

Engaging Your Congregation in Gun Violence Prevention

Joint Gun Violence Prevention Task Force of the Southwest California Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles.

1. Frame gun violence from a faith perspective, aligned with our baptismal covenant to "strive for justice and peace in all the earth".
2. Commit to sustained efforts to prevent gun violence as part of the peace and justice agenda of your congregation.
3. Be prepared to respond to "it's political", and not something in which the church should be engaged. "The Bible is overwhelmingly concerned with public -- not private morality. The big problems for the Bible's voices (the prophets and Jesus) are social issues." (The Very Rev. Gary Hall, Why Gun Violence is a Religious Issue, Reclaiming the Gospel of Peace).
4. Be familiar with your church's resolutions and statements on gun violence prevention at both the national and synod levels.(1)
5. Resist the false dichotomy of "pro-gun/anti-gun". Mothers Against Drunk Driving are not anti-car. Our commitment to life, well-being, wholeness and peacemaking, means that we want to keep dangerous weapons out of the hands of those who should not have them.
6. Define and approach gun violence as a public health epidemic which focuses on prevention of all forms of gun tragedy: unintentional shootings, gun suicides, and homicides.
7. Educate the congregation about the importance of safe storage for those that own guns. Many gun tragedies are preventable, especially those involving young people.
8. Encourage parents to ask when their child goes to another home if that is a home with an unlocked gun. This question can be included with other safety questions that parents often ask. Parents can also provide this information when someone is invited to their home. Brochures and hand-outs about safe storage geared to parents and youth are available: <http://besmartforkids.org/> or <http://askingsaveskids.org>
9. Observe National ASK (Asking Saves Kids) Day at your congregation on June 19, 2016, by making brochures available and asking parents to sign a pledge to ASK.

10. Plan an annual observance of Rachel's Day. Suggestions for this are included in the resources for Rachel's Day, a project of Women of the ELCA. (2)

11. Observe the annual Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath, held each December, near the anniversary of the shootings in Sandy Hook, CT. Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath will be observed from December 14-18, 2016 this year. The Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath website has a wealth of faith-based resources.
www.decembersabbath.org.

12.. Given the high risk for gun tragedy for women who are victims of domestic abuse, put posters with the national domestic abuse hotline number in stalls of women's restrooms in your church. Here is a link to the poster:
<http://thequibordcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/TearoffFlyer.pdf>

13. Schedule a speaker about gun violence prevention. You can contact Women Against Gun Violence, 310-204-2348 , wagv@wagv.org, or a local chapter of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. You can find a local chapter here:
<http://www.bradiycampaign.org/california-chapters> (bottom of page)

14. Identify one or ore people in your congregation who will keep this issue visible by providing on-going opportunities for education, advocacy, and activism

15. Hold an adult hour discussion using a faith-based discussion guide.

16. Show a film followed by discussion.

Resources and sources:

The Gun Violence Prevention Task Force of the Southwest California Synod can provide on-going information about timely actions, activities and events.

(1) Community Violence - Gun Control, Social Policy Resolution CA 93.06.10
http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Community_Violence_GunsSPR93.pdf

(2) http://www.womenoftheelca.org/filebin/pdf/resources/RachelsDay_2015.pdf