Dear friends,

This Friday, June 6 is **National Gun Violence Awareness Day**. How is the church, how is First Presbyterian Church of Durham, NC, called to respond to this issue? The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) offers us some guidance:

> *Since the 1960s, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its predecessor denominations have responded to gun violence by emphasizing the need to control the sale and possession of firearms and advocating for education and action at various levels of government.*
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> The 226th General Assembly in 2024 - recognizing that gun violence profoundly impacts the nation's children - voted that every PC(USA) congregation take action of their own, such as promoting secure gun storage, taking part in the Guns to Gardens initiative, or praying for the emotional, mental, and spiritual health of children growing up in an era rife with gun violence.
>
> To encourage prevention, the denomination offers programs and resources that address and explore the causes and impacts of gun violence, such as the award-winning documentary "Trigger" and "Standing Our Holy Ground,"[1] a webinar series about gun violence and how faith communities can address it.
>
> The church also responds to gun violence events and other human-caused disasters through a ministry of accompaniment and presence. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance offers Church Safety & Security Training to congregational leadership through their mid council.[2]

We at First Presbyterian Church have been directly affected by gun violence through the death of our church member Emily Steinhoff James. Emily was killed in an altercation over a year ago when a gun fired during an altercation between her sister and her sister's ex-husband (who fired the gun) as Emily accompanied her sister to pick up her sister's toddler. Emily was 44 years old. Her husband Chris and son Miles have been on our prayer list. Brianna, Ricky, and Luke Bennett remain their good friends.

Often, we feel helpless to do anything to reduce gun violence. However, our denomination has called us to act on this and given us tools to do so. **If you are interested in helping promote programs that address and explore the causes and impacts of gun violence, and encourage prevention, please let me know.**

The Presbyterian Peacemaking Program provides a Toolkit for congregations to consider how we respond to this issue, in our own city and in our nation.

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[1] Link to one of the webinars in this series, "Standing Our Holy Ground: What Churches Can Do to Address Gun Violence: Active and Creative Strategies"

[2] Gun Violence Prevention & Response | Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

In addition, Susan Dunlap and Brianna Bennett work with Durham CAN's Gun Violence Action Team, a group that successfully advocated for a Durham Office of Survivor Care that will offer resources to families of homicide victims and to people who have lived through a gunshot wound.

Locally, community members, elected officials, and law enforcement officials from across the Triangle are invited to participate in an event that will be held at noon on Friday, June 6 in front of the Franklin Street Post Office in Chapel Hill. The goal of the observance is to work to bring an end to gun violence. #WearOrange Campaign. **On this day, no matter where we are, we are invited to wear orange to raise awareness about this issue.**

We are a people of peace. Our actions make a difference. Let's do what we can to prevent gun violence.

Grace and peace to you all,
Mindy