

A LOADED CONVERSATION

an invitation to talk about guns

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Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Gun Violence Prevention Network

Introduction

Guns are part of our lives. Whether or not we own them or use them, they are part of our reality. They are in our schools, on our sidewalks, in our homes (or our friends' homes), in our politics and even in our churches. So we need to talk about them. As people of God, how do we understand and relate to guns? What does following Jesus have to do with guns?

In a culture that is dominated by fear, division and violence, churches are grappling with how to talk about and think about gun ownership and gun use. They are asking, *What is a faithful response for the people of God as we live into this reality of violence involving guns?*

With encouragement and input from pastors and others in the church representing diverse perspectives, Mennonite Central Committee U.S. has created this resource to help congregations address the topic of guns. We hope that with the help of *A Loaded Conversation*, your congregation can begin to broach this subject in your worship, conversation and action, so that you are empowered to witness to God's peace in the world.

New Revised Standard Version of the Bible used throughout.



Conversation guide

Why talk?

Our churches are more and more polarized every day. Healthy conversation including opposing ideas is hard to find. Rather than extend intellectual hospitality, we close ourselves to talking with the people with whom we already agree. Or, perhaps even worse, we only engage with ideas different from our own on a theological and ideological battlefield. Conversations are “either or” rather than “both and.” This goes far beyond the church. It is a cultural phenomenon seeping into our ecclesial practices. New sources support narratives that increasingly separate and categorize people into the “other.” We are a broken country, culture and church, divided by our inability to fully understand—or even attempt to understand—someone else’s perspective.

The topic of guns is no different. Call it gun rights, gun violence, gun control, gun safety—call it what you will, this is yet another issue paralyzing our beloved church. People have strong opinions and perspectives on the issue of guns, and are all over the board. We have congregational members lobbying for tighter gun control policy and others carrying, to protect their families and church bodies. We are all part of God’s people and yet we see things so differently.

Such stark differences make it hard to talk about guns—it is often a taboo topic in our churches. We are united in our desire, however. All of us are looking for ways to prevent violence done by guns. All of us want our children, our families, our homes, schools and communities safe from violence. As the body of Christ, we need to exercise our conversation muscle. We need to learn how to engage with one another in healthy dialogue, meaning we come together to *hear* one another and respectfully share our beliefs. The desire behind this kind of conversation is to move toward one another in mutual understanding, rather than being further divided by dualistic thinking.

It can be done! The Spirit moves when we are open to seeing God’s presence in others. We hope this resource can help your congregation begin these conversations.

Where to start

MCC has put together five perspectives that can jump-start this conversation. These perspectives represent findings from a survey answered by 264 people across Anabaptist churches, as well as 10 in-depth interviews done with people across a diverse demographic. They are spoken from personal experience and understanding of Scripture. While they cannot represent the whole of the responses gathered, a large majority of the responses could identify with one of the following perspectives. In the same way, they are not meant to funnel each person into one category or another. Rather, they are a tool to help us examine how we talk about the issues surrounding gun violence based on our experience and theological beliefs. We pray they help us identify our own understandings more clearly, as well as to help us listen to one another.

How to do it

There are many ways to hold this conversation. We recommend you begin with a short introduction about the goal of healthy dialogue around this difficult issue. Present guidelines to your conversation, which could be pre-printed at tables or put on the wall somewhere. We recommend you consider including the following guidelines:

- Use a talking device for speaking, such as a stone or stick that is held by the person speaking at all times, thus barring temptation of interruption
- Go around the circle, giving everyone a chance to speak if desired
- Listen with respect



- Contribute your thinking, speaking from your mind and heart
- Seek to understand rather than persuade
- Invite diversity of ideas and opinions
- Go for honesty and depth without going on and on and on and on and on
- Listen together for insights and deeper questions
- Play, doodle and draw while in conversation

We also encourage you to gather around tables with snacks and doodling materials. The space is important in preparing people's hearts and attitudes to respectfully listen and share. For many, drawing or doodling while talking can be very helpful. After the introduction, we offer three options to consider as you frame the conversation to meet the needs and unique character of your group:

Option 1: Where do you identify?

Have a different person read each of the five perspectives. Give them their perspective ahead of time, so that they can spend time with their narrative and present it authentically, as if it were their own. After each one has read aloud to the group, place the perspectives in different places around the room and invite people to migrate toward the perspective with which they most identify. Inevitably, some participants will have at least slight differences with each perspective, so encourage them to move toward the perspective they feel closest to in their own thoughts and beliefs.

Provide these guiding questions for each group to talk about individually. Remind each group to respect the conversation guidelines established at the beginning.

- What most drew you to this perspective?
- How convinced are you of this opinion? How flexible are you?
- What do you see as the strengths of this perspective? What are potential weaknesses of this perspective?

- What experiences in your life have shaped your perspective?
- How does Scripture inform your perspective?
- How can this perspective help to prevent gun violence?

Give the groups a good chunk of time to process their perspective together. Then, open up to begin a conversation with everyone together and have each group present some of the things they heard in their small group conversation. To continue conversation in the larger group, offer these questions:

- What do you hear as strengths of someone else's perspective that is not your own?
- What is something new you are understanding about an opinion different from your own, after listening to others today?
- What are ways to move forward together in preventing gun violence that respect multiple views?
- How have you engaged with other perspectives in the past and how have you been able to respect their experiences and viewpoint?
- Have you thought of this as a faith issue before and in what way?

Option 2: Walking in someone else's shoes

Print perspectives on different sheets of paper, and hand them out to the group at random. Ask people to gather in small groups with each perspective present. You may choose to do this individually (five people per group) or in pairs (10 people per group). Invite each person to read through their perspective and spend a few minutes trying to understand that perspective and take it on as their own. Then, invite groups to go around the circle and have everyone share their given perspective. After they have all shared, invite them to continue a conversation, maintaining the role or perspective they were given, using the following questions:

- What do you see as the strengths of this perspective? What are potential weaknesses of this perspective?



- What experiences in your life have shaped your perspective?
- How does Scripture inform your perspective?
- How can this perspective help to prevent gun violence?

Give the groups a good chunk of time to discuss. Then, open up to the larger group to process the experience together. Offer these questions as you continue the conversation:

- How much did you or did you not identify with the perspective you were given and how did that affect your experience in the conversation?
- Of the five perspectives shared, is there one that is harder to comprehend than the others?
- Do you consistently relate to people who would identify with each of these different perspectives? If so, how do you talk about this with them?
- What do you hear as strengths of someone else's perspective that is not your own personal belief or understanding?
- What is something new you are understanding about an opinion different from your own, after today's conversations?
- How have you engaged with other perspectives in the past and how have you been able to respect their experiences and viewpoint?
- Have you thought of this as a faith issue before and in what way?
- What are ways to move forward together in preventing gun violence that respect multiple views?

Option 3: Conversation Café

Have small tables set up around the room, each with all five perspectives printed and placed on the table. Invite people to sit at any table to begin. Use the following questions to ignite conversation at each table:

- Do you identify with one of the perspectives over another?
- How does your group represent each perspective?
- Do you have an experience that shapes your perspective?
- How does Scripture inform your perspective?
- Of the five perspectives shared, is there one that is harder to comprehend than the others?
- How can each perspective help to prevent gun violence?

After 15–20 minutes of conversation, ring a bell and invite people to change tables so that they are sitting with new people. One person should stay at each table. That person will begin the second conversation by giving a short overview of what was previously discussed at that table. From there, spend another 15–20 minutes going deeper into this dialogue, reflecting on the original questions or on the overview done by the table host. Repeat this pattern three to four times, so that everyone has a chance to talk with many different people.

When you have finished the rounds of small group discussion, open to the large group and ask for any reflections. You may also spur reflection with these questions:

- What is something new you are understanding about an opinion different from your own, after today's conversations?
- Have you thought of this as a faith issue before and in what way?
- How have you engaged with other perspectives in the past and how have you been able to respect their experiences and viewpoint?



Perspectives

Perspective 1

Guns are a necessary tool, although they should always be used as a last resort. As a former corrections officer, I carried a gun on my hip as a part of my job and duty for 30 years. We were always trained to use other methods first and I did. Dealing with inmates, I had to get physical numerous times, and I used my hands and body countless times, without even thinking about using the gun. Guns can escalate the problem, so we have to be careful how we use them, but they are also totally necessary when things get out of hand. We may need them as a last resort in multiple situations—especially in scenarios where we might need them for protection. Gun owners need to be responsible, but not restricted from carrying, because if we are restricted, then we don't have the option to use them in those necessary, last-resort situations.

The Bible clearly supports this—it is our duty as Christians to work for good and stop evil in the world. Jesus taught to turn the other cheek, but also used force when it was needed, like turning over the taxpayers' tables in the temple. Jesus never told soldiers or Roman authorities it was wrong to use force, so we need to understand that, although he teaches loving our enemies, he also does not condemn the necessary violence of government or individuals when the situation calls for it. Does the church have a role to teach responsible gun ownership and educate people on other ways to deal with conflict, but not to advocate against guns themselves?

Perspective 2

To increase public safety, it is important that guns are banned from public spaces. We have lost too many lives due to weak gun policies, allowing individuals to obtain dangerous weapons. By design, a gun's purpose is inherently violent. As a teenager, I was beaten and robbed at gunpoint, which left me with long-standing anxiety and fear. The trauma placed on the victims and families of gun violence should motivate our government to strengthen gun policies

to ensure public safety. The context of the second amendment doesn't hold up in the 21st century, in a world of technology, drones and surveillance.

As Christians, we must realize that guns are a disruption to peace, which Jesus calls us to achieve. We are called to be peacemakers and we cannot do that with a gun on our hip. Banning the second amendment keeps guns out of the hands of dangerous circumstances and protects the least of these in violent situations. When does the church prioritize the community over the individual? Should the church affect public policy?

Perspective 3

I live in urban Philadelphia, a city in which death by guns ranks among the highest in the nation. I cycle through some of the most affected neighborhoods on my way to work. But because I am not engaged in crime or drugs, the risk of accidental shooting is minimal. I am not a hunter, nor do I have a firearm in my house. I feel much safer that way. I believe the use of a gun for self-protection is hazardous—nonviolent intervention, though not without risk, is much safer.

The government has a big role to play to keep guns out of the hands of those who shouldn't have them. Enacting federal common-sense laws such as comprehensive background checks and banning semi-automatic weapons with high capacity magazine clips is a start. At the state level, implementing legislation that limits purchases to one handgun a month and reporting lost and stolen guns would go a long way to curb the gun violence on our streets. These laws do not infringe on the rights of hunters, but they will curb the level of criminal activity, suicide and mass murders.

As Christians, we need to recognize that gun violence, but not hunting, is a disruption to the peace of Christ. We are called to be peacemakers and we cannot do it with a handgun or assault rifle. We should be active in limiting guns from getting into the hands of those who shouldn't have them and protect the innocent in violent situations. How then, do I respect the rights of hunters, but also love and care for the people in my city?



Perspective 4

Guns are tools and can be effective for providing food for your family and community as well as protection on camping or hunting trips. However, many of us hunters would support common-sense gun legislation like background checks and waiting periods for purchases. There also needs to be better education for safe gun storage. There are common-sense laws that can help curb mass shootings and suicide that will not restrict my ability to hunt. But hunters also understand a gun culture that is built on continually trying to improve your craft, like a sport, and this often leads to the opportunity for guns to be something more than is needed for hunting.

God gave us dominion over the earth and a part of that is providing food for our families. Sometimes this is through agriculture and sometimes this is through hunting. Humans have hunted in some form or another for much of history. Our dominion carries responsibility. We are responsible for the tools we have and we are also called to live in harmony with others. As Christians we can recognize that guns are often used against other people. This creates a need for a level of “guidelines” within our community, local and national. How can gun owners create an atmosphere for common-sense gun laws that respects gun owners?

Perspective 5

Guns are inanimate objects. They cannot be the cause of violence. Even the term “gun violence” means the violence is linked to the gun rather to the person who committed the violence. Instead, we should focus on the evil in the world. Evil is the source of violence. Evil predates guns. People have a choice to be violent or not, and so we should focus on the real source of the problems. The government doesn’t need to regulate guns because guns aren’t causing the problems, people are.

We see the work of evil in the world in the Scripture—evil forces cause people to be violent. Jesus’ saving power helps redeem the evil that exists in us and can change people’s violent response to evil. This may require us to fight evil with guns. It’s far easier to focus on how people are behaving (in this case, shooting people to kill them) than address the why. How can the church address why people are acting violently instead of always blaming guns as the problem?



Ways to engage

There are many ways to engage with the topic of violence as it involves guns, and churches and individuals are working at preventing that violence in different ways. No matter where your congregation lies on this broad spectrum, and no matter how much or how little you have engaged with this in the past, there are steps you can take. The following lays out four potential understandings that might describe your congregation or group. According to where you are currently, follow the listed ways to engage. By going deeper, you can be challenged and grow, moving toward the kind of action that best suits your congregation.

If your congregational consensus is: *“We believe this conversation is about changing hearts rather than guns.”*

- Look for organizations to connect with that are working against violence in the world.
- Study peace theology and how it sees the world differently.
- Ask the people in your church to have a conversation together about guns. If interested, please check out MCC’s conversation guide. mcc.org/learn/more/gun-violence-prevention
- Preach a sermon that focuses directly on how one’s desire for safety and the confidence we put in guns can be idolatrous. Engage the congregation around how this interacts with the gospel.
- Consider planning a screening and discussion night on the documentary “Armor of Light.” armoroflightfilm.com/ The basic question of this 2015 documentary is “Can you be pro-life and pro-gun?”
- Set up educational workshops—consider inviting a gun owner, a peace activist, and someone with personal experience involving a gun to have a discussion together. Set it up forum style and have each person present their view. After an initial presentation, encourage people to ask questions.

If your congregational consensus is: *“Our church is entirely split on the issue of guns and there is absolutely no common ground to be found: some are for the promotion of gun control, others for gun rights. I feel as if it’s better to simply stay quiet and prevent a huge conflict from erupting by having this conversation.”*

- Organic and constructive conversation is vital at this point. MCC has a conversation guide available (mcc.org/learn/more/gun-violence-prevention) that showcases differing views and offers several ways to discuss together. MCC partner RAWtools uses the language of triggers as they relate to both guns and hearts. Gun violence is likely a product of the combination of the triggers in our hearts and the triggers in our streets. Whichever side one settles on or leans toward, they should be accountable to preventing violence involving guns from that perspective.
- Focus some time and energy on getting your small groups to engage this conversation. Consider offering a Bible study for those interested, but the main focus should be education. Check out this podcast on the Christian History of America’s Guns that has the potential to include and engage people all over the spectrum. christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/november-web-only/christian-history-americas-guns-shooting-second-amendment.html
- Do some research on the churches in your area. Are there certain congregations that are either struggling with violence involving guns or actively working toward a more peaceable future in your area? Consider creating a relationship with them to see how they are dealing with this issue. Sometimes having a personal relationship or a story to connect with will encourage people to engage this conversation.
- Do a book study using *Beating Guns*, co-authored by Mike Martin and Shane Claiborne. beatingguns.com



If your congregational consensus is: “*We are generally of one accord: we believe that this is an important conversation and that gun control is somewhat needed. However, this is a political issue and in order to stay true to our peace witness we will continue the separation of church and state.*”

- Take a look at history and how Anabaptists have lived out their peace theology in different ways. Two books that will benefit your work:

From Nonresistance to Justice: The Transformation of Mennonite Church Peace Rhetoric, 1908–2008 (Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History) by Ervin Stutzman

Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism by Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill

- Look at the ways Jesus engaged peacemaking in the political system that existed in his context.
- Consider planning a screening and discussion night on the documentary “Armor of Light.” armoroflightfilm.com/ The basic question of this 2015 documentary is “Can you be pro-life and pro-gun?”
- Invite a survivor to share their story and be available to discuss “next steps” with interested people in your congregation. (If you don’t have a connection with a survivor, one option would be to look up a Moms Demand Action chapter in your area. momsdemandaction.org/)
- Find and learn more about organizations in your area that are working against violence. For instance, encourage your church to get involved with your local schools.
- Do a book study using *Beating Guns*, co-authored by Mike Martin and Shane Claiborne. beatingguns.com
- Invite RAWtools to work with you to do a PeaceMaker event. This hour-long ceremony is based on God’s prophecy in Isaiah 2:4, where people will “beat their swords into plowshares.” The ceremony is centered in the Christian faith, sharing songs, art, stories and Scripture while a gun is forged into a garden tool. Contact mike@rawtools.org or connect with MCC Peace Education Coordinator Jes Stoltzfus Buller (jessicabuller@mcc.org).

If your congregational consensus is: “*We believe that gun violence runs counter to our peace theology. We believe that legislation is an important part of the conversation and are eager to do more.*”

- Seek out, learn from and connect to organizations or other churches/denominations at all levels (local, state and national) who are involved in gun violence prevention.
- Encourage attendance or host a nonviolence workshop.
- Check out MCC’s conversation guide (mcc.org/learn/more/gun-violence-prevention) in order to understand and engage other perspectives on this issue.
- Find and learn more about organizations in your area that are working against violence. For instance, encourage your church to get involved with your local schools.
- Consider a church boycott of the National Rifle Association (NRA). To learn more about ways churches could disconnect from the NRA, visit sojo.net/articles/churches-must-follow-students-lead-thoughtsprayersaction.
- Invite RAWtools to work with you to do a PeaceMaker event. This hour-long ceremony is based on God’s prophecy in Isaiah 2:4, where people will “beat their swords into plowshares.” The ceremony is centered in the Christian faith, sharing songs, art, stories and Scripture while a gun is forged into a garden tool. Contact mike@rawtools.org or connect with MCC Peace Education Coordinator Jes Stoltzfus Buller (jessicabuller@mcc.org).



Bible studies

This resource contains four Bible studies which work at contextually placing Jesus in conversation with differing views around our response to violence. We encourage congregations to intentionally

engage these studies with conversations on gun use and violence today. This could be used as a four-week session, or any study may be used individually and independent of the others.

In love and war: What is love?

John 13:31-35

31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33 Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ 34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Think about these questions:

- Take a look at what comes before and after this in John. Why do you think Jesus imparts this at this point of his life and the disciples’ understanding?
- How do we understand this command? What does “love one another” look like today?
- In discussions about hard topics, how might this command apply?
- How might this passage speak into U.S. culture and the ways it condones violence?
- What does love look like when guns are involved?



Church and state

Luke 13:10-17

10 Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 11 And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” 13 When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. 14 But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.” 15 But the Lord answered him and said, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? 16 And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?” 17 When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

Think about these questions:

- Do you see this type of religious division today? Give examples.
- What are ways that laws help our faith and understanding of Jesus? What are ways that laws hinder our faith and understanding of Jesus?
- What are the divisions in the church that you see between the law and the spirit of the law today?
- How can the church work against violence without violating a church and state separation?
- Do you consider guns to be an issue of your faith or of the law? Why? How do they intersect, if at all?



Stepping in to stop violence

John 8:2-11

2 Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. 3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, 4 they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. 5 Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” 6 They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” 8 And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. 9 When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. 10 Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” 11 She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

Think about these questions:

- Who do you identify with in this story? Why?
- How does Jesus change the situation?
- Are there current situations where Jesus’ followers should step in and try to change the dynamics? How do we make that decision? What other Scripture comes into play in those decisions? Are there other important factors (in addition to Scripture) that help make these decisions?
- How might we intervene where violence is present in ways similar to Jesus? How would having a gun in a situation change the situation?



Triggers in our hearts and in our hands

Matthew 26:47-56

47 While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. 48 Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.” 49 At once he came up to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. 50 Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you are here to do.” Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. 51 Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 52 Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. 53 Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?” 55 At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. 56 But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Think about these questions:

- What are the lessons from this passage for today’s context?
- How does Jesus speak to changing hearts and minds or other ways of walking with Jesus in this passage?
- How can we speak about why we work against violence? How can we speak about guns in ways that are healthy?



Worship resources

Call to worship options

I am a Peace Maker—call to worship

Tim Coons

My God, I lift to you my heart because . . .

“I carry a sword”

My words and actions deeply affect those around me because . . .

“I carry a sword”

I need your spirit, your new breath in me and your fire to change me because . . .

“I carry a sword”

I lift up to you my family, my coworkers, my friends, my enemies for protection because

“I carry a sword”

Guide my feet along this path I long to tread for . . .

“I carry a sword”

Amen

Invocation

Adapted from Episcopal Peace Fellowship,
“Gift of Shalom”

Liberating Faith: Religious Voices for Justice, Peace, and Ecological Wisdom Roger S. Gottlieb, ed, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003, p. 626

Gracious God, Inspire us with the gift of shalom, the gift of wholeness and the promise of your presence. Give us wisdom to seek nonviolence as an answer to the violence of our lives and world.

Give us courage to seek wholeness in a fractured and divided world, to find reconciliation rather than revenge, to abandon the instruments of violence and death and entrust our lives, our homes and our families to you. May your presence fill us and others with the thirst for unity, wholeness, and the desire to see all people valued as created in your image. May we and others receive your Shalom that we might be faithful instruments of your love. Amen.

Call to worship based on Psalm 27

Elizabeth Dilley

re-worship.blogspot.com/2014/01/call-to-worship-prayer-psalm-27.html

God is our light and our salvation; whom shall we fear?

*God is our shelter and refuge on the days of trouble,
and our hope and joy on the days of celebration!*

Day after day, we seek God’s face and the assurance of God’s holy love:

*O God, do not turn from us or hide your face from us!
Be our guide and our light instead!*

One thing we ask of God:

*That we may live in God’s dwelling place all the days of our life,
and never cease to behold the beauty of God’s home.*

Beloved of God, enter this worship in thanksgiving for God is among and within us!

Thanks be to God!



Revolution

Roddy Hamilton

glocal.net/2011/03/03/revolution-by-roddy-hamilton/

The enemy:

love them

The oppressor:

walk the mile with them

The Master:

turn the other cheek to them

This doormat faith

seems too much to bear

in a world where those who bully

always seem to win

The enemy:

imbalance them with love

The oppressor:

shame the law that oppresses

The Master:

turn the cheek as an equal

This rebellious faith

seems too much to bear

in a world where those who bully

are loved back to justice by the bullied

But this is heaven's revolution

and we are called into it

come let us worship

love's rebel, Jesus

Songs

Fear is a liar:

[youtube.com/watch?v=1srs1YoTVzs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1srs1YoTVzs)

God Will Fight Your Battles:

[hymnary.org/text/](http://hymnary.org/text/be_still_god_will_fight_your_battles)

[be_still_god_will_fight_your_battles](http://hymnary.org/text/be_still_god_will_fight_your_battles)

The Lord is My Light:

[hymnary.org/text/](http://hymnary.org/text/the_lord_is_my_light_and_my_bouknight)

[the_lord_is_my_light_and_my_bouknight](http://hymnary.org/text/the_lord_is_my_light_and_my_bouknight)

He came down:

[hymnary.org/text/](http://hymnary.org/text/he_came_down_that_we_may_have_love)

[he_came_down_that_we_may_have_love](http://hymnary.org/text/he_came_down_that_we_may_have_love)

Inspired by love and anger:

hymnary.org/text/inspired_by_love_and_anger

Canticle of Turning:

[youtube.com/watch?v=trhxP6VAOuc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trhxP6VAOuc)

Scriptures

Isaiah 61:1–3

Psalm 27

Psalm 46

Matthew 5:9–12

John 14:27

Romans 12:14–21

Sermon starts

- **Using Psalm 27 and/or John 14** (and/or other Scriptures), showcase how God asks people not to be fearful. Develop how fear affects your community's understanding of gun violence and other types of violence. What are ways the church can combat that fear in faith?
- **Using Romans 12 and John 14** (and/or other Scriptures), think through how the Holy Spirit and the church community are working or can work to create paths of peace. How does creating space for walking with those we disagree with, weeping with those who weep make peace? What are ways that the commandment to not be afraid and not be overcome by evil works in today's understanding?
- **Using Isaiah 61 and Psalm 46**, showcase how God works for wholeness. How might the power of God's steadfastness be an example of wholeness? What are ways that Christians can use God's refuge and strength to seek wholeness instead of violence?
- **Using Matthew 5 and Psalm 27**, develop themes of the call for peace and the call against fear. How would they have related in Jesus' day? What might this look like in terms of violence today?



Children's time starters

Option 1) Think about shaping time around gun safety using some of the resources found in these articles:

- besmartforkids.org/
- eddieeagle.com
- projectchildsafe.org/talking-to-kids

Explore with the kids how your understanding of God affects how you understand and use guns.

Option 2) Read Romans 8:38–39 to kids. Ask the kids to name the things that they are worried will separate them from God or other loved ones. Recognize each child's contribution. Talk about how God is with them through their fears. To end read:

38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation (say out loud all the children's worries here), will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Later, follow up on pressing concerns with children and loving adults.

Responses

I am a Peace Maker—response

Tim Coons

My God, I lift to you my heart because

“I am a peace maker”

My words and actions deeply affect those around me because

“I am a peace maker”

I need your spirit, your new breath in me and your fire to change me because

“I am a peace maker”

I lift up to you my family, my coworkers, my friends, my enemies for protection because

“I am a peace maker”

Guide my feet along this path I long to tread for

“I am a peace maker”

Amen

Prayer

My Prayer After Hearing the Evening News

Flames of the Spirit Ruth Duck, ed, The Pilgrim Press, 1985, pp. 119–120 (edited for length)

Creator God, hear us this day.

Forgive us as individuals.

Forgive our reliance upon ourselves and our own resources. Forgive our management of our disagreements.

Forgive us our dependence on violence for settling our conflicts.

God, please enter our enemies to change their minds and hearts. Please enter our own territories to change ours as well.

Change us. Change us from defenseless to defended, from fearful to confident, from closed to open, from shaken to courageous, in the risk and work of establishing peace and justice right here, over there, everywhere.



Responsive prayer based on Romans 8:22–27

Leader: O Holy God, we know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

People: We who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all.

Leader: Who hopes for what they already have?

People: But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

(Give space to silently name hopes).

Leader: The Spirit helps us in our weakness.

People: We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Leader: And the one who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit,

People: because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

A call to prayer for Las Vegas and beyond

Mike Martin, director of RAWtools

themennonite.org/call-prayer-las-vegas-shooting/

Lord, Hear our prayer . . .

We pray for the lives lost in [Las Vegas]* that join the climbing number of those lost to gun violence in America.

Comfort the mourning, the grieving, the broken-hearted.

Compel our prayers to turn into actions.

May the triggers of our streets be beaten into plowshares.

May the triggers of our hearts be met with the open arms of our neighbors.

May we trust in the transformative power of your refining fire.

Forge us to be instruments of your peace.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

May our posture be of a readiness to steady a plowshare.

May we take hold of your olive branch that plots for peace.

May the plowshare break the earth of senseless violence.

May the furrows bring us a harvest of solace, a never-ending rest from violence.

May we sit under the vine and fig, on earth as it is in heaven.

May it be so. *Amen.*

*Insert other applicable locations as appropriate.

