



Gun Control: Beyond the Myths

Separating fact from fiction in the gun control war

Goal of the Session

Participants will examine some of the myths about guns and find the fact and fiction in each of them.

Preparing for the Session

- Pray for guidance as you prepare to lead a session on a very volatile subject.
- Be aware of recent debate, violence, tragedy, or proposed legislation in your local area that may be central to current opinions of participants.
- Locate the hymn "Be Thou My Vision" and have it available to sing in the Opening of the session. Please respect copyright laws if you need to make copies of the hymn for your group. If you do not feel comfortable leading music, enlist a participant, choir member, or choir director to come and sing the hymn as a solo, or plan to read the words aloud as a group.
- If you have not previously distributed the Participant Handouts, make copies to distribute at the beginning of the session.
- Make a copy for each participant of the appendix of this Leader's Guide.
- Write on a white board or newsprint each of the seven myths addressed in the handout.
- Write on a white board or newsprint the following verse: Ecclesiastes 9:18a: "Wisdom is better than weapons of war."
- Have paper and pens available.
- Read the Participant's Handout at least once, and several times if possible.

Session at a Glance

OPENING

- Pray
- Sing or read a hymn

EXPLORING

- Write or draw a vision of total security
- Introduce the Participant Handout
- Sort it out
- Gather the facts and fiction

RESPONDING

- Brainstorm solutions

CLOSING

- Pray

Materials Needed

- Copies of the Participant Handout
- Copies of the appendix from this Leader's Guide
- Hymnals or copies of "Be Thou My Vision"
- Paper and pens
- White board or newsprint and marker

Teaching Tips

- Consider the opinions of the members of your group. There may be some very diverse attitudes regarding the use and possession of guns. Some participants may be believers of some of the dis-

cussed myths. Be prepared to remind people that the purpose of the time together is to examine some myths and find the fact and fiction in each of them and not to demonize an individual or a group. Encourage participants to treat each other respectfully regardless of various positions. Remind people to focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning one another's integrity.

- Consider listening to the two hour-long episodes of *This American Life* mentioned in the "For More Information" section prior to leading the session. For many people who live in areas where gun violence is not a daily threat, the issue of gun violence and how to prevent it can become either an academic debate about facts or remain a political topic based on principles of gun rights rather than dealing with peoples' lives affected by gun violence. This may be a resource to recommend to participants.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Pray

Pray the following, or a prayer of your own choosing:

Loving God, you created us in the image of your love; not in an image of violence.

Sustaining God, you shared your son to show us a life of love and justice; not violence.

Grieving God, we know you weep with us as we make idols out of weapons and entertainment out of violence.

Caring God, be with us as we try to sort out truth and discern a path you would have us explore and walk.

2. Sing or Read a Hymn

Sing or read "Be Thou My Vision."

Exploring (30 minutes)

3. Write or Draw a Vision of Total Security

Distribute pens and paper. Ask participants to take several minutes to jot down some images or words they would associate with their vision of what total security would look like. After a few minutes of contemplation, encourage participants to share some of the images and words with the group. Then ask what might have prompted their responses: an incident of violence, media, a sermon, an ad, a personal experience, a debate,

a teaching? Note any references to guns.

4. Introduce the Participant Handout

Introduce the session by distributing the Participant Handout to anyone who does not already have a copy.

Ask: What is a myth? Encourage sharing of examples of myths and ask how and why myths come about. Some answers might be as follows: a story to explain or idealize something, a widely believed but false explanation or story.

Ask the group to look at the list of the seven myths about guns listed on the newsprint or white board. Ask for a show of hands of those that are familiar with the myth after you or a volunteer reads each one. You may wish to encourage participants to share where they have heard the myth. Explain that the goal of the time together is to find the fact and fiction in each myth and to explore how people of faith can prevent gun violence.

Some may argue that one or more of the stated myths are actually fact. Assure them that the intent is not to offend and that the next activity will discuss some of the reasons why the author suggests that these are indeed myths.

5. Sort It Out

Distribute a copy of the appendix from this Leader's Guide, "Facts and Fiction," to each participant.

Depending on the number of participants present, form groups of two to five people and assign no more than two myths to each group to investigate.

Have participants bring their Participant Handouts to their small group. Suggest that each group identify a recorder. Make it clear that the recorder will be the spokesperson for the small group when the whole session reassembles. Ask each group to read silently or have a volunteer in the group read aloud the myths assigned to them. Allow a few minutes for the groups to read the section in the handout following their assigned myths. Then in small groups, identify the fact and fiction in the myths and have each member make note of each in the appropriate column on their "Fact and Fiction" worksheet.

Allow ten minutes and encourage participants to add any other fiction or proven fact they may know that was not included in the Participant Handout.

6. Gather the Facts and Fiction

Have each small group report to the larger group on the facts and fiction they found. Elicit fictions and proven facts that have been added that are not from the Participant Handouts. One myth often mentioned that is not in the Participant Handout is the claim that stricter gun laws would mean millions of jobs would be lost.

Responding (10 minutes)

7. Brainstorm Solutions

Take a few minutes to brainstorm as a group possible actions that might be taken by your church community. You might throw out a few ideas tried by other churches, such as becoming a drop-off center for guns people wish to get off the street or out of their homes. That activity would, of course, need to be carried out with the police department. Another possibility is to help in education campaigns about gun safety. List as many ideas as possible in five or six minutes. Then, as a group, discuss if there is any energy in the group to take action. What would that be? What are the next steps? Who will lead this effort?

Closing (2 minutes)

8. Pray

Direct participants to the newsprint or board where you have written Ecclesiastes 9:18a. Tell the group that this verse will be the closing prayer. Explain that they will read the verse together six times accenting a consecutive word(s) each time (e.g., *Wisdom* is better than weapons of war. *Wisdom* is better than weapons of war. *Wisdom* is *better* than weapons of war.) Note: “of war” is spoken together as one word in the sixth reading. After the sixth reading accenting the words “of war,” close by saying “and the people of God say ‘amen.’”

Teaching Alternatives

Consider viewing a few Web sites to enlarge the scope of laws, resources, and facts. You will need an Internet connection, a laptop or tablet computer, and a projector and screen with appropriate cables to attach the computer or tablet. Definitely check your denominational Web sites. Here are a few that are easy to find:

- Coalition to Stop Gun Violence at <http://www.csgv.org/>. Click on “Issues & Campaigns” and explore more information regarding broadening knowledge of weapons, legislation, and leverage that can be used to promote change in the gun industry.

- Presbyterian Peace Fellowship at <http://presbypeacefellowship.org/>. Click on “Gun Violence Prevention” and explore the many tools and resources that can help to prevent gun violence.
- United Methodist Resources at <http://archives.umc.org/interior.asp?ptid=16&mid=4928>.
- United Church of Christ Resources at <http://www.ucc.org/justice/criminal-justice/gun-violence.html>.
- Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence at <http://www.bradycampaign.org/>. Click on “Facts Spotlight” to learn about guns and take the Gun Law IQ Test.

For More Information

General

This American Life is a weekly public radio show produced by Chicago Public Media and distributed by Public Radio International. It is the most popular podcast in the country. In 2013 they spent two episodes, 487 and 488, interviewing students, teachers, and administrators at Harper High School in Chicago about the realities of living in an area plagued by gun violence. Hearing how youth (and all who care about them) cope with this reality is heart wrenching. It brings the issue from an often sterile discussion about rights down to a faith issue about how to best care for one another. Go to www.thisamericanlife.org and find episodes 487 and 488. Stream them from your computer, download them to a device, or print the transcripts.

Books

- James E. Atwood. *America and Its Guns: A Theological Expose*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012.
- Joshua Horwitz and Casey Anderson. *Guns, Democracy, and the Insurrectionist Idea*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009.
- Tom Diaz. *Making a Killing: The Business of Guns in America*. New York: New Press, 1999.

Web Sites

- The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence: www.csgv.org
- The Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence: www.bradycampaign.org
- The National Rifle Association: www.nrahq.org
- Heeding God’s Call: www.heedinggodscall.org

Documentary

Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence. Directed by David Barnhart. Produced by The Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Program, PC(USA). Order through PC(USA) Resources: 1-800-524-2612.

Appendix: Facts and Fiction

As you learn about gun control throughout the session, jot down statements of facts and fictions about each of these myths.

1. Guns don't kill; people kill.
2. If guns are outlawed, only outlaws will have guns.
3. An armed society is a polite society.
4. New gun laws aren't necessary; just enforce the 20,000 existing ones.
5. Guns save lives.
6. Gun control doesn't work.
7. The Second Amendment was written to fight government tyranny.

Fact	Fiction