

TRIGGER:

THE RIPPLE EFFECT
OF GUN VIOLENCE

STUDY AND ACTION GUIDE



About *Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence*

Drawing upon conversations with lawmakers, emergency room chaplains and surgeons, survivors and victims' families, former ATF officials, police officers, community leaders and others, *Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence*, a one hour documentary produced with funds from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, shares the story of how gun violence impacts individuals and communities and examines the "ripple effect" that one shooting has on a survivor, a family, a community and a society. *Trigger* also addresses the critical issue of gun violence prevention (such as keeping guns out of the hands of criminals and the mentally ill) by moving the conversation away from the polarizing extremes that have long dominated the debate and lifting up the voice and experiences of those who seek common ground and a new way forward.

This study and action guide was produced by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program. It is one part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)'s efforts to "take responsibility to build public awareness of gun violence and the epidemic of preventable gun-related deaths." The policy statement that guides our work to prevent gun violence is *Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call* (approved by the 219th General Assembly, 2010).

Both resources can be ordered at store.pcusa.org.

Policy document: *Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call* PDS #24-052-11-002

DVD documentary: *Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence*, PDS #24-0452-11-002

For more resources to address gun violence visit pcusa.org/gunviolence.

About the author:



Carol Wehrheim, Christian educator, writer, and editor, was the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators Educator of the Year in 2001. She is the author of *Getting It Together: Spiritual Practices for Faith, Family and Work*, *Giving Together: A Stewardship Guide for Families*, and *The Baptism of Your Child*. She is currently general editor for the *Feasting on the Word Curriculum*. Carol lives in Princeton, NJ, where she is clerk of session for Nassau Presbyterian Church.

STUDY AND ACTION GUIDE FOR

Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence

BY CAROL WEHRHEIM

Introduction

This four-session unit on the problem of gun violence is intended to help participants come to decisions about how they will act using what they have discovered to alleviate or eliminate this problem. It is one response to the overture passed by the 219th General Assembly (2010) "to awaken members and communities to the faith dimensions of our on-going tragedy." As stated in the rationale for that overture:

While Presbyterians and other communities of faith were issuing statements against gun violence over the past twenty years, however, the violence continued at consistent rates, resulting in more than 620,000 Americans killed and 1.4 million injured during this period. It is time, therefore, for the church to pay attention not just to the faithfulness of our spoken word, but the effectiveness of our action in stopping the preventable deaths of so many of our sons and daughters, parents and siblings, friends and neighbors. It is time to enact God's "No." It is time to recover the constructive moral outrage of the prophets and the moral courage of the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before. It is time to repent of our tolerance of that which is unacceptable" ("Gun Violence, Gospel Values," pp. 12-13).

This study takes participants from an awareness of the devastating problem of gun violence to ways that they can commit to being a part of the solution.

Sessions 1 and 2 focus on bringing an awareness of the breadth of the gun violence problem and culture to the participants. Sessions 3 and 4 provide entries into actions that participants or groups of participants can take to stop gun violence.

For the study portions, you will need:

Trigger DVD

DVD player

“Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God’s Call”—the overture and supporting statements approved by the PC(USA)’s 219th General Assembly (2010) and available on the PC(USA) website

Copies of Appendix A, “Guns and Violence in Our Language,” in “Gun Violence, Gospel Values” (pp. 26–27) for Session 2

Copies of “10 Things You Can Do to Prevent Gun Violence” for Session 3

Newsprint

Markers

Each session is planned to last about an hour. If you have more time, extend the discussion. If the group is large, consider forming small groups for initial conversation so everyone’s voice will be heard.

As you begin your preparation to lead this study on gun violence, pray that the Spirit of God will be with you.

SESSION 1

What’s Happening?

Welcome the participants. Thank them for coming and for their desire to be better informed about a deadly serious problem that is confronting our nation—gun violence.

Open with this prayer, or one of your own:

God of all creation, we have gathered here to speak of the unspeakable, the unnecessary deaths of your children by guns. Open our minds and hearts to the whispers of your Spirit. Amen.

Invite the participants to introduce themselves if they do not know each other. Then ask them to find partners, with no more than three to a group. Ask them to name the incident of gun violence that prompted them to come to this meeting.

After time for the pairs to exchange their reasons, **invite** the participants to come together. Ask them to call out names of places that have been in the news because of gun violence. List those they name on newsprint, providing ample time for them to recall places. This is not a time to discuss any of the places or events, but a time to help everyone gather what they recalled in the pairs and to add any places that have come to mind since then.

Present a brief overview of the organization for this study, noting that the goal of the study is to take actions to address the problem of gun violence. Explain that the video they will see and this study is one response called for in “Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God’s Call,” an overture passed by the PC(USA) General Assembly in 2010. You may wish to read the paragraph from the rationale for the overture in the introduction to this study (p. 1).

Watch *Trigger* from the beginning to the end of “Timing Is Everything.” (13:54) Then, without discussion or explanation, invite the group to call out their reactions in a word or brief phrase. Hearing from the family members or the survivors can create a strong emotional response. This brief time of releasing those emotions by naming them will prepare the group to move to a discussion of what they viewed. It isn’t necessary for everyone to speak because emotions named by one may be identified by others.

Discuss the part of the DVD they viewed with these questions:

| *How does gun violence happen in the United States?*

As the group discusses this question, **listen** for these occasions: mass gun violence, as at Virginia Tech; drive-by shooting, as when Brishell was killed; random shooting, as Mrs. Heyne's killing. While mass killing gets national news coverage, many shootings occur every day that receive little coverage. Note that the shootings described in *Trigger* take place in urban and suburban neighborhoods, on college campuses, and in elementary schools. No place, community, or neighborhood is immune to gun violence.

| *According to the victims and friends or families of victims, how are they affected by gun violence?*

Encourage the participants to begin this conversation with comments about the people in the DVD, recalling what they heard them say. Then encourage the group to consider how the circle of persons affected becomes broader. Ask:

| *Even when we don't know the victims or those close to them personally, how are we affected by gun violence?*

| *At the end of this segment, Rev. Holyan says, "This changes everything." How do you interpret these words?*

Conclude this session by inviting the group to be particularly alert to reports of gun violence in the media until you meet again.

Pray this litany, instructing the group to respond with "In your mercy, lead us in your way," whenever you pray "Loving God."

*In a nation where an average of 80 people are killed by guns each day, loving God,
in your mercy, lead us in your way.*

*In a nation where there are about 270 million privately owned fire arms,
loving God,*

in your mercy, lead us in your way.

*As your church, we believe that you mourn at these unnecessary deaths.
Loving God,*

in your mercy, lead us in your way.

As your people, we believe that you want us to preserve life. Loving God,

in your mercy, lead us in your way.

*As disciples of Jesus Christ, we believe that we are called to be peacemakers.
Loving God,*

in your mercy, lead us in your way.

Amen. Amen.

SESSION 2

How is Gun violence All Around Us?

Greet the group and thank them for returning. Welcome any who are new to this study and introduce them to the group. Open with this prayer or one of your own:

God of love, we come together and before you again. We are saddened by the lives lost to gun violence. We seek ways to show your love to all your people. May we be open to the movement of your Spirit among us. Amen.

Summarize the content from the first session, or ask participants to say a sentence about something from that session that has stayed with them since then.

Have the group **describe** briefly the news items regarding gun violence they have heard or read since the first session. Note that every week shootings are reported, but not all of them make the evening news or the banners across our computer screens.

Explain that thus far the group has concentrated on being more aware of the problem of gun violence. In this session they will increase their awareness, but they will also get some glimmers of ways to counter it. Suggest that they listen for those hints in *Trigger*.

Watch "Through the valley" (13:55) and "Robbing a generation" (18:13) from *Trigger*. Discuss these segments with these questions:

| *After a shooting, according to the persons in Trigger, what happens to the victims and their families and friends?*

Help the group recall the persons by naming any they have not recalled when conversation lags: Nardyne Jeffries, Christian Heyne, Rev. Holyan, Chaplain Diane Hugger, Dr. James Street III, Kenneth Barnes of Guns Aside, the middle school boy who was shot at when he was 12, Ann Brogioli (middle school social worker).

| *Rev. Holyan says that one shot ripples through the whole community and that goodness is destroyed. How do you see that happening?*

Suggest that the participants think about shootings that receive national, even global, attention and what happens miles away as well as in the immediate vicinity.

Ann Brogioli, the middle school social worker, talked about the pervasive violence in the lives of the children. What we may overlook is the many ways that allusions to gun violence are just as pervasive in our everyday language. Distribute copies of Appendix A from “Gun Violence, Gospel Values.” Invite the group to glance over it silently. Ask:

| *What is your initial reaction to this list?*

After a few participants have responded, **ask**,

| *Why is it important for us to recognize the subtle and not so subtle ways that gun violence has invaded our culture?*

Give the group this assignment for the next session: Listen to conversations, sports commentary, and news casts, and make a list of anything you hear that appears in Appendix A.

Close with prayer:

*A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and wailing.*

It's Rachel crying for her children;

she refuses to be consoled,

because her children are no more (Jer. 31:15 CEB).

We pray for all the Rachels whose children are no more. Help us, Creator God, to seek ways to stop the killings and to be givers of comfort and consolation. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

SESSION 3

What is Being Done?

After welcoming the participants, **open** with this prayer, or one of your own:

God of Shalom, one more time we are here to learn about the prevention of gun violence. Help us turn our words into actions. Amen.

Review major conversation points from Session 2, particularly what was discovered about the aftermath of gun violence. Invite the group to report on where they heard the expressions listed in Appendix A, “Guns and Violence in Our Language,” and which ones seemed to come up the most. Ask the participants to comment on their reactions to this exercise. As they name where they heard these words, list them on newsprint. This will illustrate how pervasive the language of gun violence is in our culture.

Ask the group to think about, but not discuss, this question:

| *At this point, what types of actions to prevent gun violence seem to be calling to you?*

Watch the conclusion of *Trigger*, “How could this happen?” (30:24)

Discuss this segment, using these questions:

| *What prompted these people to seek ways to prevent gun violence?*

| *Several people in *Trigger* speak of gun violence as a public health issue. How does that reframe this problem for you?*

Dr. Garen Wintemute, Director of the Gun Violence Prevention Research at UC Davis Medical Center, says: We tend to see the beads on the necklace one tragedy at a time, and we don't see the string that connects them together. There are ways in which we could interrupt the chain of events that leads to shootings.”

| *What is the string that connects these events? What can we do to break that string?*

| *Congresswoman Carolyn McCarthy talked about the costs of gun violence to society, from financial to pain. What are these costs to society?*

Several organizations working to prevent gun violence or working with victims were named in the DVD. List them on newsprint as the group recalls them, such

as Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Response Team, Guns Aside, Heeding God's Call, and the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence.

Distribute copies of "10 Things You Can Do to Prevent Gun Violence." Go over the list and invite the group to add to it. Write their suggestions on newsprint so this list can be printed for Session 4.

Ask for volunteers to research groups in your community who are working to end gun violence and to learn more about those groups named in the DVD.

Give this assignment for the final session: We can no longer sit in the shadows and ignore this threat to our nation. Until we meet again, think about what God is calling you to do and pray for clarity of vision and commitment.

Conclude the session with this prayer, providing silence for quiet meditation after each line:

God, you have called prophets to speak out against the evils in your world in each generation; what are you calling us to say today? (pause)

God, you have sent teachers to feed our minds with the fullness of your word; what do you want us to know about the evil of gun violence today? (pause)

God, you sent your Son to show us how to love your people and all creation; what are you calling us to do to stop gun violence today? (pause)

Let the people say Amen.

SESSION 4

What will we do?

Welcome the participants. Thank them for staying with this series on gun violence and how Christians respond to it.

Open the session with this prayer or one of your own:

Merciful God, we come together to continue our struggle to hear your call to counter gun violence. We pray that your Spirit will continue to abide with us as we seek to answer your call. Amen.

Explain that this session is about what happens next as they ponder God's call to care for all people. If some participants researched groups seeking to end gun violence, invite them to present their reports. If these reports result in potential actions for the participants, print them on newsprint for everyone to see.

Distribute the list of additional suggestions for ways to take action from the newsprint in Session 3 to the group. Have additional copies of "10 Things You Can Do to Prevent Gun Violence" for participants who do not have them.

Invite a time of silence for the group to reflect on the list on newsprint and the lists you have distributed. Suggest that they pray for God's guidance as they discern how they might respond to this problem. If you wish, play soothing instrumental music softly during this time of prayer and meditation.

Select one of these methods to move another step toward action:

- Invite each person to name one way he or she will take action to prevent gun violence. Assure them that no action is insignificant.
- With a large group, form groups of five or six where each one will name an action she or he has selected.
- Distribute index cards for the participants to write down the action they are committed to *taking to prevent gun violence*.

After participants have declared their intent to act, have those with common intentions **group** together so they can work together and **support** each other. They may wish to meet together regularly or form an Internet group to stay in touch. Allow time for the small groups to talk and plan their next steps.

Before concluding this session, bring everyone together to **discuss**:

| *How will this be conveyed to the congregation so others can join us?*

When a plan for communication is decided and assignments given, **close** with this prayer:

We have learned about the horrors of gun violence. We have cried with those who are victims and their family members. Now we are ready to speak out against such horrors and we are prepared to get involved. Yet, God, we know that we cannot do this without the help of your Spirit and we know we cannot move ahead unless we remember that you love all your people. Hold us when we are afraid to speak. Push us when we hesitate to step forward. Remind us daily that you love us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

10 Things You Can Do to Prevent Gun Violence

1. Contact your representatives in the U.S. Congress and ask that they support:
 - a. universal background checks and waiting periods for all gun purchases.
 - b. a ban on semiautomatic assault weapons, armor piercing handgun ammunition and .50 caliber sniper rifles.
2. Identify the organizations in your community engaged in gun violence prevention and get involved.
3. Attend a peaceful demonstration or public prayer service to end gun violence.
4. Contact your mayor and city council members and demand that steps be taken in your community to prevent gun violence.
5. Help close the gun show loophole that allows purchases with NO BACK GROUND CHECKS.
6. Schedule a screening of *Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence* for your group or organization. Visit the *Trigger* website at triggerdoc.com to order materials and get suggestions on hosting a screening.
7. Join or form a local chapter of *Heeding God's Call*, a faith-based movement to end gun violence. Visit heedinggodscall.org/ for more information.
8. Ask the leaders of your worshipping community to address gun violence in worship services (with periodic preaching, liturgies and prayers) and education classes. Resources can be found at pcusa.org/gunviolence
9. Learn about your state's concealed carry laws (that may allow guns to be carried openly, including into houses of worship). Encourage your places of work and worship to prominently display signs that prohibit carrying guns onto their property.
10. Encourage those you know (citizens, hunters and law enforcement officials) who regularly handle weapons properly to be wise examples in reducing risks and teaching how to prevent the misuse of deadly force.

All suggestions are based upon the recommendations approved by the 219th General Assembly (2010) in *Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call*. PDS #24-0452-11-002

Notes:

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For additional resources related to *Trigger*
and to learn more about PC(USA) efforts
to prevent gun violence visit:

Triggerdoc.com
pcusa.org/gunviolence

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