



Passing the Peace

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Rachel Yates

I've been monitoring my speech. I realized just how many violent metaphors I use: a shotgun approach, a bulletproof argument, fire away. That language is so commonplace, it rolls off my tongue with little thought. It might not make a difference for the pursuit of world peace, but I'm still trying to avoid words that suggest someone's about to be killed.

Not even a pandemic could slow violence in our communities. A nonprofit group, Gun Violence Archives tracks gun violence in the United States, and it reported 611 mass shootings in 2020, the highest since the organization started cataloging shootings in 2014. We're on pace this year for another surge, with 346 mass shootings to date. The problem of gun violence runs much deeper than mass shootings. Two-thirds of all gun deaths are suicides, according to a recent *Presbyterians Today* article ("As Gun Violence Grows, So Does Awareness and Advocacy", Jul/Aug 2021). In addition, nearly every year, unintended shootings outnumber defensive shootings; it seems we're just as likely to shoot an innocent bystander as we are "the bad guy."

The [Pew Research Center reports](#) that nearly half of Americans (48%) see gun violence as a "very big" problem in the country, and more than half of Americans (53%) favor stricter gun control laws, although there is disagreement about what that should look like. Gun ownership is common among those surveyed, with about 4 in 10 American adults (44%) saying they live in household with a gun. I do. I always have, from the time I was a little girl.

Still, it infuriated me when I went to Denny's with my sisters for breakfast and ran into a man touting a pistol. How was I supposed to tell him apart from someone intending me harm? Worse, from the statistics above, I had a 50-50 chance that even if he were trying to pull a defensive move at the restaurant, he'd accidentally shoot me. He didn't ask my permission, and I don't like the odds. I also wonder what heavy emotions the man must carry, believing that at any moment he might need to shoot someone, even at Denny's.

The Church does not get a pass on the issue of gun violence. We can't write it off as too political or step aside because the Bible doesn't mention guns. It mentions murder – rather, it forbids murder – and that should be enough for us to be involved. Tomorrow, the Presbytery leadership is offering the film *Trigger*, created in conjunction with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and produced in response to the 219th General Assembly (2010) resolution "Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call." Check today's Fresh Impressions for registration information, so you can participate in the Zoom discussion afterward.

The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship called Rev. Deanna Hollas to be the first minister of gun violence prevention in the PC(USA). She encourages awareness of the devastation wrought by gun violence as a first step, but then action is next. An online [congregational toolkit](#) can help with conversation starters and worship resources. Other ideas include creating memorials, ceremonies and rituals for victims of gun violence to show solidarity with those who suffer; writing and calling elected officials; and getting involved with efforts to get guns off the street, such as [RAWtools](#), an organization that turns guns into garden tools.

Passing the peace is more than a handshake (or COVID-free wave) on Sunday morning. What if we pass the peace of the Lord not just to mend relationships, but through our deliberate action to prevent violence? In word and deed, may we live into this sacred act.