

“Past Time for Sanity” Micah 4:3-4a January 6, 2019

Bill Chadwick Oak Grove Presbyterian Church Bloomington, Minnesota

I want to talk about gun violence this morning.

NOT!

Trust me, that is about the last thing I want to do this morning. But come my personal judgment day, how can I look Jesus in the eye and say that I never raised the issue with the people of my flock, despite the mind-numbing statistics? So here we go.

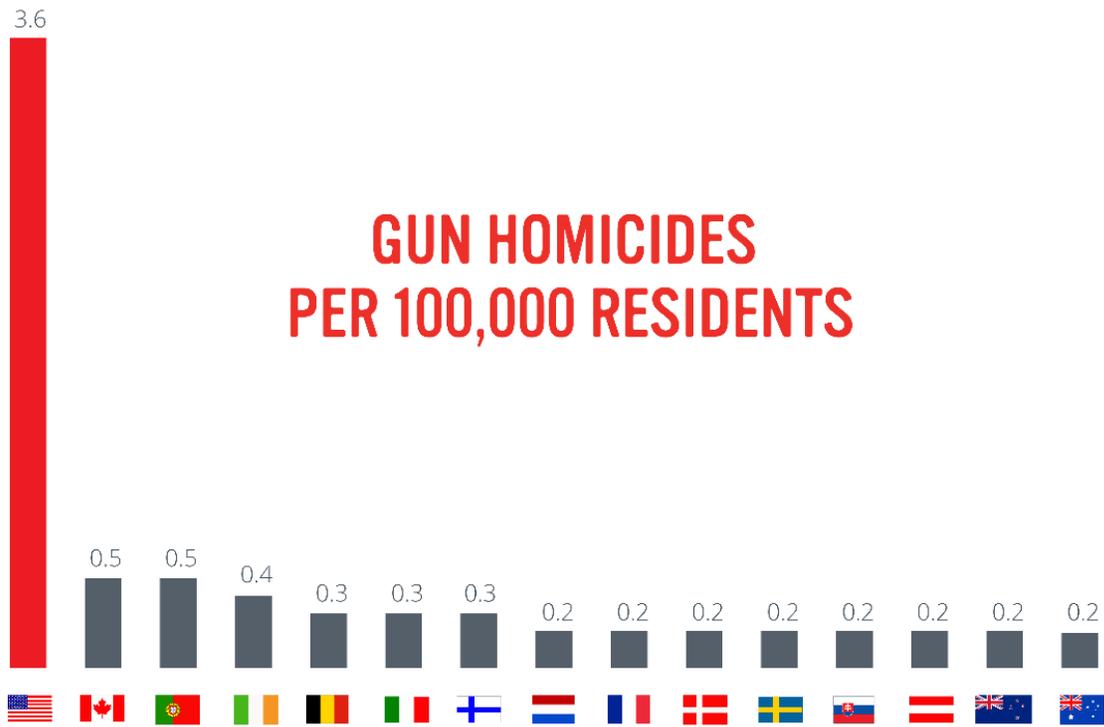
I have been a gun owner for forty years. I own a shotgun for hunting pheasants and grouse. What I want us to consider this morning is not a ban on gun ownership—that will NEVER happen in the US and it’s shameful for people to use that scare tactic. I’m talking simply about common sense gun safety laws.

In college a friend of mine was robbed at gunpoint. He did not resist. But he was still shot in the head. He survived, sort of. Permanently brain-injured.

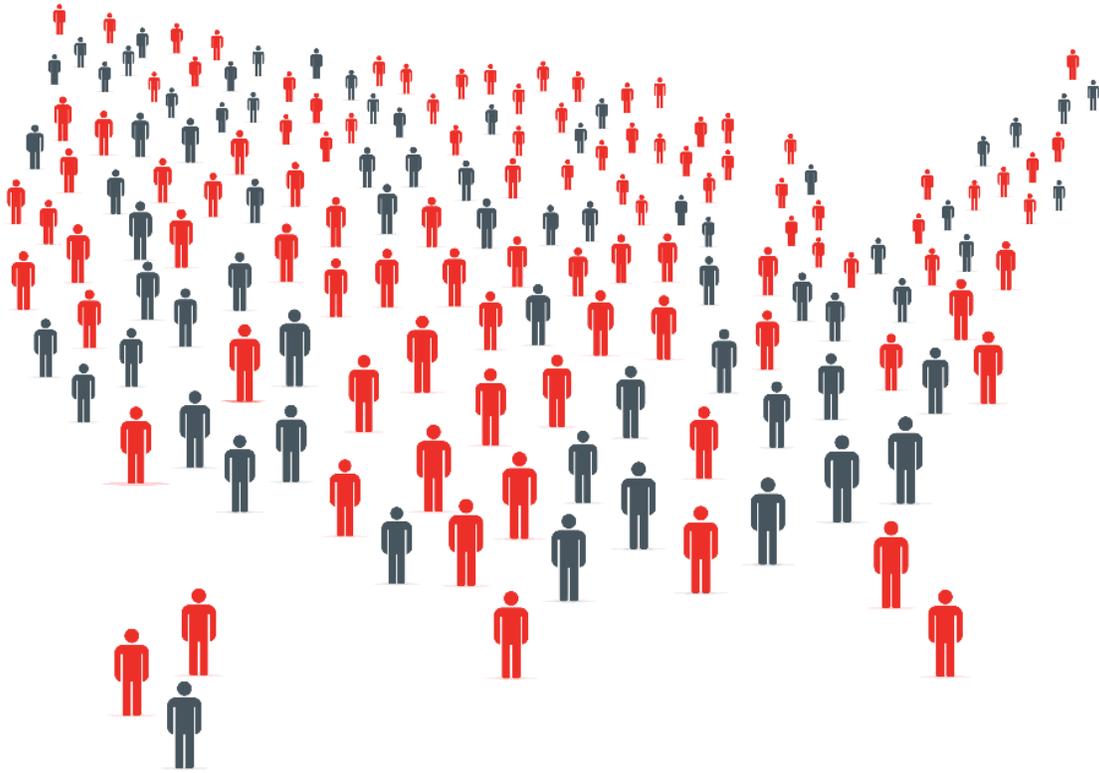
How many of you also know someone who has been shot? We are a charmed group. Approximately 44% of American adults report knowing someone who has been shot. (everytownresearch.org/gun-violence-america/#foot_note_7)

On July 20, 2012, the daughter of a friend of mine, a girl I had baptized 13 years earlier, went to see the Batman movie *The Dark Knight Rises* in Aurora, Colorado, when a gunman opened fire in the theater. She was not one of the 12 persons killed or 58 injured. But she will never be the same.

Each year about 30,000 people in the US die from gun violence. About 2/3 of those are suicides. About 11,000 each year are murders. And then there are usually around 70,000 non-fatal injuries due to gun violence. Each year.



SOURCE: GRINSHTEYN E, HEMENWAY D. VIOLENT DEATH RATES: THE U.S. COMPARED WITH OTHER HIGH-INCOME OECD COUNTRIES, 2010. *AM J MEDICINE.* 2016.



**EVERY DAY, 100 AMERICANS
ARE KILLED WITH GUNS.**



CE: CDC, UNDERLYING CAUSE OF DEATH, 2013-2017.

52

**IN AN AVERAGE MONTH,
52 AMERICAN WOMEN
ARE SHOT TO DEATH
BY AN INTIMATE PARTNER.**



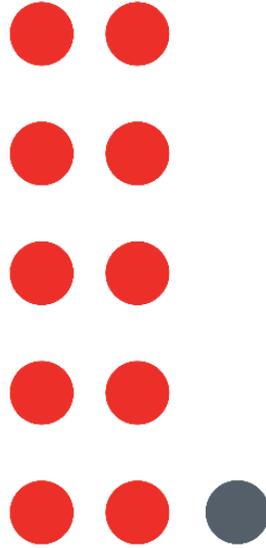
SOURCE: FBI, SUPPLEMENTARY HOMICIDE REPORTS AND FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT. 2013-2017.

1 MILLION

**NEARLY ONE MILLION WOMEN
ALIVE TODAY HAVE BEEN SHOT
OR SHOT AT BY AN INTIMATE PARTNER.**



SOURCE: SORENSON SB, SCHUT RA. NONFATAL GUN USE IN INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE. *TRAUMA VIOLENCE ABUSE*. 2016.

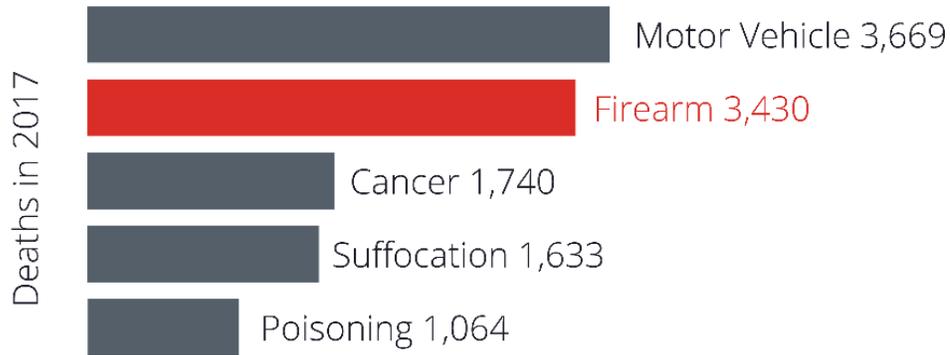


**BLACK AMERICANS ARE 10 TIMES
MORE LIKELY THAN WHITE AMERICANS
TO DIE BY GUN HOMICIDE.**



SOURCE: CDC, UNDERLYING CAUSE OF DEATH, 2013-2017.

FIREARMS ARE THE SECOND LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH FOR AMERICAN CHILDREN AND TEENS.



SOURCE: CDC, LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH REPORTS. 2017.

Since Columbine (1999), at least 26,000 children and youth have been killed by gunfire in the US (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

All these statistics. And each of those statistics is a beloved child of God. To help you picture it, the 26,000 children killed by gunfire since Columbine are more kids than the combined number of public school students in Bloomington, Richfield, and Burnsville-Eagan-Savage Districts.

Let's think together this morning about (1) barriers to common sense gun legislation, (2) an example from another country, and (3) action steps we might take.

As we all know, the biggest barriers to common sense gun legislation are the gun manufacturers and the National Rifle Association (NRA). A little history of the NRA. The founding of the NRA goes back to just after the Civil War and two former Union officers, who had despaired over their wartime recruits' poor shooting skills. (An official study estimated that Yankee troops fired 1,000 rounds for every bullet that actually struck a Confederate soldier.)

The idea was to educate a new generation of marksmen, whether for war or hunting or recreational target shooting... Many are surprised to learn that the NRA for its first hundred years worked with the federal government to limit the traffic in guns and supported gun control legislation. It was a good and helpful organization.

But in the late 1960s, there became widespread concern about rising crime rates and the deadly riots that flared in the nation's major cities. Citizens were concerned about their safety and turned to gun purchases for their personal protection. And many NRA members wanted their organization to get out in front of that.

In 1971, agents of the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms killed an NRA member who was hiding a large number of illegal weapons. That further fueled a change within the NRA.

At the 1977 NRA convention a man by the name of Harlon Carter led an uprising against the Old Guard of the NRA. Hard-liners took over and essentially, the NRA went over to the dark side at that time, 1977.

This change in mission coincided with a new surge in political money. Decisions by the Federal Election Commission and the Supreme Court had opened the spillway on vast new reservoirs of cash.

Soon, the NRA became a formidable force in fundraising and campaign spending, making and breaking candidacies at the state and federal level.

This, in turn, gave the group the muscle to move pro-gun legislation as well as to stop efforts at gun control. Carter proclaimed his group would be "so strong and so dedicated that no politician in America, mindful of his political career, would want to challenge our legitimate goals."

(Ron Elving Oct 10, 2017 <https://www.npr.org/2017/10/10/556578593/the-nra-wasnt-always-against-gun-restrictions>)

So we see once again, as with virtually every social justice issue in the United States—guns, racism, the environment, safety net policies—we come back to...the bottom line. The literal bottom line: MONEY. Campaign money. The need for Campaign finance reform underlies everything. Again, the need to support Move to Amend, to get money out of politics and declare corporations are not people and do not have the civil rights of human beings.

Now An example from another country.

In 1996 in Port Arthur, Tasmania, which is part of Australia, a gunman killed 35 people and wounded 18 others. At the time, it was the worst mass shooting in the developed world. In response to the 1996 shooting, John Howard, then Australia's conservative prime minister, moved quickly, introducing a federal law to officially make guns a privilege, not a right. Gun owners were forced to provide a valid reason for owning a weapon, such as farming or hunting. Licensing rules were tightened, a 28-day waiting period for gun purchases was imposed and a national gun registry was established.

Semiautomatic rifles, like the one used at Port Arthur in 1996 ...were severely restricted, and Australia engaged in a buyback program that took more than 650,000 firearms off the streets and generated attention around the world.

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/23/us/politics/australia-gun-crackdown-trump-school-shooting.html>)

Research suggests it's worked. Defining a mass shooting as one in which five or more people are killed at one time, in the 18 years prior to the new laws there had been 13 mass shootings in Australia. In the 22 years since, there has been only one.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2018/11/08/thousand-oaks-shooting-australia-no-mass-shootings-since-1996/1934798002/>

Australia is not the United States; it doesn't already have 300 million guns and it doesn't have the complicated history of the Second Amendment, but can't we learn something? I read the online comments from ordinary Australians who wonder, in absolute disbelief at Americans' willingness to sacrifice its children to guns and the power of the NRA.

About ten or twelve Oak Grovers participated in the March for Our Lives Rally held at the state capitol last March in response to the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, in February. We heard a number of powerful speakers. The words that were seared into my brain came from a young teenaged girl, perhaps fifteen years of age. She related that her parents have prepped her for a school shooting. They have her practice playing dead...And they gave her a vial of red liquid to carry in her backpack to splash on herself in case of a shooting, so it looks like she's already been shot.

Yet a month after that rally at the Capitol, the Minnesota legislature refused to vote on two simple, totally common sense proposals, a proposal to expand criminal background checks for gun purchasers, and to allow courts to temporarily remove a person's gun access if they're a danger to themselves or others. Who could be against those things?

A number of those legislators have since been voted out of office. Can I get an "Amen"?

Jesus called the little children to come unto him. He dandled them on his knee and said they were the models for the Kingdom of God. In the name of Jesus, what will we do to protect our children and one another?

What can we do? The Social Justice Committee has a table in the hallway with a number of actions. Here's my list.

This past June the American Medical Association declared that gun violence in America is a public health crisis. They called for a number of actions, including these:

1. A ban on the sale of assault-type weapons with high-capacity magazines. These were banned by the federal government from 1994-2004, when the ban was allowed to expire. What? How in the world was that ban allowed to expire? Who needs an AR-15 for target practice, for God's sake? Granted, millions of these weapons were grandfathered in, but research showed the ban was starting to have an effect when it was allowed to expire.

(<https://www.factcheck.org/2013/02/did-the-1994-assault-weapons-ban-work/>)

2. Remove firearms from high-risk individuals.

3. Increase the legal age to buy a gun from 18 to 21.
4. Establish gun buyback programs in order to reduce the number of circulating firearms.
5. A mandatory waiting period before you can purchase a gun.
6. Background checks for all firearm purchasers.
7. Enhancing access to mental health care.

<https://www.ama-assn.org/press-center/press-releases/ama-recommends-new-common-sense-policies-prevent-gun-violence>

Other actions we might take:

Boycotts. Walmart stopped selling assault-style weapons in 2015. Following the Parkland school shooting last February, Dick's Sporting Goods also stopped selling assault-style weapons. Cabela's, Gander Outdoors, and Bass Pro Shops have refused to stop. Profits over lives. How do these people sleep at night? In the last 25 years I have purchased a little hunting gear and a LOT of fishing gear from Gander Mountain, now called Gander Outdoors. Those days are over. Dick's costs a bit more, but is my supplier now.

Who will join me in boycotting Gander, Cabela's, and Bass Pro Shops and writing to let them know why?

The biggest thing is legislation. That means supporting campaign finance reform above all.

But it also means pressure on our current elected representatives. This coming Tuesday is a welcome back rally at the capitol to welcome our representatives back to the new legislative session. Those of us in favor of sensible gun legislation need to make our presence known. Carpooling leaves the church at 9:30. Who will join me?

Who will write to their legislators and Congresspersons urging common sense gun legislation?

Who will come to the screening of the movie *Trigger* here at Oak Grove on Saturday, January 19?

Who will pray?

As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said, "Few are guilty, but all are responsible." Amen.

Addendum: SUICIDE My friend Kelly was in love with his girlfriend, in love as only a ninth grader can be. She broke up with him. He telephoned her and begged her to get back together with him. He threatened to kill himself if she didn't. She said, "No, Kelly, I'm sorry." Then she heard the explosion. And Kelly became a handgun statistic.

In twelfth grade another schoolmate of mine became a handgun suicide statistic.

I used to think that we should just ignore suicides in this whole discussion. "If people want to kill themselves, they will find a way to kill themselves." But that was a faulty assumption on my part.

Access to a gun increases the risk of death by suicide by three times. (Anglemyer A, Horvath T, Rutherford G. The accessibility of firearms and risk for suicide and homicide victimization among household members: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Annals of Internal Medicine*. 2014; 160(2): 101-110.)

The U.S. gun suicide rate is eight times that of other high-income countries Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (WONDER, Underlying Cause of Death. Data reflect a 5 year average (2013-2017) of gun deaths by intent.)

Most people who attempt suicide do not die—unless they use a gun. Across all suicide attempts not involving a firearm, less than five percent will result in death. But for gun suicides, those statistics are flipped: approximately 85 percent of gun suicide attempts end in death. (Miller M, Azrael D, Barber C. Suicide mortality in the United States: The importance of attending to method in understanding population-level disparities in the burden of suicide. *Annual Review of Public Health*. 2012; 33: 393-408.)