

Local Presbyterian churches collaborate for Guns to Gardens event

By Sarah Gottlieb, Village Chapel Presbyterian Church

The second community Guns to Gardens event was held May 3 at St Mark's United Methodist Church in Charleston. This event was a collaborative effort by First Presbyterian Church of Charleston, Village Chapel Presbyterian Church, and St Mark's United Methodist Church with support from First Presbyterian Church of Dunbar and Temple Israel.

We partnered with RAWtools South, a non-profit blacksmith group, who brought all the equipment needed for the event and trained lay people (including Village Chapel pastor Todd Wright) on safe chop saw use when "dismantling" a firearm. RAWtools has helped with dozens of Guns to Gardens events; they re-form gun parts into garden tools, jewelry, and art at their forge in Asheville, NC. Their products were sold at First Presbyterian's Hope Village last fall. You can also purchase their work at south.rawtools.org.

On May 3, 19 firearms were voluntarily surrendered including 3 assault style rifles. Reasons for surrender included that the guns were not needed and it gave a sense of relief to no longer have them in the home where they might be stolen, inherited guns that were unwanted, a desire to recycle the gun, and that some guns were historic and may not operate properly. One owner's grandfather had carved his initials in the stock, and we were able to take off that part of the stock and return it to him, much to his delight. Overall, the gun owners were grateful and relieved to get their guns safely out of the home.

We were fortunate to receive a Cluster Support Grant from the Relations Committee to help purchase gift cards for those surrendering guns. The gift certificates to local grocery stores were \$100 for a single shot (shotgun or hunting rifle), \$150 for a revolver or semi-automatic handgun, and \$200 for a semi-automatic (assault style) rifle.

We are very appreciative to the Relations Committee and the Presbytery of WV for their support in this effort! We would love to help another community in the Presbytery organize their own event. Please reach out to Sarah Gottlieb at sarahe54gottlieb@gmail.com or Village Chapel Presbyterian Church if you're interested.

