE’S SPORT SHOP’S
‘CUSTOMER APPRECIATION DAY’

Baltimore Area Faith Leaders Will Be Available for Comment at Nearby Church

WHAT: Press availability on part of Heeding God’s Call faith leaders to comment on
campaign to gain adoption by Clyde’s Sports Shop of Code of Conduct to
diminish ‘straw buying’ and gun trafficking.
http://home.comcast.net/~clydessportshop/THENnNOW/gunprotest/protest.html

WHEN: 2pm, Sunday, November 21.

WHERE: Light Street Presbyterian Church, 809 Light Street, Baltimore, 21230

WHO: Rev. Peter Nord, Executive Presbyter, Presbytery of Baltimore
Rev. John R. Sharp, Chair, Central Maryland Ecumenical Council
Gary Gillespie, American Friends Service Committee Faith-based community leaders

WHY: ~To explain why Heeding God’s Call interfaith service originally planned for Nov. 21
near Clyde’s Sports Shop was postponed to Dec. 11.
~To explain purpose of Heeding God’s Call’s gun shop focused campaign to prevent
gun violence.
~To relate series of events to date regarding Heeding God’s Call’s effort to gain
adoption of the Code by Clyde’s.
~To counter Clyde’s incorrect arguments against adopting the Code.

VISUALS: Faith leaders speaking in front of church.
Letters to the Editor are letters written to the editor of a newspaper stating your opinion on an issue, event, etc. They may be written in response to a news story that was printed by the paper or to draw attention to a story in the newspaper. Letters to the Editor are not news stories. However, as in any conversation, your opinion will be more robust if you support it with facts. Two kinds of facts are particularly important in letters to the editor: local information and personal experience.

Opinion pieces are generally, but not always, written by people not employed by the newspaper. These can be local experts in a subject area, a local leader – civic or political, or a “syndicated columnist.”

TIPS:

1. Keep your Letter to the Editor between 50 - 150 words, not including your name and contact information and the reference to the source. Opinion essays should be between 500-570 words.
   - Make one point - two at most - in your letter.
   - State your point clearly, ideally in the first sentence. Since people generally scan through these pieces, it will not work to your benefit to craft a “big finish.”
   - To keep your thoughts focused, try and write your letter, then go back through it reading just the opening sentence of each paragraph. You should be able to tell what the letter says just from those sentences.
   - If you are calling the community to action, be clear as to how it is that you want people to respond to the information you are sharing.
   - Use plain language, avoid jargon. It can alienate people not familiar with the issue and/or confuse your point.
   - Statistics about your local community can be found in a number of online and print resources. The first stop for most kinds of local statistics should be your chamber of commerce—if they don’t know the answer to your question, they probably know where to find it.
   - Significance to readers - why should the community care? Know your audience.
   - Geographic Proximity - how does this affect where you are?
   - Prominence - is there anyone famous or interesting that makes this story more interesting?
   - Human interest - connect it to people!

2. Timeliness
   - If you are writing in response to a story you read in the paper, the sooner you get your letter in after you read the original story, the better chance that it will be printed.
   - Address why this issue is relevent now - tie it to a recent event if not a recently printed article.
3. **Submit your letter by email** (preferred) or fax. Since September 11 2001, media organizations have had to take time-consuming precautions opening mail, and your letter might not get opened for several days if you send it via the U.S. Postal Service.

4. Don’t forget to **include your full contact information**, including phone number and email. The newspaper uses that information to verify that you actually submitted the letter.

5. Once you submit your letter, **follow up with a phone call** one day later. Call the editorial page editor to make sure that your letter was received. Ask if the paper will print your letter, you can make a pitch here for why it should be. This call is essential! By bringing more attention to your letter, you increase the odds of it being published.

6. Remember that the purpose of this kind of letter to the editor is to help make other newspaper readers aware of the news, not to berate the editor for failing to print a story.

7. You usually can’t get printed more than once a month. However, you can submit letters as often as you want.

8. **Even if your letter doesn’t get into print, it may help another one with a similar point of view get published!**
Social Media

Create a Facebook page for your Heeding God’s Call chapter
- Strategically send out invites asking people to “like” your page or group. It is important to identify the audience you are targeting to bring into your movement - Who is most likely to be interested? - and send them personalized messages via Facebook or email with a link to the page.
- Draw people to your Facebook page by hosting exclusive content on it that’s not featured on other platforms or sites you use. Do you have a contest, survey, or video you could feature exclusively on FB? Want to share behind the scenes photos or videos of your work? This will entice people to visit your page frequently.
- You’ll need a volunteer or staff member to be frequently monitoring the page for abuse - remove inappropriate/irrelevant content and/or abusive members from the group.
- Don’t just say your page is interactive. Actually make it interactive. Bring fans into the planning process of your campaign by asking them questions as status updates or using the questions for pages tool, and iterate on the fly based on what they tell you.

Using this forum you can:
- Post “status updates” about Heeding Activities.
Any update you make appears in the News Feeds of your fans ensuring that your attendees do not miss out on updates. A Facebook fan page for event also gives it more visibility, when people “Like” the event updates and “Share” it with their friends on their wall.
- Create event invitations
With a Facebook Invite, fans can RSVP to events, be reminded of upcoming events, and can easily access event information, including time, date, location, overview of event, and any special instructions about the event.

Twitter is a microblogging platform that enables users to post messages in 140 characters or less. Twitter is one of the best tools for quickly amplifying your organization’s message, communicating with influentials, and crowd-sourcing requests for ideas and information.

(Twitter “handle”) so that people can respond to you or retweet you without going over the 140-character limit. Take the time to set up your user profile. The more information you provide, the easier it will be for people to find you on Twitter and to learn more about you. Include an image for your account, feel free to use the Heeding God’s Call logo.

Start tweeting! When you are sharing information, try to write the tweet as if it’s a headline—short, sweet, and to the point. It’s also great to phrase it as a question.

Use hashtags strategically and appropriately to spread, share and organize information. Hashtags are words or phrases prefixed with the ‘hash’ or ‘pound’ symbol (#), similar to category tags on a blog, and are used in Tweets to add context.

Following other Twitter users and gain a following for your own account - by follow other organizations that do similar work you can learn about their latest activities and read their recommended links. It’s also a good idea to follow influential targets—media figures and politicians, for example—so that you can respond to their tweets and potentially get noticed by them.

Respond to other Tweets. If you want to add to what someone says, disagree with what they write, or just want to connect with them, use the @ symbol in front of their Twitter handle (no space in between!) and write a message back. The @ reply feature can be used for more than just responding to other Twitter users. For example, if you are posting something that an influential Twitter user might be interested in, include their handle in your Tweet. This is a great way to get another user’s attention.

Twitter is the best tool to give your followers real time updates on the event. Have an event hashtag and ask people to retweet the important messages being tweeted. By tweeting during the event, you can let those who have been unable to attend the event know what’s happening and experience the event through Twitter.

Google+

When you are logged into Google, you will see what others have “plussed” around the web. If you are logged in and searching for content using Google search, you will see what content your friends on Google have plussed. If a friend has plussed a piece of content on another site, his or her name will will show up next to that specific website in search returns.

Within Google’s search returns itself you can +1 any search return by clicking on the +1 button next to or below a certain return (faded until you place the cursor over it). Additionally, the total number of +1s on a website will appear next to Google ads for that site.

Simply put, Google is showing you how your friends are using the web, and vice versa.

You can also post to your Google+ “stream,” which is used very much like a Facebook status or Twitter feed.
THIS IS A FREE GIFT, 
BUT WE NEED YOUR HELP TO CONTINUE THIS WORK.

Please donate to

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 resource was written and edited by Rev. Margaret Leonard.
Cover photo by Katie Rains.