



Building Gardens

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During my cross-country drive, I listened to a lot of local radio stations. One advertisement for a diet program or supplement caught my attention. “My reason for losing weight might not be everyone’s,” the sponsor said. Having lost some weight recently, I thought about my own motivations, which included being able to dance crazily with my young grandson. This advertiser, however, had something else in mind. He explained that his waistband was so tight that he could no longer wear his concealed-carry gun comfortably. So, he endorsed buying whatever product or doing whichever program had allowed him to lose the necessary weight. Turns out there’s a cottage industry for just this problem.

Another option for some people is to get rid of the gun...not because they must, but because they want to. Disposing of unwanted guns can be challenging. I’ve inherited several that I don’t need or want. One option for safely surrendering weapons is the [Guns to Gardens program](#). Based on the Scripture verse in Isaiah 2:4 “They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks,” this project literally forges unwanted guns into garden tools. Mennonite pastor Mike Martin felt called to become a blacksmith to convert guns to garden tools after the Sandy Hook School shooting in December 2012, and the project has since spread nationally. The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship offers training and outreach to our congregations, and our PC(USA) General Assembly endorsed this program in July as a way of disposing of unwanted guns.

I want to get rid of the guns I’ve inherited because I don’t ever want them used to injure or kill a person. Why else would people dispose of guns voluntarily? The household has changed and now includes young children. A former hunter no longer feels able to safely handle the gun. A family receives a gun back from the police after a loved one used it to commit suicide. Parents want to prevent gun violence by a child with emotional problems or mental illness. Congregations that wish to organize a Guns to Gardens event or to participate in the nationwide gun buyback event can contact the [Presbyterian Peace Fellowship](#) or register for its online training program. The next training opportunity starts on August 18.

Is it symbolic? Yes, and so is the American flag. Symbols have power. Is it meaningful? Yes, the guns transformed into tools will never be fired for the purpose of taking a life. Does it do anything to stop gun violence? Yes, it is a small step that each of us can take together. The events are a visible witness in our communities that we seek peace from a different source. For communities traumatized by gun violence, these events can be a way to offer healing and recovery. May your garden flourish!

