

Kingdom Dreams Violent Realities

Reflections on gun violence
from Micah 4:1-4



CHURCH & SOCIETY

The United Methodist Church

Living **FAITH** Seeking **JUSTICE** Pursuing **PEACE**

*“In days to come...they shall beat their swords
into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more...for the
mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.”*

Micah 4:1-4

Kingdom Dreams, Violent Realities is a three-week Bible study produced by the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church (GBCS). First created in 2014, this edition has been revised and updated by Colleen Moore, Director of Peace With Justice, GBCS.

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A Message from Bishop Julius Trimble, General Secretary

Dear Beloved:

Gun violence is robbing the world of beloved children and adults across the globe. I was born and raised in Chicago and have been familiar with the conversations and casualties that gun ownership and gun violence have produced.

I join the voices of millions who cry out that “Thoughts and Prayers” represent an insufficient response to gun violence and the daily loss of life and resulting trauma.

In recent years, the United States Surgeon General has declared gun violence a national health crisis. The often-cited quote that “guns don’t kill people, people kill people” is a lie that is costing us dearly, with the gun violence debate a question of idolatry more than constitutional rights.

Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain all changed their laws after mass shootings. John Winston Howard, the former Prime Minister of Australia 1996-2007, declared, “The greatest right we have is to stay alive.”

The Church has a major role in walking alongside those who have been impacted by gun violence. We weep with those who weep. We join the voices who advocate for sensible gun laws and restricting access to automatic assault weapons. We believe in the right to stay alive and grieve when we hear the stories of children playing dead in order to not be shot dead.

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Jesus said, “I have come that you may have life, and have life abundantly.” As disciples of Christ, we have a clear call to build peace with justice. “The church deplores war and all other forms of violent conflict and urges the peaceful settlement of all disputes (Social Principles -The Political Community, Government Responsibilities, F. War and Military Service).” The Church calls upon United Methodists to prayerfully address gun violence in their local context, through conversations, prayer times, partnerships, and advocacy (Book of Resolutions: Our Call to End Gun Violence).

This Bible study, Kingdom Dreams, Violent Realities, is one way for us to lift the importance of biblically-based and faith-filled conversations around attitudes toward guns. We must become the change we want to see.

Bishop Julius C. Trimble
General Secretary
The General Board of Church and Society,
The United Methodist Church
March 2025

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Introduction

Micah 4:1-4

¹In days to come
the mountain of the LORD's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall
be raised up above the hills.
Peoples shall stream to it,
²and many nations shall come and say:
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the
house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths." For out
of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
³He shall judge between many peoples,
and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they
shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks; nation
shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more;
⁴but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid;
for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

At the 2016 General Conference of The United Methodist Church, the resolution "Our Call to End Gun Violence" was passed, becoming an official church statement and part of the Book of Resolutions. This resolution was readopted at the 2024 General Conference. "Our Call to End Gun Violence" draws on Micah 4:1-4 for its biblical inspiration, applying Micah's prophetic dream of peace to our violent reality. This study deepens the connection between gun violence and Micah 4:1-4 by providing an opportunity to delve into the text thematically while exploring the multifaceted issue of gun violence. Over the course of the three weeks, we engage Micah 4:1-4 through the themes of the common good, transformation, and flourishing. These themes

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draw out the theological meaning of the passage, provide a window into the causes and implications of gun violence, and suggest faith-filled responses to this scourge. At the end of the study is the text of Resolution #3212 “Our Call to End Gun Violence” and a list of advocacy issues and resources.

As “Our Call to End Gun Violence” states, “Whether it happens in the towns of northeastern Nigeria, a suburb in the United States, the streets of Australia, or an office in France, gun violence has become an all-too-often frightening phenomenon. We need the reality of Micah’s vision more than ever.” Gun violence is a tragic reality the world over. In light of this global context, this study provides particular focus on the United States. Gun violence in the United States of America is staggering, with 125 people killed by guns each day, and more than 200 people being shot and wounded every day. The U.S. gun homicide rate is 26 times that of other high-income countries. Black Americans are more than 12 times likely than white Americans to die by gun homicide.¹ This has a tremendous impact both on the United States and on other nations.

If gun violence is not a significant reality in your community or country, there are several ways you can engage this study. Use the points of connection and juxtaposition with the picture presented here to probe how your community might engage the issue of gun violence. Consider what issues of violence are a reality and what lessons may apply from this study. Pray for your fellow Christians where gun violence is a reality.

As suggested in the title of this study, there is a gap between prophesied dreams of the Kingdom and the present violent reality.

¹Everytown Research, “Gun Violence in America,” <https://everytownresearch.org/report/gun-violence-in-america/>, last updated 7 November 2025, accessed 11 February 2025.

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What do future visions of peace mean for a very violent present? How are we to understand this and other prophetic scriptures? Is prophecy of the Kingdom only about a far-off time yet to come, or does prophecy about the future have some bearing on the present? This tension is, in many ways, at the heart of this study. Read on to learn how prophetic dreams of the future Kingdom can infuse and transform the reality of the present.

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Week 1

The Common Good

Micah 4:1-2

¹In days to come
the mountain of the LORD's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised up above the hills.
Peoples shall stream to it,
²and many nations shall come and say:
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

The Passage

Little is known about the eight-century BCE prophet Micah, yet his words and imagery are some of the most memorable in the Bible. Throughout the book of Micah, prophecy alternates between condemnation for injustice and opportunities for repentance. Micah 4:1-2 begins a message of repentance. To grasp its meaning, we must recall the condemnation in chapter 3 and the broader context of the book.

The political situation within and without ancient Israel sets the backdrop for Micah's words. Micah lives at a worrisome time for Israel. Powerful nations like Assyria lurk in the shadows, ready to invade the Kingdom of Judah.² These external threats mirror the rockiness of the internal situation. Previous years of economic development, coupled

¹Klaus Koch. *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, p. 104.

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with corrupt leaders, have sprouted grave inequality and violent injustice within the nation.

Micah condemns the political and religious leaders who are actively involved in the oppression of the poor. They “hate the good and love the evil” (3:2) and declare war against the hungry (3:5). Micah accuses them of being cannibalistic towards the people (3:2) and desiring personal gain to the extent of causing bloodshed and widespread corruption. Justice in the courts is skewed towards the affluent and religious teaching can be bought. As a result of such fraud, God chooses to remain hidden and unapproachable: “Then they will cry to the LORD, but God will not answer them; God will hide God’s face from them at that time, because they have acted wickedly” (3:4).

Israel at this time is thus a people in peril. Their outward security is compromised as powerful nations lie in wait, and their inward security is likewise at risk as widespread injustice has separated them from God. Violence due to self-interest threatens from outside and inside the nation. The security compromise is so great that Micah prophesies the flattening of the stronghold of Zion, the utter ruin of Jerusalem (3:12).

The message of Micah 4 comes amidst this desperate situation for the people of God. Against the closing image in chapter 3 of God’s city being brought low, the opening to chapter 4 envisions the “mountain of the LORD’s house...established as the highest of the mountains, and...raised up above the hills” (4:1). The reestablishment of God’s rule is not limited to Israel or Judah. Instead, the unsurpassable height of the mountain declares the limitless reach and universal recognition of God’s transcendence.

As Micah 4:2 shows, this universal recognition is not only of God’s greatness, but also, in light of that, of the error of people’s ways.

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Micah's vision foretells of a deep desire among the peoples for change: the heartfelt pangs of earnest repentance. There is a universal hunger for something more, something higher than what they have been mired in. In Micah 4:1-2, we see that the path of violence has led nowhere. Seeking out one's own welfare against others — whether fueled by fear, self-protection, or self-interest — has failed. God's ways and paths are needed. These sketch a different route, one holding great promise.

The journey to God is not an individualistic pursuit. In Micah's vision, we see that Israel and Judah's salvation is not separate from that of the rest of the world, but connected to it. All peoples, with no distinctions made for some nations or social groups above others, stream to God's presence so "that God may teach us God's ways and that we may walk in God's paths" (4:2). Antagonistic borders formerly fraught with violence, societal divisions predicated on injustice, and the isolating distance that separated God from God's people are all dissolved as the nations go up to God together to learn God's ways. Participatory, transcendent, and universal, God's justice is the justice of the common good.

Contextual Application: Gun Trafficking

The common good is a central issue at stake in the reality of gun violence, both philosophically and practically. Philosophically, talk and thought about guns is often framed in the discourse of rights, where guns are conceived of as an individual right. The individual right to bear arms is often construed of as being at odds with talk of the public good, as if the two are mutually opposed, or as if consideration of the public good is a threat to — rather than core component of — individual security. Individual security is often weighted against public security. Micah's vision, though, shows us that this is not God's way — individual security is bound up with common security.

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Practically, people often seek guns out of fear and self-protection, acting in a way that presupposes that individual security is set at odds with common security.³ While many claim that the prevalence of guns in society is the path to common security, studies have shown the opposite to be the case. When a gun is present in a household, the risk of gun violence — whether accidental or intentional — increases.⁴

In the United States, between 2002 and 2022, more children were killed by gunshots than on-duty police officers and active military combined. Gun violence is the number one cause of death for kids and teens. This is a heartbreaking testament to the fact that the mere presence of guns is a reliable indicator of gun violence.⁵

Looking at some of the most common situations of gun violence, we see that an embrace of the common good is absent from many of the laws and cultural attitudes surrounding guns. Gun trafficking is a major source of gun violence. Gun trafficking often consists of the movement of guns from one locale where they are legally obtained to another where they are not, or the purchasing of guns by a “straw purchaser,” a person who can legally buy guns and then sells them to someone who cannot legally possess guns. Trafficking patterns reveal that weak gun laws in one locale fuel a flow of guns to another locale where there are stricter laws.

³Kate Masters, “For Most U.S. Gun Owners, Protection is the Main Reason They Own a Gun,” Pew Research Center, 16 August 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/08/16/for-most-u-s-gun-owners-protection-is-the-main-reason-they-own-a-gun/>, accessed 11 February 2025.

⁴Everytown Research & Policy, “Preventable Tragedies: Unintentional Shootings by Children,” last updated 26 April 2023, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/notanaccident/>, accessed 11 February 2025; Choi, DiNitto and Marti, “Youth firearm suicide: Precipitating/risk factors and gun access,” 2017, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740917306977>, accessed 11 February 2025; Campbell et al., “Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: results from a multisite case control study,” 2003, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12835191/>, accessed 11 February 2025.

⁵Kelly Drane, “Guns are Now the Leading Cause of Death for American Kids,” Giffords, 2 August 2022, <https://giffords.org/stories/guns-are-now-the-leading-cause-of-death-for-american-kids/>, accessed 11 February 2025.

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The extreme gun violence in Chicago, Illinois provides an example. Chicago has a gun-homicide rate four times the national average, with 90% of homicides being committed by guns.⁶ Illinois has some of the strongest gun laws in the United States, and so much of its gun violence is due to trafficked guns from neighboring states with weak gun laws.⁷

We see the same situation elsewhere in the United States. Law enforcement officials have identified the “Iron Pipeline” as a pattern of trafficking guns used in crime between states connected via major interstate highways.⁸ For example, Maryland has the highest rate of crime gun imports, with nearly a third of crime guns used in Maryland being originally sold in Virginia.⁹ The lack of policy change on this issue reveals the failure to embrace and take into account the public good as part of the private good.

This failure is magnified on an international level. Though the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Arms Trade Treaty in 2014 to prevent illegal trade of small arms (assault rifles, sub-machine guns, light machine guns, and more) across international boundaries, gun trafficking is still a major issue.¹⁰ Notably, the U.S. fuels the spread of guns around the world, facilitating violent crime in other countries.

⁶Mason et al, “Changes in the Demographic Distribution of Chicago Gun-Homicide Decedents From 2015-2021: Violent Death Surveillance Cross-sectional Study,” 7 April 2023, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10131678/>, accessed February 11 2025.

⁷Giffords Law Center, “Illinois Gun Laws,” last updated November 2024, <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/states/illinois/>, accessed 11 February 2025.

⁸Roberts et al, “Interstate Highway Connections and Traced Gun Transfers Between the 48 Contiguous United States,” 9 April 2024, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2817314>, accessed February 11 2025.

⁹Giffords, “New Annual Gun Law Scorecard Reveals Gun Safety Movement Continues Remarkable Rise As More Americans than Ever Protected by Stronger Laws,” 6 February 2020, <https://giffords.org/press-release/2020/02/2019-scorecard-national-press-release/>, accessed 11 February 2025.

¹⁰United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, “The Arms Trade Treaty,” <https://disarmament.unoda.org/con-arms/arms-trade-treaty-2/>, accessed 11 February 2025.

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Between 200,000 and half million U.S. firearms are estimated to be smuggled into Mexico every year, known as the “Iron River.”¹¹

Despite these findings, the U.S. lacks a strong federal gun trafficking law and only 19 states and Washington, D.C. require background checks on all gun sales. Only federally licensed gun dealers are required to conduct criminal background checks, meaning private sales or sellers at gun shows typically do not need to perform background checks.¹² The lack of concern for the common good reflected in laws, regulations, and attitudes facilitates the proliferation of guns and spread of gun violence across the U.S. and world. The unregulated desire for guns as a source of individual security in certain parts of the U.S. and world impacts others, at a high price.

Personal Connection: A Gun Violence Victim

On January 21, 2013, Hadiya Pendleton performed with her high school band at President Barack Obama’s inauguration in Washington, D.C. One week later, on January 29, 2013, she was killed by a gang in her hometown of Chicago. Hadiya was taking shelter from the rain with friends when a shooter, thinking they were members of a rival gang, approached them and fired. She was 15 years old.

Like so many other victims of gun violence, Hadiya was shot and killed with an illegally trafficked gun that entered Chicago through the weak gun laws of neighboring states. Her death sparked international response: President Obama spoke about it in his 2013 State of the Union address, First Lady Michelle Obama attended Hadiya’s funeral,

¹¹Alfonsi et al, “Mexico Fights to dam ‘iron river’ sending guns from U.S. to cartels,” 22 December 2024, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/guns-from-us-ending-up-in-mexico-60-minutes/>, accessed 11 February 2025.

¹²Giffords Law Center, “Universal Background Checks,” <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/background-checks/universal-background-checks/>, accessed 11 February 2025.

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and a bill in Hadiya's name was introduced in the Senate in 2015. Her birthday, June 2, was declared National Gun Violence Awareness Day and her friends started a movement to get people to #WearOrange on this date, orange being the color hunters wear to protect themselves in the woods. Yet despite this movement, guns still flow rapidly into Chicago and other areas around the country and globe due to the absence of change in regulation, enforcement, and attitudes.

As the death tolls in Chicago since Hadiya's death indicate, the desire for guns in states with weak gun laws continues to affect the lives of others elsewhere. The common good is not yet embraced.

Questions for Discussion

1. How is gun trafficking impacting your community today? Visit the Gun Violence Archive (<http://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>) or conduct quick research for statistics on incidents of gun violence in your community (city, state, region, country). Were the guns involved in these incidents trafficked? What factors — neighboring states, distant countries, the drug trade, or other causes — affected the trafficking?
2. Better legislation is only part of the solution to stopping gun trafficking. What other types of interventions could have been made by whom and when to prevent the death of Hadiya Pendleton and others? In other words, who and what else beside the law is part of the solution to stopping gun trafficking? What actions should the Church take in facing this issue?
3. Where in our world have you seen the picture presented in the opening of Micah 4 people coming together to seek out God's justice?

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4. In what ways does the common good inform your decision-making process? In what situations, or regarding what issues, do you take the security of others into account when making decisions for yourself?

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Week 2

Transformation

Micah 4:3

³He shall judge between many peoples,
and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more;

The Passage

The third verse of chapter 4 contains some of the most remarkable and beautiful imagery among the prophets. In Micah 4:1-2 we saw that many nations will stream to the mountain of the Lord's house. Here, we see what happens when they arrive: God establishes justice, arbitrating among them. Even for "strong" and distant nations, God's judgment will stand. Nothing in the passage indicates that this arbitration will occur only among monotheistic nations or nations already in peaceful coexistence with Israel. Once again, following week one's focus, this judgment affects all nations, regardless of their belief systems or prior relationships to one another. God is the final judge and the nations will voluntarily journey to God out of their desire to live in peace, without violence and bloodshed.

Notably, Micah 4:3 specifies that the nations will still be armed when God arbitrates between them. The transformation of weapons into instruments of harvesting food occurs after judgments are made in the prophecy. Micah envisions God's judgments as so just that the nations will not simply turn in their weapons of warfare, but will actively engage in their transformation: they will undertake the difficult work

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of beating weapons into agricultural instruments that provide for the welfare of all people. It will require a great deal of specifically human effort to transform weapons into peaceful instruments. God does not collect or transform the weapons.

Once the judgments are handed down, the nations themselves will transform what was once violently used to cause bloodshed into instruments to benefit all people. The text specifically states that nations “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.”

It is intriguing to note that plowshares and pruning hooks can be used as weapons. The transformation that occurs, then, is not only in the weapons but in those who wield them. It is a holistic and total transformation, not a temporary one. The purpose of these instruments changes as the peoples’ focuses transforms from self-centered violence to all-centered welfare. There is thus a culture change that is part of the eradication of weapons. Previously defining disputes — among nations and within them, rooted in racism, ethnic hatred, nationalism, sexism, and more — end with the recognition of God’s justice. There is no more “learning war,” as the violent divisions that gave nations their identities are eradicated. A new culture, a new way of peaceful co-existence and reconciliation for all, will be established.

It is vital to reemphasize that it is not God who will remove the weaponry. God does not treat the nations as if they are small children who cannot be trusted, taking the weapons away on God’s own; nor does God magically change the culture. The nations themselves participate in the hard work of their own transformation, changing weapons and cultures of violence into vehicles of peace and provision

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supporting the welfare of all. This is a picture of corporate conversion — a full, universal repentance.

Contextual Application: Suicide and Domestic Violence

The transformation of weapons into plowshares has meaningful connections to gun violence. In the reading of the passage offered here, guns used, in design or purpose, to harm, kill, and destroy others are not weapons transformed. Suicide and domestic violence provide two windows on the holistic transformation that is needed in facing gun violence.

Suicide and domestic violence are hugely implicated in gun violence. In 2021, 54% of gun deaths were by suicide (26,328).¹³ The U.S. gun suicide rate is nearly 12 times of other high-income countries.¹⁴

As regards domestic violence, more than seven in ten intimate partner homicides in the United States are committed with a gun, and 76 percent of intimate partner firearm homicide victims are women.¹⁵ In an average month, 76 women in the U.S. are killed with a gun by intimate partners.¹⁶ From an international perspective, studies have found that the U.S. is by far the most dangerous place for women among so-called “developed” countries when it comes to gun violence.¹⁷

¹³John Gramlich, “What the data says about gun deaths in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center, 26 April 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/26/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/>, accessed 11 February 2025.

¹⁴Everytown analysis of the most recent year of gun deaths by country (2015 to 2019), GunPolicy.org, accessed 11 February 2025.

¹⁵Everytown Research analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS), 2021, Ages: 18–85+, accessed February 11 2025.

¹⁶Everytown Research analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS), 2021, analysis includes firearm homicides involving an intimate partner and women ages 18–85+, accessed 11 February 2025.

¹⁷Everytown analysis of the most recent year of gun deaths by country (2015–2019), GunPolicy.org, accessed 11 February 2025.

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The issue of access is one of the main contributing factors to the intersection of suicide and guns and the intersection of domestic violence and guns. Weak laws enabling easy access facilitate gun violence in both situations. Studies show that access is a major factor in the prevalence of suicide.

The New York Times reports that in early 20th-century England, many people committed suicide by intentionally inhaling fumes from coal gas ovens.¹⁸ When oven technology advanced, fewer people died by this method and only some found an alternate means of suicide. In other words, the suicide rate as a whole dropped substantially when a major means of access was restricted. Similarly, when the Israeli army stopped letting service members take guns home on weekends in 2006, the suicide rate fell by 40 percent.¹⁹ Limited access impacts suicide rates overall.

Access is similarly a factor in the impact of guns in domestic violence. In U.S. federal law, the “boyfriend loophole” allows ex-partners with restraining orders or previous convictions to access guns. The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act that was signed into law in 2022 by President Biden partially closed this loophole by expanding prohibitions barring people convicted of certain domestic violence crimes from possessing guns to include dating partners.²⁰ However, this loophole has not completely closed at the federal level, and most states in the U.S. do not have laws that cover this gap.

In addition to access, culture is a significant factor for gun violence in the case of suicide and domestic violence. Toxic masculinity, or cultural

¹⁸Margot Sanger-Katz, “Gun Deaths are Mostly Suicides,” The New York Times, 8 October 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/09/upshot/gun-deaths-are-mostly-suicides.html?_r=0, accessed on 1 November 2016.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Wilson et al, “The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, 1 Year Later,” Center for American Progress, 10 August 2023, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-bipartisan-safer-communities-act-1-year-later/>, accessed 14 February 2025.

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views of maleness that center male identity and masculinity in social, physical, and other forms of violent dominance, often over women, contribute to domestic violence and suicide. Contrary to the idea that survivors of domestic violence should purchase a gun to keep themselves safe, studies have shown that women living in households with a firearm are at greater risk of homicide.²¹ Furthermore, domestic violence victims are not to blame, nor are they the ones responsible for fixing the crime. Therefore, it is necessary to domestic violence abusers accountable and reform understandings of masculinity.

Regarding suicide, cultural stigma around mental health support inhibits people from seeking help. In 2022, men comprised over 68 percent of all firearm suicide deaths, suggesting that toxic masculinity harms men as well as women.²² The provision of better mental health services and other forms of care and community are needed. Social isolation is often a factor in suicide. As the provision of community is a core function of churches and faith communities, these groups specifically can aid in lowering the numbers of people turning to suicide as an answer.

Attending to guns in this context of domestic violence and suicide reflects a larger point to be made: that gun violence is a public health issue. Seeing gun violence as a public health issue is a major culture change from what stands currently. Drunk driving, wearing seatbelts, and smoking tobacco are all examples of “personal” matters that were successfully re-framed and re-approached as public health issues. As the contexts of suicide and domestic violence show, gun violence is desperately in need of legislative as well as cultural changes. Holistic

²¹Anglemyer et al, “The Accessibility of Firearms and Risk for Suicide and Homicide Victimization Among Household Members: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” *Annals of Internal Medicine* 160, no. 2 (2014): 101–10, <https://doi.org/10.7326/M13-1301>, accessed 11 February 2025.

²²American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, “Suicide Statistics,” published statistics on suicide from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Data & Statistics Fatal Injury Report for 2022, retrieved May 11, 2024.

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transformation is needed, not just of guns but also of the attitudes and cultures of those who wield them.

Personal Connection: A Domestic Violence Survivor of Gun Violence

La'Shea Cretain is a Moms Demand Action volunteer and a Senior Survivor Fellow with the Everytown Survivor Network. The following was taken from a story published by Cretain in 2022.

“When young people graduate from high school, they typically enjoy a fun-filled summer before heading off to college in the fall. For me, the summer after my senior year was filled with fear and intimidation from an abusive dating partner, who ultimately shot me five times, leaving me with lifelong physical and emotional wounds.

I grew up in Opelousas, Louisiana, a small, tight-knit community. It was a happy childhood, though as I got older I saw glimpses of abuse at school and around the neighborhood. The response from bystanders was always the same: shrugging it off and eventually forgetting about it. I now know that response is all too common in many communities across the U.S.

By high school, I had grown into a tough, headstrong country girl who did what she wanted. I played competitive basketball for the school team and football on weekends with my friends. In 10th grade, I met my ex-boyfriend and gave birth to my first child, a son. One week after graduating high school, in May 1996, I had my second child, a daughter. But my relationship with my children's father — my ex-boyfriend — had grown more and more physically and emotionally abusive since we'd met sophomore year. And I didn't tell anyone.

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Instead, I made every possible effort to separate from him the summer after graduation. I didn't live with him or accept money from him to support the children. I started working part-time at McDonalds, making \$4 an hour. My family supported me and my babies, all while not knowing I was trying to remove myself from an abusive relationship. But my ex's behavior grew more dangerous and concerning.

He started stalking me at work, hovering outside the restaurant and staring me down. I once saw him pull a gun on someone, so I suspected he was armed, and I already knew he was not above physical violence towards me. At 18, I was living in silent fear, every day, alone, with a two-year-old and a newborn.

By August, I went to the police. I told them everything: That my ex was terrorizing me. That he had been abusive and I didn't know what to do. They told me they'd talk to him, but that was that. It was the only time I ever asked for help in Opelousas, and they reacted exactly the way I predicted they would: by shrugging it off and forgetting. So I tried to forget too.

And then October 3rd arrived.

I was at my aunt's house with my babies when my ex showed up. He asked me to leave with him, and I refused multiple times. He came back a few hours later with a gun, demanding I go with him again. And at 2:48pm, he shot me five times in front of our children before shooting and killing himself.

I was in a coma for several weeks following the shooting, but I can vividly remember the relief — even when I was unconscious — when my children were brought to visit me in the hospital room. They hadn't been shot, and nor had my aunt or my ex's mother who was also there

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that day. Any one of them could have been in the hospital like me or killed because my ex had access to a firearm.

I know that my story is one of far too many in a country where gun-related violence towards women continues to devastate lives. This can and does happen to anyone, at any time, at any age. Abusers with access to a gun are five times more likely to kill their female victims, and nearly one million women in the U.S. alive today have reported being shot or shot at by an intimate partner. I also know first hand that guns can be used as tools of fear and intimidation to terrorize, coerce or control people.

The road to physical recovery was long and hard, but I was motivated and resilient. Emotionally, I poured myself into creating a peaceful, happy childhood for my babies. In 2000, we relocated to San Diego and began a new life. I made sure my kids lived in a warm, loving home, and when I was ready, I got a bachelor's degree for business. Every year, we would go to Louisiana and spend time with family there. I would also bring them to visit their father's grave. But I never told my story — until nearly 20 years later when my daughter was heading off to college herself. She was 18, the same age I was when I got shot. She asked me about her father, and I didn't lie.

With her support, I began sharing my story publicly for the first time. I joined Moms Demand Action in 2017. Now, I use my voice to empower survivors of domestic violence across the country. I advocate for commonsense policies that support and protect all survivors of domestic violence, including non-married partners, by preventing abusers from possessing firearms. October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, a time to elevate survivor stories and ensure that victims have access to resources to discuss domestic violence and to seek help. For me, this October will mark 26 years since my shooting,

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but I'll also be walking down the graduation aisle again — this time, with my Masters of Business Administration.

I still live with the five bullets inside me, but they don't have power over me. Instead, I named them after the five elements that help me as I continue to heal — FIGHT, FAMILY, FAITH, FORGIVE and FORGET. By sharing my story, I hope other survivors or victims of domestic violence understand that they're not alone. Trust the strength of your voice, and know that there are people out there who are fighting for you and are here to help you when you're ready. It's what I wish I knew.”²³

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you see any evidence today of the vision Micah shares: nations recognizing that their ways of violence are not sustainable and beginning to recognize God's ways are higher and better than our ways?
2. It is noted in this study that the culture change of nations no longer “learning war” is just as significant — and difficult — an effort of beating weapons into instruments that provide for the welfare of all people. What specific cultural characteristics of your nation, culture, or community need to change to “not learn war anymore?” How are you and your church participating now in this change?
3. What ministries is your church currently engaged in to prevent suicide and domestic violence? What might be some ministries your church can engage in to prevent these tragedies?

²³La'Shea Cretain, “My Ex Shot Me 5 Times In Front Of My Kids. Here's What I Want You To Know,” Scary Mommy, 12 October 2022, <https://www.scarymommy.com/lifestyle/domestic-violence-month-moms-demand-action-survivor-stories>, accessed 11 February 2025.

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4. How could the Church have been more active in the case of La'Shea Cretain before the terrible shooting of her by her ex?

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Week 3 Flourishing

Micah 4:4

⁴but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and
no one shall make them afraid;
for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

The Passage

After the mountain of the house of the LORD is raised up, after the nations stream to it in repentance seeking God's ways of peace, after God renders judgments, and after great effort is poured into transforming weapons and cultures of war into instruments of peace, we see in verse 4 the final outcome in Micah's vision. That outcome is universal flourishing: the attainment of genuine security and peace for all.

As explored in week one, underlying so much of the violence between nations and among them is a desire to secure individual welfare. Whether securing borders, guarding against real or perceived enemies, defending economic or foreign policy interests, conducting wars for territorial expansion, or seeking to exploit another nation's resources, nations often engage in violence by protecting their own interests. On the individual level, similar situations of desire for security or advancement and related emotions — of fear, jealousy, greed, desire for domination — function as motivators to violence. Violence is, in so many ways, fueled by fear, self-protection, and self-interest.

Micah's dream rejects this logic. The way to genuine peace and security is through repentance and transformation from violent paths

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for self-protection or self-interest. As seen in week two's lesson, the nations ascend the mountain of the LORD together, enacting repentance as full transformation — in tools, culture, and self — from the former path of violence to God's path of peace.

Significantly, this is not the abandoning of justice, but the fulfillment of it. Total transformation is the corollary to God's justice and it yields what the nations were searching for with violence. Verse 4 gives a picture of true flourishing: genuine peace and security, the provision of sustenance, and freedom from fear. In verse 4, we see that physical and economic security is given to all peoples by God only after the weapons of warfare are beaten and the nations themselves are transformed. It is following the participatory transformation enabling the well-being of all peoples that the treasure they were seeking is found. Repentance and the rejection of violence brings the dreams so often associated with conquest and domination — dreams of peace, safety, and economic security — into reality.

Micah's vision is ultimately about salvation. In acknowledging our inability to save ourselves, we acknowledge salvation by God — and, what is more, we find that we are invited to participate with God in the salvation and liberation of the world. Micah's vision is in the process of being fulfilled through the coming of the Messiah, the Christ. Jesus declared at the beginning of his ministry that he was the one about whom the prophet Isaiah (Micah's contemporary) spoke, stating that he would "proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:19). Our ability to participate in the peace and security characteristic of God's Kingdom is dependent on our recognition that we are powerless to bring about our own security, peace, and fulfillment. Whether we own every type of gun there is or we do not have access to guns at all, we are all in need of recognizing our utter inability to manufacture our own salvation.

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One must wonder what it will be like for the first nation or individual to see the mountain of the house of the Lord lifted up and, in that vision, acknowledge the error of their current path. Who will be the first to gaze upon the mountain of the house of the Lord and be willing to acknowledge that our attempts to protect and secure our own prosperity are in vain? Who will be the first to repent?

These are not rhetorical questions, but questions we are equipped and called on to answer, for Micah's vision is not utopianism or a prophecy pertaining only to the distant future.

Micah's vision is not meant to be forgotten and dismissed the minute we put down the Bible. It is not hyperbole where meaning lives more in the force of words than of actions. It is exactly the opposite. Micah 4:1-4 is sealed with the promise based on God's character: "For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." God intends to bring this dream about because it is rooted in who God is and what God has promised. If we indeed believe in who God is and in what God says, then we can count on Micah's dream coming to pass. The only question we have to ask is if we want to participate in making these Kingdom dreams real and if the day Micah speaks of longingly might be today.

Our theological understanding of this passage — repentance, confession, and transformation involving active participation in making Kingdom dreams reality — points to specific actions we can take. Corporate repentance must include, and may even begin with, individual repentance. Cultures cannot change without their individual members changing. Just as God desires that cultures of violence become ones of peace, so too does God desire the same transformation of us as individuals. Violent individuals are not to be eradicated, killed, or destroyed, but transformed. God wants to transform our anger into compassion, our indifference to the suffering

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of others into love, our covetousness into mutuality, our pride into humility, and our obsession with self-preservation into concern for the flourishing of all, rooted in love of God and people.

Take a moment and recommit all of who you are to the Lord. Invite the Holy Spirit to convict you of sin and to cleanse you. Our world will be more peaceful as we resemble more of Christ. There can be no social holiness without individual holiness — as Micah's dream shows, the interrelation of the two is the beginning of the path to God.

Belief in the reality of God's promise coming to pass means that we live to see the promise of God's Kingdom made real in our lives and in our world today. To refuse to work toward that dream, to continue to hoard weapons of violence to create fear and intimidation in others, and to make self-preservation our greatest focus, is a statement of unbelief in the power of God to make God's Kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven.

Contextual Application: Mass Shootings

In the U.S., mass shootings — gun violence in which four or more people, not including the shooter, are killed — attract widespread media attention and reactions of deep pain, sorrow, terror, outrage, and solidarity. They attract responses that point to the difference between our ways and God's ways, and the flourishing that is found only in the latter. Mass shootings are, perhaps, the clearest situation where the flourishing of all is threatened by guns. Armed gunmen wielding weapons that can, and tragically do, wipe out dozens pose a grave threat to the wellbeing of individuals and society.

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These acts of terrorism create a national and international stage for their motivating beliefs—white supremacy (Charleston, South Carolina 2015; Buffalo, New York 2022), homophobia (Orlando, Florida 2016; Colorado Springs, Colorado 2022), religious extremism (Paris, France 2015; San Bernardino, California 2015), political extremism (Nevada 2014), or other (Las Vegas, Nevada 2017; Parkland, Florida 2018; Uvalde, Texas 2022).²⁴

These incidents traumatize society not just with death, but with fear. In addition to the horrific loss of life that happens in the event of the killings, mass shootings leave us feeling afraid. Fear, rather than flourishing, takes root in the social fabric.

As noted above, fear often leads to violence. In the case of mass shootings, we see the fear left in their wake provoking a desire to turn to weapons for greater security. Public responses to mass shootings often involve both calls for further restricting access to weapons and calls for the loosening of barriers preventing access to weapons. Following the rampage of a gunman in Norway in 2011 that left 77 dead at a summer camp, some criticized the country's policy in which most police do not carry guns. An independent commission following the incident, however, recommended tightening gun restrictions, prohibiting pistols and semiautomatic weapons.²⁵

The belief that “the only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun” is a prevalent one. The gun industry has pushed the belief that the public safety threatened by guns is also only secured by

²⁴Everytown Research, “Mass Shootings in America,” last updated March 2023, <https://everytownresearch.org/mass-shootings-in-america/>, accessed 11 February 2025, only reflects some recent incidents of mass shootings in the world.

²⁵Jonathan Masters, “Gun Control Around the World – A Primer: Lessons from Canada to Japan,” *The Atlantic*, 12 January 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/01/worldwide-gun-control-policy/423711/>, accessed 11 February 2025.

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guns—and guns everywhere, in churches, schools, airports, and other public places. However, Micah’s vision of God’s Kingdom shows us that self-protection is a matter of belief in the power of God which cannot be attained through fear and intimidation.

However, guns are rarely used for successful self-defense in both the home and in public. Guns are many more times more likely to be used for homicide or suicide than self-defense.²⁶ Believing in Micah’s vision means repealing legislation such as “Stand Your Ground” laws in places where they have been adopted.²⁷ “Stand Your Ground” laws allow for anyone in any place to use deadly force if they reasonably believe that they are in danger of bodily harm. As seen in the shooting of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in 2012, laws enable violence and violent offenders to go unpunished. Both before and after his encounter ending in the death of Trayvon Martin, George Zimmerman had a long history of violence, including assaulting a police officer, four incidents of domestic violence, and a road rage incident in which he threatened another driver.²⁸

The absence of universal background checks and stronger domestic violence laws regulating access to guns, as well as the presence of concealed-carry laws, enabled Zimmerman to have a gun and use it to kill. “Stand Your Ground” laws have proven to be deadly for people of color, especially young black men. When a white person kills a

²⁶Laura Cutillela, “The ‘Good Guy With a Gun’ Myth,” Giffords, 1 October 2020, <https://giffords.org/analysis/the-good-guy-with-a-gun-myth/>, accessed 11 February 2025.

²⁷As of October 2023, the list of U.S. states that have passed “Stand Your Ground” laws includes Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming. <https://www.findlaw.com/criminal/criminal-law-basics/states-that-have-stand-your-ground-laws.html>

²⁸Center for American Progress, “Fact Sheet: Have Gun, Will Travel: Mandated National Concealed-Carry Legislation,” February 2015, <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/MandatedConcealCarry-fact-sheet.pdf>, accessed 11 February 2025.

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Black person, it is 281% greater odds of being deemed justified than a white person killing another white person. However, when a Black person kills a white person, it is half as likely to be deemed justifiable compared to when a white person kills another white person.²⁹ You can see this in the case of Ahmaud Arbery, where three white men invoked Georgia's "Stand Your Ground" law after they shot and killed Arbery who was jogging through their neighborhood in February 2020.³⁰

If the nations in Micah's vision had applied "Stand Your Ground" reasoning, or had carried weapons in response to a threat (or to intimidate others, creating a threat) as with concealed or open carry practices, it is highly unlikely that they would have peaceably ventured up the mountain to the house of the LORD. The nations would not have repented, nor would they have participated in their own salvation through transforming their weapons into instruments to care for the welfare others. Ultimately, none would have found true security and flourishing.

We are called to repentance from such course of action, turning away from violent strategies for self-protection to place our security in God. We are called to interrupt the cycle of violence and transform it, not perpetuate it. The "Stand Your Ground" response that advocates using deadly force seems to be a repudiation of belief in the power of God to be the one to bring about genuine security and peace. The Church must be on the forefront of the efforts to repeal such laws and uphold transformation if we are to accept the vision given to us by God through Micah.

²⁹John K Roman, "Race, Justifiable Homicide, and Stand Your Ground Laws: Analysis of FBI Supplementary Homicide Report Data," July 2013, <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/23856/412873-Race-Justifiable-Homicide-and-Stand-Your-Ground-Laws.PDF>, accessed 11 February 2025.

³⁰Equal Justice Initiative, "Stand Your Ground Laws and the Presumption of Dangerousness," 4 October 2024, <https://eji.org/news/stand-your-ground-laws-and-the-presumption-of-dangerousness/>, accessed 11 February 2025.

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Personal Connection: A Gun Violence Interrupter – A Model for Action

This section draws from an NPR interview available online.³¹

In the case of Antoinette Tuff, we see that the Church is on the forefront through the witness of everyday Christians. On August 20, 2013, Antoinette stopped a mass shooting before it even began at the school where she worked in Decatur, Georgia. Armed with an AK-47 and 500 rounds of ammunition, 20-year-old Michael Hill entered Ronald E. McNair Discovery Learning Academy, where Antoinette worked alongside 100 employees serving 800 students. Hill took Antoinette hostage in a brief standoff with police. In the face of this would-be killer, Antoinette offered peace. She shared with him her own struggles and told him she loved him. Through her message, she convinced him to surrender.

Antoinette's extraordinary action catapulted her to widespread acclaim. However — rather than bravery or self-assuredness — hurt, fear, and faith are what Antoinette cites as guiding her actions on that day.

In an interview with National Public Radio, she describes the pain in her life at the time of her encounter with Michael Hill: "I had just lost my husband after 33 years...he was actually leaving to be with another woman [and] I had just gotten a phone call to tell me that I was in the process of losing my car, and they wanted me to give them almost \$15,000 [which] I didn't have...So before I got there [to her seat in the

³¹Tell Me More staff, "How One Woman's Faith Stopped a School Shooting," National Public Radio, 31 January 2014, <https://www.npr.org/2014/01/31/268417580/how-one-womans-faith-stopped-a-school-shooting> accessed 11 February 2025; All Things Considered, "911 Call Captures School Employee Talking Down Gunman," National Public Radio, 22 August 2013, <https://www.npr.org/2013/08/22/214576953/911-call-captures-school-employee-talking-down-gunman>, accessed 11 February 2025.

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front office that morning],...I was in tears and screaming out, ‘God help me!’” When Antoinette encountered Michael that morning, she was dealing with this personal pain. Michael slipped past security to enter into the school’s front office, where, firing bullets randomly, he declared that this was no joking matter.

Antoinette says, “I was screaming and terrified on the inside. I didn’t even know I was calm until [I re-listened to the 911 tape]. And to be honest with you, I didn’t even recognize my own voice. And so I knew at that moment that it was God that guided me through that day.”

Michael announced that he was off his medications for a mental disorder and did not care if he died, having nothing to live for. Antoinette shared her struggles with him, telling him about her husband, about the difficulty of raising a son with disabilities, and about her own suicide attempt. In reflecting back later on what she said that morning, Antoinette says:

“All of us have a purpose in our life. And so God prepares us all for one. That day was very important for me that every word that proceeded out of my mouth at that point in time could be life or death, not only for me and Michael Hill [the gunman], but for everyone in that building. And so I knew that that was the moment that I had to make sure that everything that I heard God say to me, was what I came out of my mouth with.”

Antoinette’s answers to questions about faith and struggle get to the heart of this study:

On whether she questioned her faith

“No, ‘cause I was too terrified to question him. I needed him to talk every minute he was there. I was calling on him more than

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I'm calling on him any day. I was like, 'God, what we going to do now, what we going to do next, what do I say, how do I say it?' 'Cause remember now, he had already shot a bullet right there in front of my face, in the office, and it ricocheted. I'm sitting there literally watch him unfold mentally. You know, spraying bullets everywhere, loading up the magazines, you know loading bullets in his pockets everywhere. I'm actually seeing him self-destruct right there. So I knew that the power of my words had to be powerful."

On healing from the pain

"Do I feel more healed than I did on August the 20th? Yes. Am I completely there? No. You can't have an AK-47 in your face and lose a marriage after 33 years and don't feel."

Antoinette Tuff stopped a mass shooting from taking place by responding with peace to a violent situation. She saved the lives of 800 children, 100 adults, and as many families. She kept would-be shooter Michael Hill from becoming a mass murderer.

Antoinette's actions of peace were not without fear or pain. As she shares in the interview, pain and fear were very present in her life at that time and in that moment for her and after. Yet, so was faith, and her faith directed her pain and fear not to violence but to love. It transformed her actions, and saved a man and community from becoming another in a long list of mass shootings.

That transformation from violence to peace, from certain death to life, is exactly what lies at the heart of our faith. We can only imagine the death that would have ensued had Antoinette responded with violence, escalating the situation. Such action would have been fully supported by the mentality of "Stand Your Ground" laws, of concealed and

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open carry laws, and of laws, attitudes, and cultural perspectives celebrating the spread of guns as defensive personal weapons. However, Antoinette did not go that route of acting on concern for self-protection only (or for protecting her community from a threatening “other”). In sharing her pain with Michael Hill and joining him in his suffering, Antoinette acted on the recognition that self-interest is bound up with the common good, which expressly included Michael Hill. His welfare as a human was not antithetical to hers (or to that of the schoolchildren or other employees), but deeply interwoven. Through following God’s path with this recognition, Antoinette enabled flourishing for all.

A final excerpt from the interview captures the elements of Micah’s dream (common good, transformation, flourishing) in Antoinette’s actions:

On why she never mentioned that Michael Hill is white, and she is African-American

“Well you know, one thing God says, he doesn’t say anything about color. He says ‘love thy neighbor.’ He doesn’t say love thy neighbor because you white. He doesn’t say love thy neighbor because you black. He doesn’t say love thy neighbor because you purple, green or orange And so for me, I didn’t see color. To me, I seen someone that was hurting, and did not need me to judge or pass judgment on them, show anger or be frustrated or mad at him. But I seen a young man in an unstable condition mind needing me to show him love.”

Questions for Discussion

1. What mass shootings have touched your community or, if you feel comfortable sharing, you personally?

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2. How viable do you think non-violent responses to gun violence are as a strategy? Would an unarmed police force work in your community, city, state, or country? If no, what are the ways that your community could begin to be transformed for such a practice to become reality? Do you think such a thing is desirable?
3. Do you know anyone like Antoinette who has responded with peace and compassion in a situation of violence? Have you ever been in a situation of violence in which you or someone else has responded in this manner? What effect did it have on you or other bystanders or participants?
4. Micah sees the nations each sitting under their own fig tree free from fear. Look up the significance of figs in the Bible. What meanings can this imagery have in Micah? How can these meanings translate for us today?

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Conclusion

The title of this study is Kingdom Dreams, Violent Realities. As noted in the introduction, Micah 4:1-4 is a prophetic dream of a future time and, yet, as seen through the application of this text to a very real and current issue, prophecy is not solely about the future. It is also about the present. The glimpsed vision of the hereafter affects how we see, engage, and understand the here-and-now. God's Kingdom that is to come is being established on earth.

Over the three weeks, we explored Micah 4:1-4 through the themes of the common good, transformation, and flourishing. The core image of transforming swords into plowshares ties the three themes together and shines light on the need to address various facets of gun violence. The transformation of weapons into objects of provision is complete and stunning, located in the objects as well as in the culture and the individuals who wield and shape both. This transformation is life-giving repentance, a turning from our ways to those of the Lord, which provide genuine security and peace. Such transformation comes about through placing faith not in guns, but in God.

Gun violence happens for a number of reasons and one prominent reason is self-preservation: to protect one's property, to protect one's life or one's family, or to protect one's "way of life." Securing what has been entrusted to us seems to not only be natural, but also a means of good stewardship. In Micah's vision of God's Kingdom, however, security is achieved not through arming oneself and overpowering or intimidating one's enemy, but rather, in acknowledging that our ways of arming ourselves, attempting to overpower or intimidate our real or perceived enemies, is going to end in our own destruction. Our confession, as will be the nations' one day, is that God's ways are not our

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ways. Our weapons will not bring us the security we desire. That will only come with the reality of God's Kingdom in our world.

As seen in week one, the first step towards that reality is the acknowledgement that we cannot get there alone. Despite the large divides between warring nations or groups using guns, or between individuals on the issue of guns (for example "pro-gun" and "gun control" proponents), Micah's vision shows us that the common good is the basis of the justice meted in the Kingdom. The welfare and engagement of all, regardless of politics, is vital. Transformation and flourishing follow only when the entirety of this "all" is embraced. As Antoinette Tuff showed, "all" means including the shooters themselves.

Humankind has learned how to dominate and do violence, but only God can truly fulfill the dreams and aspirations of humanity. Humankind can kill and destroy, but only God can redeem, transform, and fulfill. Humanity has historically created violent realities that put many innocent lives in peril, but God creates Kingdom dreams and invites all of us to actively participate in the difficult work of manifesting God's Kingdom dreams in the midst of the violent realities all around us. Following God's path of peace is the way forward.

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Resolution #3212

“Our Call to End Gun Violence”

Jesus’ call to his followers to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) is tied to intimate relationship with God, and echoes God’s dreams for peace for all of creation as expressed in Micah 4:1-4:

“In days to come, / the mountain of the LORD’s house / shall be established as the highest of the mountains, / and shall be raised up above the hills. / Peoples shall stream to it, / and many nations shall come and say: / ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, / to the house of the God of Jacob; / that he may teach us his ways / and that we may walk in his paths.’ / For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, / and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. / He shall judge between many peoples, / and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; / they shall beat their swords into plowshares, / and their spears into pruning hooks; / nation shall not lift up sword against nation, / neither shall they learn war any more; / but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, / and no one shall make them afraid; / for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken” (NRSV).

Micah’s prophetic dream points to a time when all peoples will journey to God’s presence so God “may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths” (4:2). Micah describes God as the final judge and the nations will travel to God’s presence out of their desire to live in peace without violence and bloodshed.

The stunning imagery of Micah’s dream is the transformation of weapons into instruments of harvesting food that occurs after the judgments are handed down to the nations. The transformation is not complete until the nations participate in their own transformation.

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The work that went into creating the weapons will be matched by the human effort it will take to transform those weapons into peaceful instruments.

God does not collect or hide the weapons from the nations, nor does God transform the weapons outside of human effort. The text states that the nations themselves, “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.”

Violence, in so many ways, is fueled by fear and self-protection. Iron plows and pruning tools can be used as weapons. Yet, in Micah’s vision, genuine peace and security are given to all people by God after the weapons of violence are transformed: “they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid.” Culture as well as weapons will be transformed: Indeed, “neither shall they learn war any more.”

Whether it happens in the towns of northeastern Nigeria, a suburb in the United States, the streets of Australia, or an office in France, gun violence has become an all-too-often frightening phenomenon. We need the reality of Micah’s vision more than ever.

Small arms include assault rifles, submachine guns, light machine guns, grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns and anti-tank guns, among other weapons (Small Arms Survey, <<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/definitions.html>>). Nations encumbered with violence from small arms face the greatest obstacles to delivering social services to those who need them the most (Ibid.). Armed violence contributes to crime, human trafficking, drug trafficking, gender-based violence, racial and ethnic conflicts, systemic economic inequalities, persistent unemployment, and human rights abuses among other social maladies (Small Arms Survey, <http://>

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www.smallarmssurvey.org/armed-violence/social-and-economic-costs/impact-on-development.html). In many countries small arms are the greatest hindrance to food security.

One crucial step toward curbing this violence on an international scale is the Arms Trade Treaty that passed the United Nations in 2013. Its focus is to prevent arms from being traded into already dangerous situations. The treaty does not regulate the trade of small arms within nations. In adopting the treaty, the 118 nations that signed it and the 31 nations that have already ratified it are stating that gun violence is a universal problem devastating lives and creating tremendous instability in nations and entire regions in the world. (<<http://disarmament.un.org/treaties/t/att/deposit/asc>>).

Gun violence also greatly affects families and individuals. One of the most prominent forms of gun violence is suicide. Worldwide, there are nearly one million suicides every year, which amounts to more than 3,000 per day (World Health Organization, International Association for Suicide Prevention, http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en/, Worldwide Suicide Prevention Day is September 10, <http://www.iasp.info/wspd/>). While not all of these involve firearms access to firearms makes suicide more attainable for many who attempt it. Indeed, firearms are the most frequent method for suicides in countries where firearms are common in private households (World Health Organization, <<http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/86/9/07-043489/en/>>).

When domestic violence incidents involve the use of firearms the results are often deadly. “Gender inequality, tolerance and cultural acceptance of the use of violence against women, and common notions of masculinity that embrace firearms possession (which may be supported by both men and women) all combine to create a climate that

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places women at risk of Intimate Partner Violence involving firearms” (Small Arms Survey, <[http:// www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/A-Yearbook/2013/en/Small- Arms-Survey-2013-Chapter-2-summary-EN.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/A-Yearbook/2013/en/Small-Arms-Survey-2013-Chapter-2-summary-EN.pdf)>). A U.S.-based study of mass shootings between January 2009 and January 2013 revealed that 57 percent of the incidents involved the killing of a family member, or a current or former intimate partner of the shooter (<[https://s3.amazonaws.com/ s3.mayorsagainstillegal-guns.org/images/analysis-of-recent-mass-shootings.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.mayorsagainstillegal-guns.org/images/analysis-of-recent-mass-shootings.pdf)>).

As followers of Jesus, called to live into the reality of God’s dream of shalom as described by Micah, we must address the epidemic of gun violence so “that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in God’s paths.” Therefore, we call upon United Methodists to prayerfully address gun violence in their local context. Some of the ways in which to prevent gun violence include the following:

1. For congregations to make preventing gun violence a regular part of our conversations and prayer times. Gun violence must be worshipfully and theologically reflected on, and we encourage United Methodist churches to frame conversations theologically by utilizing resources such as “Kingdom Dreams, Violent Realities: Reflections on Gun Violence from Micah 4:1-4” produced by the General Board of Church and Society.
2. For congregations to assist those affected by gun violence through prayer, pastoral care, creating space, and encouraging survivors to share their stories, financial assistance, and through identifying other resources in their communities as victims of gun violence and their families walk through the process of grieving and healing.
3. For individual United Methodists who own guns as hunters or collectors to safely and securely store their guns and to teach the importance of practicing gun safety.

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4. For United Methodist congregations that have not experienced gun violence to form ecumenical and interfaith partnerships with faith communities that have experienced gun violence in order to support them and learn from their experiences.
5. For United Methodist congregations to lead or join in ecumenical or interfaith gatherings for public prayer at sites where gun violence has occurred and partner with law enforcement to help prevent gun violence.
6. For United Methodist congregations to partner with local law-enforcement agencies and community groups to identify gun retailers that engage in retail practices designed to circumvent laws on gun sales and ownership, encourage full legal compliance, and to work with groups like Heeding God's Call that organize faith-based campaigns to encourage gun retailers to gain full legal compliance with appropriate standards and laws.
7. For United Methodist congregations to display signs that prohibit carrying guns onto church property.
8. For United Methodist congregations to advocate at the local and national level for laws that prevent or reduce gun violence. Some of those measures include:
 - Universal background checks on all gun purchases
 - Ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty
 - Ensuring all guns are sold through licensed gun retailers
 - Prohibiting all individuals convicted of violent crimes from purchasing a gun for a fixed time period
 - Prohibiting all individuals under restraining order due to threat of violence from purchasing a gun
 - Prohibiting persons with serious mental illness, who pose a danger to themselves and their communities, from purchasing a gun
 - Ensuring greater access to services for those suffering from mental illness

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- Establishing a minimum age of 21 years for a gun purchase or possession
- Banning large-capacity ammunition magazines and weapons designed to fire multiple rounds each time the trigger is pulled
- Promoting new technologies to aid law-enforcement agencies to trace crime guns and promote public safety.

**ADOPTED 2016
READOPTED 2024
RESOLUTION #3428, 2016 BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS**

See Social Principles, ¶ 162, Other Social Issues, B.

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Resources

Advocacy Issues

Gun trafficking

Investigate the impact of gun trafficking in your neighborhood, state, country, or community. Find out what laws, if any, target trafficking and what community action has been or is being pursued, if any. Advocate for the effective criminalization of and an end to trafficking.

Universal background checks

Find out whether universal background checks are required in your state or country. Advocate for their adoption.

Background check loopholes: “boyfriend loophole” and others

Is domestic violence taken into account in laws around guns in your community? Advocate for awareness of this major topic in gun law — closing loopholes in access, background checks, or other issues.

Banning assault weapons

Does your state or country prohibit the purchase and/or possession of assault weapons? Advocate at the state and federal level for a ban on semi-automatic weapons and large-capacity ammunition magazines.

Regulating ghost guns

Are ghost guns, unserialized and untraceable firearms, regulated in your state or country? Advocate to your federal government to ensure that the core parts for ghost guns are defined as firearms and thus properly regulated, as well as to your state government to consider additional action.

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Red flag laws and other prohibitions

Does your state or country have red flag laws, which allow courts to temporarily remove guns from people who are considered a danger to themselves or others? Or other laws to establish minimum age to purchase or possess a gun? Advocate to your state government to support laws to prevent gun violence.

Gun violence as a public health issue

Learn more about what it means to understand gun violence as a public health issue. Advocate against the cultural and political resistance to approaching gun violence in a public health framework. Support better access to mental health services and suicide prevention programs.

Arms Trade Treaty

Find out whether your nation has signed and ratified the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty. If not, advocate for such action, and discover its implications on your local level.

Responsible gun ownership

Consider the role guns play in your culture. If owning a gun is part of your culture, make ownership part of a responsible process. Simple steps — such as those around safety, access, and the type of guns available — can ensure that the cultural obsession with self-preservation through the use of violence is not legitimized.

Gun dealer accountability in the U.S.

Licensed gun dealers are subject to very little federal scrutiny and too often allows gun dealers to endanger public safety without accountability. Advocate to your state government to adopt laws regulating firearms dealers.

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Dates

June: National Gun Violence Awareness Month

First Friday of June: #WearOrange Day – National Gun Violence Awareness Day

December: Annual National Vigil for All Victims of Gun Violence

Organizations

The General Board of Church and Society, the social justice agency of The United Methodist Church, is engaged in gun violence prevention advocacy at local, national, and international levels. Visit www.umcjustice.org to learn more about UMC witness for gun violence prevention and get more involved in the work by joining the UMC Gun Violence Prevention Network. For more information, contact Colleen Moore, Director of Peace With Justice, at cmoore@umcjustice.org.

Heeding God's Call To End Gun Violence: <https://www.heedinggodscall.org/>

Brady: United Against Gun Violence: <https://www.bradyunited.org/>

Community Justice: <https://thecommunityjustice.net/>

Everytown for Gun Safety: www.everytown.org

GIFFORDS: <https://giffords.org/>

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Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America: www.momsdemandaction.org

Newtown Action Alliance: <https://www.newtownactionalliance.org/>

Notes

Notes



For more information contact:
Advocacy@umcjustice.org

www.umcjustice.org

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