

NATIONAL GUN VIOLENCE SURVIVOR WEEK 2023

Wednesday, February 1, through Tuesday, February 7, 2023
The U.S. gun death rate is 11 times that of other high-income countries. This is unacceptable. Each February, Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund ("Everytown") commemorates the loss of life and mourn the effects of gun violence on survivors – more than 230 people a day are shot and survive their injury – and on our society as a whole.

This February 1-7 will mark the fifth annual **National Gun Violence Survivors Week** – a week when people from all walks of life come together to share and amplify the stories and voices of gun violence survivors who live with the impact of gun violence every day of the year.
The centerpiece is Moments that Survive, a digital storytelling site that lifts up the stories of survivors in their own words. We honor the stories of survivors by sharing their stories and participating in dedicated events to acknowledge the lives of those marked by gun violence.

Join us by participating in **Survivor Weekend**, dedicated to remembrance and celebration of survivors and their loved ones. **This document has ideas on how communities of faith can participate in National Gun Violence Survivors Week and Survivor Weekend and work to bring peace to our communities.**

Gun homicides, nonfatal shootings, and exposure to gun violence disproportionately affect Black communities, and these disparities are largely driven by longstanding inequalities and systemic racism. As we observe National Gun Violence Survivors Week, we will also mark the start of Black History Month with the same vision by celebrating the resilience and healing of Black survivors. Throughout the month, Everytown, and the Students Demand Action and Moms Demand Action volunteers, will share the stories and experiences of Black gun violence prevention advocates who are making a difference in the movement.

FAITH AND GUN VIOLENCE ARE CONNECTED

Gun violence impacts us all. Leaders from a wide range of religious traditions realize that gun violence damages the lives and relational and spiritual wellbeing of communities. People of faith of many different backgrounds have experienced firsthand the impact of gun violence, tragically even in houses of worship. When our communities hurt because of gun violence, we are compelled by conscience to heal the hurt and seek transformation. We honor and serve the people in our communities by tending to their personal and collective spiritual care needs. We honor them with our prayers. And we honor them with our actions. We are working with Everytown to make our country safer.

Several religious groups offer resources for countering gun violence within various faith traditions, including Bishops United Against Gun Violence and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. These resources are available to use and can be modified for various faith contexts.

GUN VIOLENCE SURVIVOR WEEK GOALS

1. Raise awareness and spark conversation about the scale and impact of gun violence on survivors online using #GVSurvivorsWeek, and at virtual events, including by highlighting all forms of gun violence including police violence, suicide and domestic violence, witnesses of gun violence, those who are threatened and wounded by gun violence, and gun violence in communities of color.
2. Provide an empowering platform for all survivors to speak out and share their stories and highlight their leadership in our movement.
3. Motivate more people to honor survivors with action by joining the movement to end gun violence.

Action Points: Faith groups can use their community's traditions and experience to support survivors and promote peace throughout their physical location.

You can support this work by hosting a virtual event or sharing the word about National Gun Violence Survivors Week. Members of all religious and ideological backgrounds can come together to support those affected by gun violence and work towards safer communities across the country.

INCORPORATING SURVIVORS WEEKEND IN WORSHIP SERVICES

One way to honor and support survivors in your community is to include them in your worship service. This looks different in every religious context, but it can include recognition before or after the service, a testimony from a survivor, or a sermon or lesson that talks about gun violence from your faith perspective. To incorporate it into your faith community's prayers, Bishops United Against Gun Violence has created liturgies and litanies that can be adapted for a variety of faith contexts. That resource is available here.

SURVIVOR WEEKEND EVENTS

Build awareness within your community by hosting or participating in a virtual event. These events may be added to other activities on a day of worship or can stand on their own as an instance of connection and service to our world stricken with gun violence.

1. *Candlelight Vigil (Virtual)*: In the spirit of holding a candle vigil or lighting up the Empire State Building orange in awareness of gun violence, host a candle lighting/vigil event. Light or candle fire echoes "Wear Orange" awareness events that take place in June. Light can be displayed to honor the spirit of survivors, which has not been extinguished by the darkness of gun violence.
    a. Participants can display candles or lights in darkened windows or simply gather for lighting ceremonies or vigil-like events.
2. *Community Conversations*: Host a dialogue with community partners of another faith or partners involved in advocacy work to prevent gun violence, including Moms Demand Action, Students Demand Action or other local partners. Some potential topics include a focus on domestic violence, suicide, or police violence.
    a. Dialogues can be between two leaders or a small group of leaders (virtual).
    b. Dialogues can also be focused on a piece of media or art piece (documentary/film, literature/poetry/music content, visual art) that connects to one of related topics listed above (provide time for a talk-back or group reflection).
3. *Caravans/Unity Walks (Virtual)*: Demonstrate unity of purpose as a community by sponsoring or joining a caravan to highlight gun violence. Display signs, banners from vehicles while driving along a predetermined route for a socially distant take on a protest or unity walk.
    a. Hosted within your particular faith community.

b. Consider sponsoring interfaith joint caravan or unity walk.

MOMENTS THAT SURVIVE: STORIES

Meet the survivors. At Everytown, we offer care and the opportunity for transformation by giving survivors a space to share their stories. Uplift the voices of gun violence survivors by sharing stories from the momentsthatsurvive.org website on social media using the #GVSurvivorsWeek hashtag. Consider inviting members of your own House of Worship to share their stories as well.

On Moments that Survive, hear survivors in their own words.
Survivors who pray for blessings for others even in the midst of their pain.
Survivors who spiritually carry their lost loved ones with them always.
Survivors who live with purpose.

Survivors with a sense of compassion to help improve the world. Survivors with a vision to protect and care for others. Survivors who view life as a gift.

Survivors are connected by events they could not control and did not ask for. Survivors are connected to one another across faith backgrounds. Survivors are united.

We honor the resilience of survivors and choose to unite ourselves with survivors as people of faith. Join us in seeking transformation for individual lives and our communities. Let us follow the example of these survivors who "choose to change the world by helping, not hurting."

PEOPLE OF FAITH. SERVING TOGETHER, CHANGING TOGETHER.

Gun violence changes us. Our paths forward look different, but are committed to honoring each others' journey to healing and transformation. As we heal, we also seek to help others heal.

Hear more from voices on Everytown's Faith Council of interfaith leaders.

Charleston AME, Rev. Sharon Risher, a member of the Everytown Survivor Network whose mother, Ethel Lance, and Cousins, Susie Jackson and Tywanza Sanders, were shot and killed on June 17, 2015, at The Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina

> *"October 1st, 2017, I was preaching, and the word "forgiveness" was not even in my sermon because I made sure that I didn't use those type of words. And that Sunday, the word*

"forgiveness" came out my mouth. And it was like this warm kind of feeling, and it was like God was saying, "Okay, you have done the work. It's time for you to free yourself of this. I'm here for you; you could be free." And I just said, "I forgive you."

God was saying, "I am calling you out to a new ministry, a ministry that people need to know about how gun violence has become a crisis in this country, and I'm going to give you this hard task, because you're built for this, I know you could do this, being a gun violence advocate, now author, public speaker, all of these things is what makes Sharon Sharon now." And I thank God for seeing that this little geechee girl from Charleston, South Carolina, that God was preparing me for such a time as this."

Read more "Healing after Charleston church shooting"

Oak Creek, Dr. Simran Jeet Singh, visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary, author of *Fauja Singh Keeps Going*, and host of the Spirited podcast

"One 11-year-old raised her hand shyly and nervously adjusted her pink-framed glasses as she spoke: "I believe the killer had God inside of him, but he chose not to listen to God and so he did a bad thing. He didn't see God in other people, and that's why he could hurt them."... She echoed the Sikh theological perspective that our enemies are not particular individuals or peoples; rather, we seek to eradicate human tendencies that bring suffering in this world, such as ego, greed and anger.

Speaking to the children raises an important issue for us to consider. The challenge for Sikhs is to determine how we will react to Page and others who commit hateful acts. How will we respect the godliness in our greatest foes, and how will we teach our children and younger generations to accept and grow after such devastation? "

Read more "Through the eyes of Sikh kids: A profound lesson in tolerance"

Tree of Life, Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, director of Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

"...there are the families who are grieving and the rabbis locally who are pastoring and taking care of their folks. And then there is a city which is confronting what is not only the most violent act of terror against the Jewish community in American history - certainly in a synagogue - but is also what the mayor of Pittsburgh, yesterday, called the worst disaster ever to confront his city. So you have faith leaders across the spectrum who are coming together to ask - how could such a thing happen, and what can this city do to rise up from the ashes of this and redeem itself?"

Listen on Morning Edition "Very Painful Scene"