

The Presbytery of Elizabeth

Presbyterian Church (USA)

SPECIAL MEETING

The Watchung Avenue Presbyterian Church, North Plainfield, NJ

March 24 MMXIII

Attendance.

Present:

Teaching Elder Members: James F. Thomas (Iselin), Ryan Landino (Calvin), Susan Rack (Martinsville), Arlo Jones (Metuchen), Neal D. Presa (Middlesex; Moderator of the 220th General Assembly), Christopher Belden (Mountainside), Shannan Vance-Ocampo (Watchung Avenue), Emily Wilmarth (Westfield), Shelley Gardner (Woodbridge), Dorothy Morris (Specialized Minister), Frederick Black (Honorably Retired), Paul F. Rack (Stated Clerk).

Ruling Elder Commissioners: John Hoare (Basking Ridge), Lisa Lomauro (Clinton), Arthur Winter, Jr (Cranford), Richard Sharrett (Fanwood), Anne Kenderes (Calvin), Phyllis Black (Metuchen), Marjorie & Nicholas Bradshaw (Mountainside), Doug Bo;leyn (Watchung Avenue), Alan Ford (Bethlehem), Mary Jane Finne (Willow Grove), Lee Anne Lowman (Central), Lynn Merrill (Trinity United).

Excused:

Minister Members: Victoria M. Ney (Springfield), Kathy Henry (Specialized Minister, Jennifer Testa Hrynyk (Specialized Minister), (include Honorably Retired or out-of-state minister members).

All others absent.

Others in Attendance: Elizabeth, Quintero and Sara Burke (Presbytery Staff), Cameron Stevens (Presbytery Disaster Volunteer Coordinator), Rick Ufford-Chase and Mary Ann Harwell (Stony Point Center / Presbyterian Peace Fellowship), from Watchung Avenue: Mark Smith, Tom and Dianne Ledder, Gwyn Gronlund, Susan Durick, Angre Mercado, Judith Bitzan, Luis Luza, Saellen Hogan, Jamie Thomas, Christy Thomas, Shawn RaPaere, Juan Ocampo; from Westfield: Joyce Benz, Emily Benz, Barbara Ringk, from Prospect Presbyterian Church in Maplewood: Anne Love, Jennifer Bazilio, Eric Bazilio, Robin Morey; Marilyn Thorne (Willow Grove), Heather Valosin (Trinity United), Sue Figueroa (Iselin), Don Bolton (Iselin), Kevin Gates (Westfield), Pat Schrope (Martinsville), and from First Presbyterian Church in Rumson: Sue Smith and Bill Buchanan; Peggy Waldman.

Minutes.

Call to Order.

A Special Meeting of the Presbytery of Elizabeth was held on Sunday, March 24, 2013, at the Watchung Avenue Presbyterian Church, in North Plainfield, NJ. The meeting was called to order at 3:00 pm (EDT), and opened with a prayer by Shannan Vance-Ocampo (Watchung Avenue) the Vice-Moderator of Presbytery.

A quorum was present.

1. The Vice-Moderator also welcomed the presbytery, made introductions.
2. First-time commissioners were introduced from the Iselin church. Guests:
3. The presbytery **VOTED** to seat Rick Ufford-Chase (Hudson River Presbytery) as a Corresponding Member for this meeting.

The presbytery sang the hymn, "God, We Have Heard," By Carolyn Gillette.

Words were offered by Neal Presa (Middlesex), who currently serves as Moderator of the General Assembly.

The presbytery **VOTED** to approve the call for the meeting, the Docket, and to approve of all requested excuses.

Order of the Day

Introduction to the film, by Rick Ufford-Chase. We are apparently the first presbytery to hold a special meeting on gun violence. The GA has asked the presbyteries to engage in a period of discernment on violence in our time. There is a curriculum available for this, to be used by small groups. Findings will be crafted into a proposal which will go to the General Assembly.

Our political institutions are engineered to fail us on this issue, especially on the national level. No politically expedient way has been found to move this through our institutions. Therefore, it is a window for the church to get involved. No other country has the epidemic of violence we have. 30-35K deaths a year.

The film is a production of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and has been shown on national television networks.

There is also a curriculum available from www.presbypeacefellowship.org. Rather than making statements, which tend to be controversial, presbyter Ufford-Chase told of the process used by his home church in Stony Point, based on conversation. This is not about hunting or the Second Amendment; some believe handguns increase personal security and some do not. But it's not about this either. The congregation covenanted to reach out to victims and be a public witness against gun violence and laws that promote it.

The presbytery viewed the film, *Trigger*.

After the film and a break, the presbytery gathered at tables for a time of discussion at separate tables, and sharing of findings. These included:

- The grim statistic that 2795 are dead by gun violence since the Sandy Hook massacre.
- The importance of hearing the voices of victims.
- The sad fact that children *expect* to be shot in some of our neighborhoods.
- There are now many survivors who are willing to go public.
- Many of the perpetrators of gun violence are also very young, especially in the inner city.
- This is a public health issue, like alcohol related problems. It should not be treated solely like a constitutional rights or criminal justice issue.
- It is also a spiritual problem: are we finding our security in violence, or in God?
- We need to follow the money further to the gun *manufacturers* who are behind the gun lobby.
- General and widespread frustration was expressed with our political leaders.
- We are experiencing a lot of passivity in the populace, including the churches; arising from a sense of deep resignation.
- One important question is: How to create peaceful communities?
- NJ has the second-strongest gun laws in the country already; but many guns come in from other states.
- Can we get the politics out of it long enough to find a response of discipleship?
- How can we increase our support some of the agencies we already support that do good work in the community?
- The Sermon on the Mount should come into play here. What is meant by Christian discipleship, and how does it relate to this issue?

Rick Ufford-Chase then led the presbytery in a time of conversation, planning, movement building.

Adjourn.

The presbytery **VOTED** to adjourn at 5:30 pm (EDT) with a closing hymn and a prayer by Chris Belden (Mountainside).

Attest:

Paul F. Rack
Stated Clerk