

# Reflection Guide for Taking a Corporate Stand against Gun Violence



*(Image from losangelesCBSlocal)*

## Introduction

Since 2011 the Sisters of St. Francis have had great concern and have taken action toward the issue of gun violence in our country. Our JPIC Committee, Corporate Social Responsibility Office, coworkers at Anna's Place in Chester as well as, LCWR, FAN, and our own personal action have kept us in touch with this issue and our call to live the Gospel message of nonviolence.

In an effort to further commit ourselves as a congregation, we have declared a corporate stand against gun violence. We invite you to join us and use this reflection guide to participate and gain awareness of the issue so that you will be able to make an informed decision about your call to action.

## Prayer


Creator God,

Help us to remember that we are all your children, created in your image, and are connected by a single garment of mutuality and destiny. Reveal to us, O God, that the pain felt in Newtown and Charleston is the same pain felt in Chicago and Charlottesville. The tears shed in Orlando and Las Vegas are the same tears shed in Oakland and Pittsburgh. The lives lost in Tucson are the same lives lost in Philadelphia and Camden. The children buried in Aurora are the same children being buried in Detroit. Lives are lost daily on our city streets and the common denominator is guns. Help us to remember we are all made in your image. Teach us your ways, O God. Bless us

with the wisdom and strength to put down our swords and be peacemakers. Use us, work through and, if necessary, in spite of us, to mend our nation's brokenness. **AMEN**

## Some Statistics on Gun Violence

The debate over gun safety reform in the United States has waxed and waned over the years stirred by a series of mass shootings in civilian settings. In particular, the killing of 20 school children in Newtown, Connecticut, in 2012 prompted a new national discussion about gun laws. However, legislation that would have banned semiautomatic assault weapons was defeated in the Senate despite extensive public support. It must be said that allegiance to the National Rifle Association (NRA) played and continues to play a role in the failure to pass legislation. In 2017, mass shootings at a music festival in Las Vegas, at a church near San Antonio, and more recently massacres throughout 2018 have rekindled the gun safety reform debate.

- The U.S. Supreme Court has upheld some firearms restrictions such as bans on concealed weapons and on the possession of certain types of weapons as well as prohibitions against the sale of guns to certain categories of people, e.g., to persons under 18 years of age, convicted criminals, the mentally disabled, and others. 
- In January 2016, President Barack Obama took several actions intended to decrease gun violence, including a measure requiring dealers of firearms at gun shows or online to obtain federal licenses and conduct background checks.
- Currently, however, there are no federal laws banning semiautomatic assault weapons, military style .50 caliber rifles, handguns, or large-capacity magazines. There was a federal prohibition on assault weapons and large-capacity magazines between 1994 and 2004 but Congress allowed these restrictions to expire. In the days after the mass shooting in Las Vegas, some lawmakers expressed provisional support for a federal prohibition of bump fire stocks, devices that allow semiautomatic guns to fire at a rate approaching that of automatic weapons but no concrete action followed.
- The United States, with fewer than 5% of the world's population, has about 35-50% of the world's civilian-owned guns. It ranks number one in firearms per capita and also has the highest homicide-by-firearm rate among the world's most developed nations.
- Nearly 1,300 children in the U.S. die from gun-related injuries every year. That makes guns the third leading cause of death for U.S. children according to a 2017 study in *Pediatrics*, surpassing the number of childhood deaths from illness. About 50 women a month are shot to death by partners in the U.S. and gun homicides kill about 13,000 people every year in our country.
- In an April 2018 review of mass shootings in the U.S., 99 mass shootings have occurred since 1982 from which approximately 76 semi-automatic handguns and 89 assault weapons and weapons with high magazine capacity were recovered.

## **Our Faith Response**

### **From Scripture:**

“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ To the contrary, ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:19-21)

“Wisdom is better than weapons of war, yet one wrongdoer can undo much good.” (*Ecclesiastes 9:18*)

### **From LCWR:**

“There is much to mourn, but mourning is not enough. Prayers and condolences are not enough. The killing must stop. It is well past time that we enacted sensible gun violence prevention legislation. This is not about protecting the second amendment. It is about protecting the most precious resource we have, the gift of life.

“We call our elected officials to immediately take up legislation that

- requires universal background checks and mandatory waiting periods for all gun purchases,
- bans civilian ownership of high-capacity weapons and magazines, and
- makes gun trafficking a federal crime.

“We commend the young people of Parkland for taking up the important work of gun violence prevention. We will stand with you as you advocate for legislation that will save lives. We will join you in the March 24 ‘March for Our Lives.’ We will walk with you as together we seek to put an end to violence and follow the path of peace.”

Read the full statement here: <https://lcwr.org/media/news/mourning-not-enough-lcwr-calls-action-prevent-gun-violence>.

### **From Our Sisters in their Work and Ministry:**

#### **From the JPIC Committee**

Srs. Kate O’Donnell, Pat Millen, and the JPIC Committee have been working hard to keep our sisters and companions aware of current legislation related to issues of gun violence/safety. Advocacy Alerts invite sisters and companions to respond to upcoming calls for advocacy through contacting our senators and representatives as well as putting our commitment into action in a variety of ways. Below are just a few of the actions in which we have been involved.

***Gun Violence Vigil*** – In remembrance of the Sandy Hook Elementary school tragedy as well as the 600,000 American victims and survivors of gun violence since December 2012, the Sisters of St. Francis participated in a nationwide prayer vigil to #EndGunViolence. The vigil began with a prayer service inside and then participants processed out to the road to hold a silent candlelight vigil in honor of all victims and survivors of gun violence. “Situations of injustice and violence

continue to take on new dimensions and challenges. Gun violence deaths and injuries must not be tolerated,” said Sr. Marie Lucey. “We must call on our legislators to act.”

***Taking the Fight to Harrisburg*** – On February 21, 2018, members of the JPIC Committee connected with Cease Fire PA to vigil and lobby with Pennsylvania state senators and representatives to call for Comprehensive Gun Safety Reform Bills. Included are limits on magazines, universal background checks, ban on assault weapons, and an end to bump stock usage.

***March for Our Lives*** – On March 24, 2018, several of our sisters, along with children and families of March for Our Lives campaign took to the streets to demand that their lives and safety become a priority and that we end gun violence in our schools and communities. <https://marchforourlives.com/>

***Interfaith Prayer Service*** – In November 19, 2017, there was a gathering at Aston Community Center to pray for and to address the issues of hunger, drugs, gun violence, and natural disasters. The first half of the program allowed visitors to view and discuss various projects. The Sisters of St. Francis had four participants. Sr. Margaret Xavier Romans displayed and shared information about her ministry of making pillows. Srs. Kate O’Donnell and Patricia Platt offered activities and provided information about the issue of gun violence. Sr. Jean Rupertus provided visitors with information about the services offered at Anna’s Place in Chester. The other area churches—Mt. Hope Methodist Church, St. Timothy’s Lutheran Church, and Aston Presbyterian Church—also had displays. This event continues annually.

***Concert Across America*** – In 2016 the OLA choir remembered the forgotten victims of America’s gun violence epidemic by participating in the Concert Across America, a series of live music events of all sizes from coast to coast. The event was done to raise the volume on the national effort to save lives from gun violence.

### **From Corporate Social Responsibility**

Sr. Nora Nash and her team in the Corporate Social Responsibility office have been working hard—using our corporate shares to influence companies on their policies around gun reform/safety. Here are a couple examples from recent news sources:



#### ***Wells Fargo***

The company committed to doing the Business Standards Review. In December 2017, our leadership group met with the company to lay out our terms of agreement. All aspects of operations have been included to complete the review. We’ve also asked for a cross-sectional focus so that silos may be avoided. The new report must include our seven major points from the resolution. They will release their Business Standards Review the beginning of February 2019.

We have received major publicity as has Wells Fargo—although theirs is getting worse because of the gun issue. Wells Fargo remains one of the largest financers of the gun industry. They recently established a new line of credit to Sturm Ruger.

- **NRA TV:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCMvrYDiWqg>
- **Nora Nash Response to New Line of Credit:** <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-10-05/unswayed-by-nuns-wells-fargo-hands-gunmaker-new-line-of-credit>
- **New Line of Credit:** <https://www.bizjournals.com/philadelphia/news/2018/10/05/wells-fargo-40m-credit-line-gun-sturm-ruger-hogg.html>



***Sturm Ruger***

Our resolution voiced our concerns about the issue of gun violence in our society and the role that Sturm Ruger could play in reducing the number of deaths and injuries from handguns. We believe that gun violence is a human rights issue and a serious public health and safety concern that is impacting the well-being of our nation. We realize that gun policy is a divisive issue in our country but we believe that Sturm Ruger has an opportunity to play a positive role in the development of firearms and in shaping legislation that would benefit its business as well as the health and safety of all who live in our country. We have asked for a dialogue. Actual vote on resolution: 69%



**Smith & Wesson®**

***American Outdoor Brands (Smith & Wesson)***

Our group wrote a letter to American Outdoor in July 2017 to voice our concerns about the gun violence issue. We filed a resolution in January 2018. We've explained that we see gun violence as a public health crisis with extraordinary human and financial costs. We are asking America Outdoors to be a leader in and take a serious step through research and assessment toward firearm manufacturing and safety. Actual vote on resolution: 52.16%



***Dick's Sporting Goods***

Our group wrote a letter to Dick's Sporting Goods in July 2017 to voice our concerns about the gun violence issue. We filed a resolution in December 2017. We've explained that we see gun violence as a public health crisis with extraordinary human and financial costs. A dialogue was held in January 2018 with members of Dick's Sporting Goods' senior management. The company responded positively and publicly. We withdrew the resolution in February with plans for future dialogue.

February 2018: Dick's announced they would stop selling assault style weapons and restrict sales to purchasers 21 and over.

- [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/business/wp/2018/02/28/dicks-sporting-goods-ceo-says-company-will-no-longer-sell-assault-rifles-guns-to-people-under-21/?utm\\_term=.9b202d35795c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/business/wp/2018/02/28/dicks-sporting-goods-ceo-says-company-will-no-longer-sell-assault-rifles-guns-to-people-under-21/?utm_term=.9b202d35795c)

**From our Work in Chester**

**Chester Community Coalition Awarded \$431,531 in Grants to Provide Trauma-Informed Support Services in Chester, Pennsylvania**



June 28, 2018 - The Chester Community Coalition has received a \$421,731 grant from Catholic Health Initiatives' Mission and Ministry Fund through the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia to provide trauma-informed support services to survivors of gun violence and \$9,800 from Congregation Ohev Shalom's Outreach Grant to provide art therapy for young children from families bereaved by violence in Chester, Pennsylvania.

The goal of the coalition is to deliver programs to heal the psychological and emotional impact of homicides and reduce trauma-related reactive violence in the City of Chester. Homicide bereavement in disadvantaged communities of color takes a heavy toll: depression and PTSD that extend many years after the loss. Families exhaust their savings and borrow to cover funeral costs. Mothers who have lost sons to gun violence feel stigmatized and isolated. Children suffer intrusive re-imaginings and angry outbursts.

Money will be allocated to provide group therapy for families who have lost someone to homicide or experienced injury by gun violence, and coordinate peer-based violence education and volunteer trauma response teams. The programs will be led by the coordinating committee of Fran Stier, Sr. Jean Rupertus, Sr. Virginia Spiegel, and Alexia Clarke. As has been shown in other settings, we anticipate that these early interventions will reduce reactive violence, empower the community dealing with toxic stress, and build a safer city in which to live.

Our programs can only be accomplished in partnership with City of Chester residents, social and business organizations, and political entities. Over the 2017-2018 planning year, the Chester Community Coalition (CCC) has developed a board reflecting Chester's diversity. The coalition has also actively participated in community meetings, events, and outreach. Transparency, respect, commitment, and service are the fundamental values from which we have begun this work and with which we will continue.

### **From Franciscan Action Network**

Franciscan Action Network (FAN) executive director Patrick Carolan joined "Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence" and "Mayors United against Illegal Guns" to sign a letter calling for immediate legislative action related to gun safety. Patrick Carolan and FAN staff member Sr. Marie Lucey, OSF, participated in a faith community event in Washington, DC, on January 15 when the letter was delivered to members of congress. Fan is a member of Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence.

### **Reflection Questions**

- ❖ How do I/we respond with a Franciscan heart on a local level to the violence that surrounds us?
- ❖ How do I/we choose to help the victims of gun violence and their families/community?
- ❖ What actions can I embrace that will help me witness peace?

## References:

To stay up-to-date with current issues and needs, please visit these suggested sites:

LCWR Statement on Gun Violence	<a href="https://lcwr.org/media/news/mourning-not-enough-lcwr-calls-action-prevent-gun-violence">https://lcwr.org/media/news/mourning-not-enough-lcwr-calls-action-prevent-gun-violence</a> .
Chester Community Coalition	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/ChesterCommunityCoalition/">https://www.facebook.com/ChesterCommunityCoalition/</a>
<i>New York Times</i> article on Sturm Ruger	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/09/business/sturm-ruger-shareholders-activists.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/09/business/sturm-ruger-shareholders-activists.html</a>
<i>The Trace</i> article on Smith & Wesson	<a href="https://www.thetrace.org/rounds/smith-and-wesson-nuns-activism-gunmaker/">https://www.thetrace.org/rounds/smith-and-wesson-nuns-activism-gunmaker/</a> .
<i>BNN Bloomberg</i> article on Wells Fargo	<a href="https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/unswayed-by-nuns-wells-fargo-hands-gunmaker-new-line-of-credit-1.1148038">https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/unswayed-by-nuns-wells-fargo-hands-gunmaker-new-line-of-credit-1.1148038</a> .
Sturm Ruger Resolution	<a href="https://osfphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/SR-Gun-Safety-Resolution-2018-FINAL.pdf">https://osfphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/SR-Gun-Safety-Resolution-2018-FINAL.pdf</a>
Metro IAF Do not Stand Idly By	<a href="http://metro-iaf.org/topics/gun-safety">http://metro-iaf.org/topics/gun-safety</a>
Guns Down America	<a href="https://gunsdownamerica.org/">https://gunsdownamerica.org/</a>
March for Our Lives	<a href="https://marchforourlives.com/">https://marchforourlives.com/</a>
Pennsylvania Under the Gun	<a href="https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/report/2016/05/16/137219/pennsylvania-under-the-gun">https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/report/2016/05/16/137219/pennsylvania-under-the-gun</a>
Demand a Plan.org	<a href="http://www.demandaplan.org/">http://www.demandaplan.org/</a> .
Mayors United Against Illegal Guns	<a href="https://everytown.org/mayors/">https://everytown.org/mayors/</a>
FAN Gun Violence Update	<a href="https://franciscanaction.org/article/gun-violence-update-eleven">https://franciscanaction.org/article/gun-violence-update-eleven</a>
The Trace.org	<a href="https://www.thetrace.org/">https://www.thetrace.org/</a>
Cease Fire PA	<a href="https://www.ceasefirepa.org/">https://www.ceasefirepa.org/</a>
Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence	<a href="http://faithsunited.org/">http://faithsunited.org/</a>