

“No Guns in God’s House” Signage

In 2004 Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis became the first church that we know of to post a sign as a witness against gun violence. That sign, still up today, reads: “*Blessed are the Peacemakers – No Guns Allowed.*” In 2014 the PCUSA General Assembly called on more churches to post signs with the suggested message: “*No Guns in God’s House.*”

Gun violence in America killed 36,000 people in 2016, injuring 100,000 more, with boundless pain, families destroyed, parents bereaved, children orphaned. It is not just a political issue. Gun violence is a spiritual issue: In what do we trust? And what kind of nation do we want to be?



The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship seeks 100 church buildings to post “No Guns in God’s House” signage by Dec. 14, 2017, the 5th anniversary of the Sandy Hook School shooting. “This anniversary

requires us to do more than offer our thoughts and prayers,” says Margery Rossi, *above*, chair of the PPF Gun Violence Prevention Working Group. “We are looking for 100 lead churches who will study the issue and vote to post these signs in 2017, as a first step toward many more doing so in the coming years.”

FAQs

Why should we declare church property to be a Gun-Free Zone?

Expanded provisions in concealed and/or open carry laws in many states now allow guns to be carried into places never before considered appropriate, including into houses of worship. ***It is important that churches stand firm against the gun and ammunition industry myth that more guns in more places will make us more secure. Many studies show***

that where there are more guns, there is more gun violence, not less.

For 50 years, Presbyterian efforts to reduce gun violence have been focused on advocacy and legislative change. We believe it is time to provide a stronger witness by living out our Christian commitment to nonviolence *within our own buildings* and equipping local church members to affect change.



Gun violence can be a difficult subject to talk about in any context, including the church. As a result, very little meaningful discussion happens anywhere about guns. We hope that the Sign Project will encourage education, spiritual reflection and healthy conversation to embolden congregations to stand against fear and to support actions that can reduce gun violence.

Which sign should we use?

Signs will vary across the country. Find square & circle sign options to order or download, as well as English and Spanish versions, at presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence/resources Use whichever image you prefer. The rectangular image includes space for you to post necessary language to meet local codes. Or create your own sign.



Will these signs meet code to be legal where we are?

Check your local requirements. Counties, municipalities and states are writing new laws all

the time regarding gun-free zone signage. Research *all* levels of government with jurisdiction over your community before deciding which image is the right option for you and whether or not your congregation intends to comply with these sign codes, which are often deliberately designed to be difficult to post. ***Be Bold!*** Posting these signs on God’s property is an act of faith and witness.

Does Session vote on this or do we need a congregational vote?

Signs are fast appearing across the nation at Episcopal and Catholic churches and schools where a bishop can decide to act city-wide. But for Presbyterians, each church decides about signage for itself. The Session has spiritual and policy-making authority in a congregation, so it is appropriate for the Session to vote on use of these signs. Sample policy language to record in minutes: “*Individuals (other than active law-enforcement officers) are prohibited from carrying guns onto this property.*” (GA 2014)

However, this is a *very* important conversation for *congregations* to have as well – what does it mean to you to post these signs on your church property?



There are many educational resources available to sessions and congregations to engage these issues from a spiritual and theological study perspective. Talk and study about it together! See PPF’s ***Gun Violence Prevention Congregational Toolkit.***

Do the Signs Make us Targets?

When Trinity Presbyterian in Harrisonburg, VA posted its sign, a neighbor who uses the building objected. "She felt that we were advertising that we are sitting ducks," said Rev. Stephanie Sorge Wing. Chicago's Fourth Presbyterian Church session spoke unanimously to the same issue:



"As Christians we follow the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. He reprimanded Peter for grabbing a weapon in his defense, saying 'All who live by the sword will die by the sword.' (Matt. 26:52b)

The solution to gun violence in our country is not more guns; the epidemic of gun violence breeds distrust, fear, and disconnection between people. Workplaces which permit employees to carry guns are five to seven times more likely to be the site of workplace violence. Gun owners are six times more likely to be a victim of gun violence than to use their weapon in self-defense."* (* American Public Health Association)

Presbyterian pastor and former NRA member James Atwood points out in his book, ***Gundamentalism and Where it is Taking America*** (Cascade Books) that it is a false and idolatrous sense of security to think that we are safer by arming ourselves everywhere. He recalls the disaster at Ft. Hood, a U.S. Army base. Twelve soldiers were killed and 32 wounded in that place which was brimming with guns. This was followed by the Washington Navy Yard killings where 13 died and another dozen were injured at a fully armed facility.

The "No Guns in God's House" Sign Project calls on the family of Jesus to publicly witness to the way of peace by declaring church buildings, camps and campuses to be sanctuaries, free from violence and from fear of neighbors.

Our faith calls us to do more about gun violence. What else can we do?

See the PPF *Gun Violence Prevention Congregational Toolkit* for more ways you can get involved in your area. The 74 page toolkit offers educational, pastoral and action



resources, as well as case studies on congregations already involved. To order a print copy or for a free toolkit download, see presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence/resources

How do we Report our Sign Action?

Please send a photo of your church sign and church name/city and a contact person to info@presbypeacefellowship.org

Follow others in the Sign Project at facebook.com/presbypeace If you need help or have further questions, let us know that too.



Who We Are

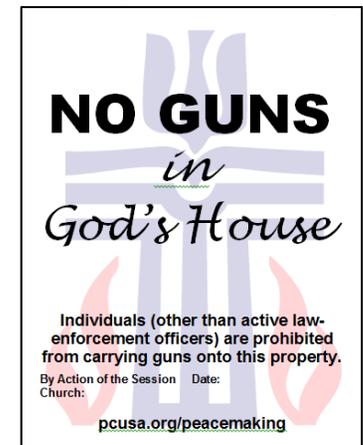
Founded in 1944, the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship is a nation-wide community of Presbyterians who trust in the nonviolence of Jesus Christ. We are church members, elders, pastors, younger, older --- all Presbyterian activists who seek alternatives to war and violence. Be Bold. Nonviolence Works.

www.presbypeacefellowship.org
info@presbypeacefellowship.org
[@presbypeace](https://twitter.com/presbypeace)



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GOAL: 100 Signs on Presbyterian Buildings in 2017

What About Your Church?

A Project of the
Presbyterian Peace Fellowship
Gun Violence Prevention Working
Group, in Partnership with the
Presbyterian Peacemaking Program