

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ABOUT FPCP AND GUN VIOLENCE¹

1. Why does FPCP have a Gun Violence Prevention Taskforce and why is First Church getting involved?

FPCP has historically been an action-oriented church for social justice issues (such as creating MANNA) and for decades, the General Assembly of the PC(USA) has urged gun violence prevention action. By focusing on education, partnerships, and constructive ways to address the loss and pain caused by gun violence (for communities as well as victims and their families), we believe that we are responsibly honoring our beliefs and furthering the work of our church.

2. Why is gun violence such an issue in the U.S. now?

With over 1.3 guns per person, we have more guns than any other country and a “gun culture” exists: guns are very easy to buy; many people have a very expansive view of the 2nd Amendment (to include high capacity assault rifles and “God-given” gun rights); and mass shootings have become more commonplace. With the pandemic and a divisive political climate, there is also heightened financial and emotional stress, frustration, domestic violence, social unrest, and fear, all of which have accelerated both gun purchases and the feeling that guns may be the solution to resolving problems. This is especially true in Philadelphia, where gun violence is up 38% over last year; over 1,200 have been shot as of mid-August, including over 100 children (almost all Black); only Chicago tops our death toll from gun violence for U.S. cities.

3. Who is getting killed from gun violence?

Blacks are more likely to be victims of gun homicide (13 times more for Black men and 8 times more overall). Homicides account for about 37% of gun deaths. Anti-LGBTQ homicides are on the rise and it is estimated that a woman is shot and killed by a current or former partner every 16 hours. Over 60% of deaths are from suicide (including children, teens, any age with access to a gun) and expected to rise due to coronavirus-related issues; an August 2020 CDC survey about impacts of the pandemic reported that a quarter of young adults in the U.S. said they considered suicide in the previous month—and access to a gun triples the risk of death by suicide. The rest are accidental shootings (such as kids playing), police action, or unclassified.

4. I own a gun; will FPCP be advocating for changing gun control laws?

Being against gun violence is not the same as being against responsible gun ownership; we are concerned about the culture of gun use to settle personal differences and the availability and proliferation of guns to unscreened and irresponsible owners, especially weapons designed to kill many people very quickly. In 2021, we plan to consider coordinated advocacy for gun control laws, although individual initiatives at any time, in terms of assessing and weighing in on legislation, is always appropriate. Information is available at ceasefirepa.org.

¹Questions and answers adapted from information available from the Pew Research Center; CeaseFirePA (August 2020 presentations to the GVP TaskForce); “Gun Violence, Gospel Values” approved by the 219th General Assembly of the PC (USA); Fact Tank; Politico; local news reports in August 2020, such as 6abc and the Philadelphia Inquirer; Team Enough, BRADY Against Gun Violence; and the GVP Initiatives document citations. Specific citations available upon request (missions@fpcphila.org).