

GUN VIOLENCE REDUCTION

Context:

- Gun violence has been at the forefront of public consciousness in recent years, and our hearts ache every time there is a mass shooting, or we hear a report about the prevalence of gun violence in some parts of Chicago.
 - The U.S. gun homicide rate is 25 times higher than the average of other high-income countries.
 - The U.S. has averaged about 16,000 gun homicides over the past decade.
 - In the U.S. every month about 50 women are shot to death by their intimate partners.
 - The overall number of people killed with guns is about 38,000 per year, including suicides.
- The personal context can be seen at St. Sabina's church at the corner of Racine and 78th Place in Chicago, where a memory board shows photos of hundreds of people connected to St. Sabina killed with guns in recent years.

Criteria Fit: A properly selected gun violence reduction project could certainly fit all our criteria (proper scale, multifaceted, good fit for our congregation, attractive to our community, measurable outcomes, transformative)

Sample ideas:

- 1) After spending time building existing or new relationships with people in the neighborhoods most directly affected by gun violence, we could choose a neighborhood to focus on, and begin a sustained effort to improve the conditions that lead to gun violence: employment, education, gang involvement, trauma, weak social networks, early childhood education, etc.
- 2) Either partnering with an existing organization or beginning a new program (after building the relevant relationships) we could launch an employment and mentoring program specifically aimed at a target population (e.g. people formerly incarcerated, young people at-risk of gang involvement, girls who drop out of school). This could either be focused on existing job possibilities or entrepreneurship, or both.
- 3) Working with Do Not Stand Idly By, we could commit to this market-based strategy for cleaning up gun distribution networks, and creating new standards for gun product safety.
- 4) As a long-term gun violence reduction effort, we could commit to greatly expanding the availability and quality of early childhood programs in the neighborhood most affected by gun violence.

Traps:

- Without careful preparation we could fail to form relationships with the communities most affected by gun violence and thus be perceived as outsiders, with little idea of the true dynamics involved.
- We could fall victim to waves of interest (based on the latest mass shooting) rather than have a truly sustained, long-term effort.
- We could fail to draw the distinction between gun violence reduction (which this is) and gun control (which this is not) and thus fall into partisan battles that are unlikely to be effective.

Possible impacts: Carefully developing the scale of our work would be important, but the payoff could be great.

- Following sample idea 1) above - Neighborhood redevelopment led by the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP) in Chicago has cut the homicide and overall crime rate in their target neighborhood by 50% in just five years.
- Following sample idea 2) above - Homeboy Industries in L.A. has helped about 80,000 gang at-risk people find employment over 20 years and has thus saved tens of thousands of lives. The gun homicide rate in L.A. is 25% of what it is in Chicago, and many people give Homeboy Industries much of the credit.
- Metro IAF (the organization behind Do Not Stand Idly By) has a track record of affecting huge issues on a national scale. Their work in the areas of health care and housing has improved the lives of millions. With regard to gun violence, Do Not Stand Idly By originated much of the gun violence reduction program (not gun control) initiated by the Obama administration following the Sandy Hook killings. It is impossible to predict, but the impact of this type of work could be significant.
- Following sample idea 4) above –The impacts of quality early childhood education on later gun violence would be hard to track because of the multiplicity of causes, but the American Psychological Association (among others) has identified quality preschool as one of eight key preventative factors.

Connections with other areas/issues:

- Gun violence reduction overlaps significantly with the area of jobs and education.