



## Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

### What Happened on Gun Violence Prevention at 225<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian General Assembly? A LOT!

From June 18 to July 9, 2022, the Presbyterian Church held its 225<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in a hybrid way, with weekly waves of Committees meeting in person in Louisville, KY and the whole Assembly voting as a plenary body from their homes by Zoom. The public and larger church were not able to attend except by Zoom. Missing was the in-person family reunion of prior assemblies, and, with over 500 online commissioners, it was a bit of a circus. But it worked!

The Assembly **Committee on Addressing Violence in the USA** did an amazing job, leading the full General Assembly plenary to pass every gun violence prevention overture and report that the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship organized to support, plus a special resolution on ending stock investments in gun sellers. Many thanks to the gun violence prevention activists who provided **25** testimonies in support of those overtures and reports. Your congregations and presbyteries are proud of you!

As a result, **the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) became the first major religious body to support the Guns to Gardens movement**, honoring those churches that are already chopping up unwanted guns and encouraging all congregations to prayerfully consider if they are called to offer this practical and prophetic service in their communities. Learn more about Guns to Gardens at [www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence](http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence)

The Assembly also took a practical stand against domestic gun violence by **endorsing the new Gun Relinquishment Protocol of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Firearms**. The new protocol brings together courts, police, families and agencies to provide domestic abusers a legal opportunity to relinquish guns in a way that will no longer be used against them in court. This prioritizes getting guns out of the hands of those with domestic violence protection orders against them. The new protocol is especially important now that the US Congress has acted to help states to create “Red Flag” laws to protect families from armed abusers. The Protocol offers a comprehensive and fair way to enforce these laws.

**BIG NEWS!** Two gun violence prevention overtures were held over from the 2020 General Assembly, which did not act on items due to Covid. They both called for updating and strengthening PCUSA positions on gun violence prevention and they were both answered by a major new initiative by this year’s Assembly: **a 10-year project, the Decade to End Gun Violence**, to bring all levels of the denomination into the movement to save lives. There will be new education and action resources for congregations and pastors, as well as a sequel to the award-winning documentary “Trigger,” produced by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. The Matthew 25 Initiative of the church will be enlarged to include gun violence prevention and the Presbyterian Mission Agency will provide support for local actions such as “Violence Interrupters,” community safe green spaces and faith-based advocacy. In passing the “Gun Violence Report and Recommendations” from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness

Policy, the Assembly provided an updated policy that reflects new thinking about the intersection of gun violence, race, poverty and racism, as well as the rise of mass shootings with assault weapons and the need for law enforcement reform. The Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, the Washington Office on Public Witness and many others in the denomination will work together to help heal our nation. **Get ready for the Presbyterian Decade to End Gun Violence!**

For extra credit, the General Assembly passed a last-minute Commissioner's Resolution on church stock investments in gun sellers, introduced by a member of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship who was a GA commissioner this year. It begins a process of PCUSA engagement with 3 publically traded companies who sell guns, Walmart, Dick's Sporting Goods and Kroger. The goal is to encourage them to stop selling any kind of gun. The action also calls for consideration by the next General Assembly on whether gun sellers fall into the same category as longtime prohibitions on holding stock in alcohol, tobacco and gambling.

In addition to these actions on gun violence prevention, the Assembly voted to divest from stock in 5 major fossil fuel corporations, after almost ten years of advocacy for fossil fuel divestment by dozens of presbyteries and Fossil Free PCUSA. There were many other worthy actions, including support for human rights and voting rights, adequate family leave for church staff and significant statements for use of nonviolent approaches to foreign policy, as well as for Middle East peace and justice. Prayers were lifted for peace in Ukraine and for repentance from the legacy of racism. The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship hosted a Zoom event during the Assembly to present its 2021 and 2022 Peaceseeker Awards to Rev. Harry Eberts and Miranda Viscoli of New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence and to Rev. Bart Smith for his hunger strike in support of voting rights. Learn more about how to follow up on the actions of the 225<sup>th</sup> General Assembly at the Facebook group, **presbys following GA225**

Photo captions:

Rev. Jimmie Hawkins, Director of the PCUSA Office of Public Witness in Washington DC, introduces Rev. Christine Caton as she presents a Commissioner's Resolution on restricting church investments in corporations that sell guns.

The all-female leadership team of the Assembly Committee on Addressing Violence in the USA applauds the passage of the proposal for a Presbyterian Decade to End Gun Violence.