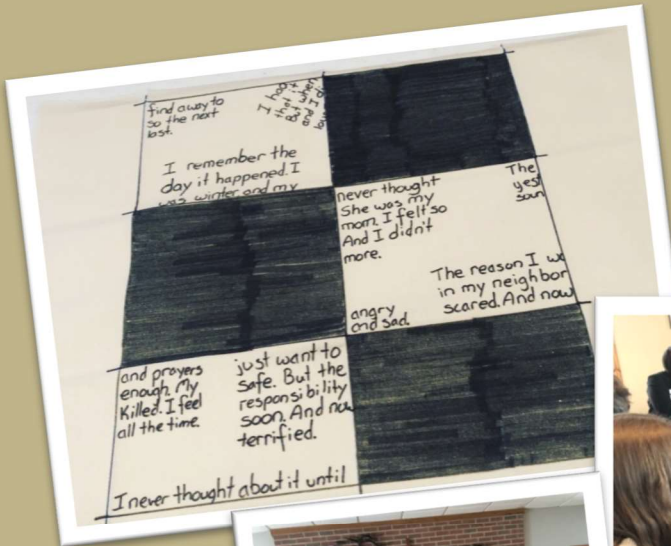


WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

MULTIGENERATIONAL
CONVERSATIONS ON
FAITH & GUN VIOLENCE



WISCONSIN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK.....	3
SUGGESTIONS FOR PLANNING A WORSHIP SERVICE.....	5
SINGLE-SESSION FRAMEWORK.....	14
MULTI-SESSION FRAMEWORK	
60 minute sessions.....	15
90 minute sessions.....	19
FIRST-PERSON REFLECTIONS: WORDS FROM THE FIELD	
“Ultrashorts”: brief testimony from survivors.....	23
A Poem for Peace.....	24
Faith in Life.....	25
Transcribed Stories from Youth Summits.....	26
OTHER RESOURCES	
Resources for Opening/Closing Sessions.....	31
Circle of Trust Touchstones for Safe and Trustworthy Space.....	33
Dealing with Sensitive Stories.....	34
Action Steps: Ways to Get Started.....	35
Church Security and Safer Church Resources.....	36
See Also.....	37
WI COUNCIL OF CHURCHES STATEMENT ON NONVIOLENCE.....	39

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We must also express our gratitude to the adult chaperones of the youth who attended the Youth Summits on Faith & Gun Violence in January and April 2019 for their time and care for those they accompanied, and last but certainly *not* least, the youth and young adults who claimed the brave space to share their stories and perspectives, and were willing to offer them in ways that helped others to grow in faith and advocacy. You are prophetic leaders, blessed to be a blessing. ✠

To the Churches of Wisconsin –

We began our most recent conversations on gun violence at the Council's Annual Meeting in 2017, when representatives of many of our member denominations gathered for a discussion session on our varied approaches to the crisis of gun violence facing our churches, communities and world. This work was given more urgency in the wake of the Ash Wednesday 2018 attack at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. In a Lenten Call to Action, we wrote these words to our members:

**We believe it is possible to address the scourge of gun violence as a people of faith, not fear.
We believe our faith compels us to act in this moment, standing with the traumatized,
aligning ourselves with the hope of transformation and new life.**

This study-action guide is the result of two years of faithful listening, cross+generational connection, and continuous commitment to the belief that that the Spirit calls us to action in multiple ways. Our work, and the resources in this guide were built on three foundational ideas. As you develop plans to implement these resources in your own local context, we urge you to consider how these scripture passages can inform your own efforts:

(1) On Prophetic, Cross+Generational Leadership

... this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.
Acts 2:16-17

On the issue of gun violence in our time, youth and young adults are speaking and acting as prophetic leaders. In our *Lenten Call to Action*, we said “They are speaking without fear, naming difficult truths, and advocating for change, believing that transformation is possible. They are confronting the powers of death with holy imagination.” We committed in this project to keep the voices of youth central. Two youth summits helped generate the testimony – true personal stories shared in vulnerable moments, art, and other writing – which form the backbone of each option in this guide. Youth from our member churches have been part of piloting the materials found here.

Holy Scripture reminds us that the gifts of the Spirit have been poured out equally upon *all flesh*, that a prophetic voice can be found among any generation of God's people. We invite you to consider: how can you engage youth and young adults from your community in planning and leading an activity based upon the outlines offered here? On Pentecost Day, it was Peter who spoke to the assembled crowd, perhaps the least likely preacher of all the disciples. How can you make space among you for the unlikely preachers and prophets to be heard, and the “dreams and visions” of multiple generations to be held as sacred side by side?

(2) On Facing Multiple Forms of Violence

There are numerous scripture reflections on peace and nonviolence. We urge you to read the Council's Statement on Nonviolence (see page 39 and following) for a deeper reflection on these themes. For the purpose of this study, however, we take this text as formative:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. - Matthew 5:38-42

While we are committed to nonviolence, it does not mean we are passive. In Matthew 5:39, Jesus says “Do not resist an evil doer.” This is not a directive for a do-nothing response. It actually means “Do not mirror evil.” In plain language today, we might say, “Rather than retaliating against violence with more violence, do something to defuse and change the situation.” Responding to violence with violence just continues a violent cycle. Changing the situation can lead to less violence. Eventually, it might even allow a healing of relationships between enemies.

Violence happens with guns, but it also includes the harm produced by racism and the degrading of people that comes with racist names and terms. We must model ways to respond to both kinds of violence without mirroring it. Responding to violence in ways that change the situation requires imagination and creativity. We are called to the beauty and joy of a nonviolent life in the Reign of God.¹ With creative engagement, youth hold the key to healing the plague of gun violence, and of racism in our society.

(3) When My Neighbor is in Pain

25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” 27 He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” 28 And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” 29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30 Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ 36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” 37 He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

The Commandment "Thou shalt not kill" can seem a simple and rudimentary concept. But over the centuries Christian writers have expanded it to mean also that it is possible to "kill" someone spiritually, mentally, emotionally, with words, by failing to assist, by withholding opportunity. Over the centuries, the Good Samaritan parable has been exegeted as depicting Christ's salvation of humans. He is the Samaritan; humanity is the person by the side of the road. The inn & its keeper are the Church, entrusted with continuing to improve the health of beaten-up humans.

As Christians, we are called not only to be the innkeeper, but also to model ourselves after the Good Samaritan (Jesus Christ). Our Lord deeply cares about every sparrow which falls to the ground (Matt. 10:29). We are called to resemble Christ, the Good Samaritan, who "ran to the afflicted with affection, showing him the utmost care." (St. Gregory of Narek, 10th Century). The Samaritan does not judge, but acts to help the traveler and restore them to health.

As we listen to the stories told within, and share some of our own, be alert for multiple forms of violence, and ways in which we or others are agents of death. How are you called to respond, as a Christian, to the varied forms of violence tangled up in these narratives? How is your community called? We invite you to pray over the question, as we have: **how can we be at peace when one of our neighbors is in pain?** Then let the source of all Wisdom, death-defying hope of Resurrection Morning be your guide as you take your next steps.

With Great Hope,
The Peace & Justice Commission of the Wisconsin Council of Churches
February 2020

¹ WCC Statement on Nonviolence

SUGGESTIONS FOR PLANNING A WORSHIP SERVICE

This outline may be easily customized to fit the specifics of your own tradition's worship order. We offer liturgical resources, several suggestions for the sermon or homily and/or a time of testimony, a time for the prayers of the people, and a hymn based on services which have taken place. Links to further resources are available in the "See Also" section beginning on page 37.

If you have time for advance planning, engage the youth of your church in planning and organizing this service. It may be the case that they are willing to create art, lead elements of worship, develop prayers, poems or other items to enrich worship.

✦ LITURGY

- **Call to Worship²** (PCUSA)

Leader: Come let us go to the mountain of the LORD,
that we may walk the path of the Most High.

People: **That we may beat our swords into ploughshares,
and our spears into pruning hooks.**

Leader: We gather today in remembrance of all those killed or harmed by gun violence in
_____ just this week.

People: **We mourn the loss of nearly 40,000 of our brothers and sisters,
killed by guns in our country this year.**

Leader: We are a nation at war with ourselves,
a people who have forgotten who we are.

People: **We gather today to remember
that we are each a child of God.
We gather to claim our belonging to each other
and our commitment to living the way of God's peace.**

Leader: Come let us go to the mountain of the LORD,
that we may walk the path of the Most High.

People: **That we may beat our swords into ploughshares,
and our spears into pruning hooks.**

Leader: Neighbor shall not lift up gun against neighbor.
Neither shall they learn violence any more.

All: **And none shall be afraid,
for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken.**

² Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, <http://www.PresbyPeaceFellowship.org>

MULTI-SESSION FRAMEWORK

BACKGROUND FOR LEADER/CO-LEADERS

The topic of gun violence is an emotionally powerful issue. A key role of the Leader/Co-leaders is to create a safe space for the participants to discuss the topic. For example; when participants share, be sure to acknowledge and thank them for their input. Be aware that they may feel vulnerable. By appreciating the contributions of the participants in this active way, the conversations over the weeks will get deeper and more personal. Since the goal of the workshop is to evoke awareness and empathy with the end goal being advocacy for a reduction in gun violence, the deepening discussions are essential. Consider guidelines for group dynamics such as the “Circle of Trust” Touchstones developed by Parker J. Palmer and the Center for Courage and Renewal (see page 33).¹²

By organizing the room into small clusters of seats of 2, 3, or 4 participants, the leader will set the space to emphasize the importance of small group conversations. Gradually, the conversations will become the focus of the sessions, which will build trust within the group. Groups of 2 are the most intimate. Groups of 3 shift to a little less intimate and are similar to groups of 4 or 5 where sharing might be limited. If there are 6 or more in a small group, the intimacy is often greatly diminished and the depth of the sharing can be harder to achieve.

The videos in the curriculum show high school youth from churches in Wisconsin speaking about their experiences with gun violence. Although the workshops do not require youth participation, we recommend cross-generational participation, including families, when possible. Having a youth co-leader from your church working with the adult leader will express the importance of multi-generational participation and make it more likely that youth will attend the sessions.

The multi-session framework is set up for six sessions. We provide options for sixty minute or ninety minute sessions. This framework is well-suited for churches wishing to move from reflection to action, as it provides an extended time to engage with the material, build trust, momentum and consensus.

Before leading your first session, we invite you to watch the first video on our playlist, “Introduction to Storytelling and Brave Space” to learn more about creating brave space, which is not always safe or comfortable, but a place to learn. This introduction also provides helpful advice about the boundary between stories that are ready to be shared and those that are still too tender. We offer a guide on page 34 for how to hold space for sacred stories, and what to do when these seem too intense for the facilitator to hold alone.

SIX SESSIONS/60 MINUTES

Session 1:

- 10 min: Welcome, Introductions, and Brief Opening Prayer/Centering Moment/Devotion
- 10 min: Introduction to the topic & overview of the theological framework
- 10 min: Reactions to theological framework:
 - What resonated with you?
 - What questions do you have?
 - What would you add from your own faith background?

¹² www.couragerenewal.org

TRANSCRIBED STORIES FROM THE YOUTH SUMMITS

Sarah | So it was December 14th, and it had snowed the night before. I went to school like every other day. And once the school day was over, I walked home. When I got home I put my key into the door, turned the handle, pushed the door open, and I heard my mom crying. She doesn't do that often, so I was concerned. I knew something was wrong. So I put my backpack down on the kitchen floor and I went and sat next to her on the couch – and the news was on. She doesn't watch the news – another new thing. So I asked what was wrong. She pointed at the TV, and it said "Sandy Hook Shooting." I didn't know what a shooting was, because I was in the 5th grade. I asked her, "Mom, what's a shooting?" She said, "A bad guy went into a school and many kids are dead." I didn't understand what that was, because I was in 5th grade. So I knew that was bad, but I didn't know how bad.

So later that night I was going to karate, and in the car, my mom was talking to her boyfriend about how we weren't safe and things like that, but I was still confused. So when I got to karate, I took off my shoes, and walked up to one of my favorite instructors, who I was quite close to, and asked to talk. So we got down on the floor and we just sat there. I didn't know what I wanted to say, but I knew that I had something to say. So I waited and I thought about what I needed to say. And then I asked him: "Am I safe? Will you keep me safe?" And he said, "The world can be scary, but you need to live your life, and you need to love your life." And so throughout the class I thought about that. What does it mean to live your life? What does it mean to love your life? Doesn't everyone do that?"

I was quite distracted in class, which doesn't really happen, so my mom got a call, which she didn't appreciate. After class I went home and thought about it. What does it mean to love life? What does it mean to live your life? Does it mean loving the book that you're reading in class? Does it mean having fun with your friends? Will we ever know what it truly means to love your life and to live your life? And so I ponder those questions and still to this day I wonder, what does it mean to love your life, to live your life? Does it mean loving the book you're reading? I don't know.

Anonymous | We were in the lunchroom and we heard that it was a Code Red and we didn't know if it was a drill or something serious. A couple of minutes later the principal said it was not a drill, that someone was actually in the school. So I didn't know what to do. *(available in the Milwaukee Story Circle clip)*

Emily | So it was the beginning of my senior year and I was carrying what feels like a hundred pound backpack into school, and I had my tennis backpack with me. And it was a really crummy day and I didn't want to go to practice. But we still had it. So I went down and put my backpack away afterschool into my varsity locker. And we had to stay inside because it was crummy outside; then we were in the cafeteria doing stretches and workouts and all that. And all of a sudden the cross-country and soccer guys start coming inside. They were whispering to each other and we were like, "what's going on?" Over the loudspeaker, they were like, "we're going into a lockdown, please go upstairs to a safe space," and so we did.



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END OF SAMPLE

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