



GRACE NOTES

GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH, 46 WOODLAND STREET, HARTFORD, CT 06105 860-527-7792

JULY / AUGUST 2021

SEEING AND CELEBRATING

After a year of worshipping virtually, and a more-rapidly-than-expected, return generated by vaccines, our Grace Church Council determined it was time to, once again, celebrate our faith with joy and hope in our Sanctuary. The Best Worship Committee in the World set out to develop a plan on how we could accomplish this without excluding anyone, and with precautions that would keep everybody safe. We hoped for perfection: everyone celebrating both virtually (for those needing to be home or somewhere else due to health and other family or personal reasons), and those who would come together, once more, in the arms of Grace at 46 Woodland Street.

The day was perfect. Cooler than expected, fresh flowers heralding our return, Walter in robes as our faithful Acolyte, three volunteer singers to do the singing (avoiding the risks of our congregation members all joining in); they were wonderful - thank you Dale, Judy, and Nina! There were 23 of us in-person. Distanced by intention, all wearing masks, some brand new, others, the faithful, coming with smiles one could see through their masks. Special masks, hand-made and donated by a friend of Colleen covered our singers faces and this pastor's, too.

It was nice hearing the live prelude music played by our renaissance man, Dale, on the organ. We started promptly at 10: 00 am. Gabriella, a young high schooler, took charge of the equipment we had purchased to assure the participation of those who had no choice but to be with us virtually. We celebrated. For the most part it went well. After the service, I sat under one of our cherry trees getting to know a man who attended Grace for the first time. He was dealing with challenges in his life and welcomed the opportunity to be with us. We shared contact information.

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SEEING AND CELEBRATING

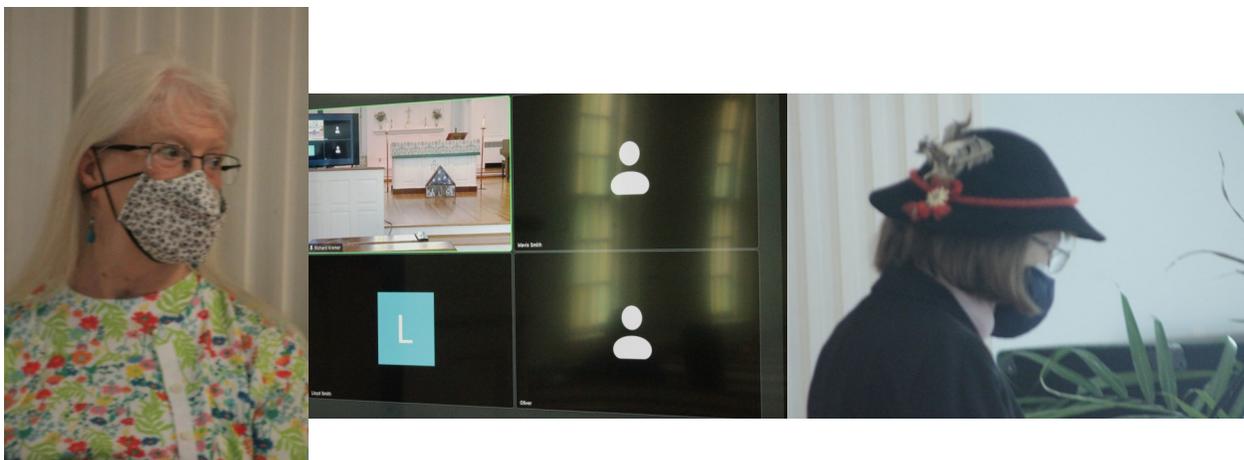
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All was not perfect. And, I cannot say, “so what”. While my sermons are imperfect and having everyone learn to worship in a slightly different way was a challenge (doing healing without touching, doing communion without a common cup, and NOBODY SINGING but a select few). All that was to be expected. What I deeply own is that our attempt at virtuality for those unable to attend was not successful. We apologize to all who were not able to get in virtually. We know of at least nine people who tried and failed to be with us. We will try again this Sunday coming.

We will keep trying until we have accomplished our goal of being available to everyone who seeks a place to come together, pray, celebrate the sacraments, sing to the Lord, and remember that Jesus formed and blessed this and other communities throughout the world. We are not a perfect place, but we do the very best we as human beings can, to not exclude anyone, at any time, for any reason. All are welcome here.

But, of course, this is all about us “seeing” and letting go of perfection. The need for Judy’s delivery of our bulletins to those we knew would be trying to be with us was another example of our imperfection... we were too late to depend on the post office to get them out. But when you look closer, you know that our hearts are and were in the right place and always are and will be.

Grace has held together through this terrible time of trial. We have continued to serve, with dozens of gifted volunteers, church members and not, and we believe that God reigns. We trust in God! We reach out in love to ourselves, strangers, and neighbors. This is worth celebrating. Not to see completely... is to diminish our enthusiasm for celebration. The celebration of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our wonder at the presence of the Holy Spirit in all our pain and suffering, and, too, in our joy and enthusiasm for life and one another. God the Father has promised us. We believe, we see, and we celebrate.



PASTOR'S MESSAGE: TRYING TO DO RIGHT IN A BROKEN WORLD

We are living in the face of dissonance the like of which I have never felt in my life. Yet, I believe. The distractions can be so disturbing that I find myself wanting to keep myself safe. I see the light. What is bad, wrong, and evil, like racism and the politics of lies, continue to grow. Others matter. I care about others. So do you. So living now means to stay with those values, and our faith. And, try our very best to live them. It wasn't only what Jesus said, it's more about what He did. It won't be how we argue and win that is the right answer; it is what we do with our lives that matters.

How do we do that? Well, we keep in touch with one another. We worship together, inviting others to join us. We pray for others, people we know and don't know, people who are suffering, and people afraid. We stay awake. Watching and listening, feeling and reaching. Wanting to do something good. That's not about perfection, because we are not perfect. But it is about striving for perfection. Loving is hard when we see all the flaws in others around us, even in our own community. It's easy to find the flaws.

What happens when we look for something else in others? Something of goodness, not about fault. What if we care enough about others, that we even stop and pay attention to the stranger. What if we care enough about creation that we try and find ways to do better, nothing perfect, just better! A conversation can morph into a relationship, which can provide a bridge that can help each other. In trying to do that, we discover so much good in others and we make some things right.

A man with his dog being walked all over our church lawn in the morning. A neighbor who is despairing. Seeing in family members their challenges, biases, frustrations and fears. What could we do? Friends facing major challenges physically, emotionally and in some cases alone. How could we comfort? It is worth doing, and we have an infinite opportunity to do things that are right. And, we know what's right.

WWJD – what would Jesus do? Do you remember the time many years ago when we tried that on? Not a bad idea for today. And let's list some of the ways we are trying to do right in a broken world.

Creation: solar panels, cherry tree care, pruning, cleaning, composting, pollinating, planting, and caring.

Social Justice: voting, advocacy, modeling, reaching out, welcoming in, encouraging others, speaking in public.

Poverty: feeding and clothing people, respecting, valuing, supporting, communicating, and advocating.

Partnering: GHIAA, CCFJ, AHNA, Asylum Hill Churches, Wheeler Clinic, InterCommunity, Fresh Start, etc.

Worship: praying with, praying for, sacraments, music, healing, virtual and in-person worship.

Relationship Building: knowing others, reaching out, helping, supporting, writing books, and worshipping.

Human Development: AA meetings, Everybody Talks (E-Talks), volunteers, visitations, interviewing, book writing, and counseling.

All of these things are what we are doing to try to do right in this broken world.

We will continue because we believe in Him.

We will do our best because we are imperfect, but He is perfect.

May He continue to guide us, and the communities we serve. May we, together, heal this broken world.

TRANSFORMING WEAPONS INTO GARDENING TOOLS, SWORDS TO PLOWSHARES NORTHEAST BRINGING MESSAGE OF PEACE TO HARTFORD

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Samira Jallow, Hartford Courant

From the tragic death of 3-year-old Randell Jones in April to the recent shooting of Sylvia Cordova as she stood in her kitchen, the epidemic of gun violence has been taking a toll on Hartford; residents, officials and advocates have been searching for ways to stop it.

One man, Rt. Rev. James Curry, retired Bishop Suffragan of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, is turning the message of Isaiah 2:4 — “they shall beat their swords into plowshares” — into a literal lesson, melting down guns forfeited during buybacks and turning them into gardening tools.

Curry, who works with the New Haven-based nonprofit Swords to Plowshares Northeast, will be in Hartford Saturday doing a demonstration of forging weapons into tools at Kamora’s Cultural Corner Labyrinth at 75 Sterling St. at 1 p.m. He will also work with young people in Heads Up Hartford, a faith-based youth camp.

Swords to Plowshares Northeast works with municipalities to organize gun buybacks and givebacks where people voluntarily sell or donate their guns. Then, with the help of the New Haven Police Department, they heat up the guns so they can be remolded and given new life.

Curry says part of the event with the youth will focus on the question of if guns are really needed and exploring the choice to be without them.



In a Wednesday evening community conversation hosted by Kamora’s Cultural Corner, Curry spoke about the organization’s initiatives.

“We really focus on the choice that we all have to step away from violence,” Curry said in the meeting.

“We’ve forgotten we have a choice and we’ve forgotten we can take initiative to do something different,” Curry said.

The finished tools go to community gardens, youth and church groups and some are sold during a fundraiser to keep the church running. At demonstrations people can even leave with a heart necklace made out of shotgun barrels. The necklaces are also made by jewelers in Guilford and sold as a fundraiser.

Curry said the organization isn’t anti-gun or anti-Second Amendment. “It’s not about taking your guns, it’s about the choice to let go of them, and the choice to be free from the violence those guns can represent.”

Jeremy Stein, executive director of Connecticut Against Gun Violence, who also participated in the conversation agreed. “We’re not trying to get rid of people’s rights, this is about reducing violence.”

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TRANSFORMING WEAPONS INTO GARDENING TOOLS, SWORDS TO PLOWSHARES NORTHEAST BRINGING MESSAGE OF PEACE TO HARTFORD

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Stein said there is a misperception that everyone is trying to “do away with the Second amendment.” Instead, he says that as an organization their focus is aimed at advocating for stronger gun laws.

Though Connecticut has some of the strongest gun laws in the country, Stein acknowledged gun violence has deeper roots.

“We also know it’s not just about the laws. Especially when we’re talking about community gun violence; we’re really talking about quality-of-life issues. If we can better people’s lives, we may be able to reduce gun violence.”

Curry echoed a similar tone recognizing that gun buybacks aren’t the answer to solving the issues, but said, “It’s an important means to get that conversation going in our communities.”

For tomorrow’s event Herrington was encouraging all in the community to come, listen, and let their voices be heard. “I’m hoping it creates a place for dialogue,” she said. “It won’t stop gun violence, but it can help address the issues that come up about it.”

At Grace, we are thrilled by Bishop Curry’s work and encourage him to continue to build and expand his conversations’ reach. The article below from several years ago illustrates how Swords to Plowshares began with Jim’s compassionate response to all who have suffered as a result of gun violence, with the children and teachers of New Town being central to their work.

SWORDS TO PLOWSHARES: FORGING SURRENDERED GUNS INTO GARDENING TOOLS IN CONNECTICUT

9/21/2018

They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Micah 4:3

By Alli Huggins, ECCT Staff

In the garden of a New Haven artist’s studio, two bishops, one priest, and a sculptor destroyed 138 guns. These guns were voluntarily surrendered in a municipal buyback program sponsored by the Yale-New Haven Hospital and the New Haven Police Department in December 2017. This was the largest gun buyback New Haven has seen since it began its buyback program in 2011. The difference: these guns would be turned into gardening tools.

Steve Yanovsky, Communications Director for the Newtown Foundation, decided to pursue this endeavor here in Connecticut and connected with the Rt. Rev. James Curry, retired Bishop Suffragan of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut (ECCT), who has been involved with the movement against gun violence for years. “We can choose differently for our neighborhoods,” Bishop Curry said.

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“This isn’t a 2nd amendment issue because folks were invited to turn in their guns to be turned into gardening tools. This is a new understanding.” Bishop Curry reached out to Officer David Hartman of the New Haven Police, and the Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas, Bishop Diocesan of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, to make concrete steps in the process of turning guns into plowshares.

Monday morning, surrounded by New Haven police officers and various media crews, Bishops Curry and Douglas, the Rev. Bob Bergner, Priest-in-Charge at Grace and St. Peter’s, Hamden, and Gar Waterman, renowned sculptor and owner of the studio, disassembled 138 guns. The stocks were removed and put into one pile, trigger guards and hammers removed, and the remaining pieces of the gun and barrels sawed in two; all parts to be forged into forks, shovels, spades, and other gardening tools.

The organization behind this process and idea is RAWtools, Inc., based in Colorado Springs, CO, which started three months after the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Their mission: *Disarm Hearts. Forge Peace.* With financial support from ECCT, Mike Martin, founder and Executive Director of RAWtools, brought his expertise, two blacksmiths, and two forges, the hearths used to heat the metal, to New Haven and created a pop-up blacksmithing station at the New Haven Police Department.

Two blacksmiths from Virginia, accompanying Martin, trained inmates in the New Haven Correction Center to forge the guns into gardening tools, a hopefully cathartic experience for many. “They picked up how to make the tools in only four hours,” Martin said at a press conference on Thursday, September 20.

Yanovsky said that “the idea of taking a weapon of death and turning it into a tool to sustain life is the ultimate human affirming experience.” Yanovsky was first introduced to the swords into plowshares concept and RAWtools, back in 2016 when the Rev. Jeremy Lucas, Episcopal priest in Portland, OR, won an AR-15 in a softball team’s raffle and surrendered it to RAWtools to be forged. That AR-15 was forged into three gardening tools, one presented to the Newtown Action Alliance.

“This is so tangible,” Bishop Douglas said about the process of working with his hands (pictured) to disassemble the guns. “To take the implements of death and destruction and turning them into tools to bring forth life, like in Micah – swords into plowshares – it is more than just a metaphor.” Bishop Douglas said that a large part of his ministry here in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut has been focused on guns, “This is just a wrinkle of learning about guns and our community,” he said.

Later that evening, Bishop Douglas and Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens, Bishop Suffragan, were invited by Roy McAdoo of Trinity, Collinsville to the Simsbury Shooting Range. This separate event was an invitation encouraged by McAdoo and others at a June 16 conversation with ECCT gun owners at Christ Church Cathedral, Hartford. Destroy guns in the morning, shoot guns in the evening; a paradox not lost on Douglas. “It is important for me to learn more about all aspects of guns in ECCT, so I can speak with more integrity, wisdom, and authenticity,” he said.

The New Haven-based non-profit construction and landscaping company EMERGE, which hires recently paroled individuals for 6 – 9 months, and provides personal development and mental health programs, hopes to become involved with the Swords to Plowshares program, offering blacksmithing as a new skill for their staff.

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After the guns have been forged (pictured), they will be shipped back to RAWtools to have handles added, and to be labeled. Martin believes around 150 – 200 farming tools will come from the weapons destroyed on Monday.

“Gun violence is a gun and a heart problem,” Martin said. “For me this act of turning guns into farming tools is a spiritual practice and partnership with the Holy Spirit. We need help of those around us and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” Every tool will be assigned a number and marked, so people can see just how many tools have been made from guns.

Bishop Curry and Yanovsky hope to present these tools to local agricultural high schools and community garden plots in New Haven in early spring, just in time for the planting season. While this is the pilot test for swords to plowshares with municipalities, Yanovsky and Bishop Curry hope to begin with all cities in Connecticut, then continue to expand this to all of New England.

“We no longer have to be tied to the instruments of death, but rather of growth and life,” Bishop Curry said at Thursday’s press conference, which was met with an “Amen” from the crowd. “God has been good to us to get us this far.”

Forging began Wednesday, September 19, and will continue through the week. There was a press conference on Thursday, September 20. On Friday, September 21, there was a planned public event to showcase the newly forged tools.



HOW BAD IS THE RISE IN U.S. HOMICIDES? FACT-CHECKING THE ‘CRIME WAVE’ NARRATIVE POLICE ARE PUSHING

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jun/30/us-crime-rate-homicides-explained>

There’s been a wave of media coverage this summer about an increase in homicides across the United States, with attention often focused on the same political question: will Americans still want to defund or even reform the police if “violent crime” is on the rise?

Anxiety about violent crime is often used to win elections. Police and politicians routinely share misleading, out-of-context crime statistics to advance their agendas. Fear-mongering about rising crime has also been used for decades to undermine Black Americans’ protests for civil rights. So it’s important to ask: is this homicide increase actually significant? And how much evidence is there for any of the explanations about why killings are going up?



A vigil for the victims of a shooting in San Jose, California, on 27 May 2021. Photograph: Amy Osborne/AFP/Getty Images

The numbers

After decades of a primarily downward trend in the overall number of people killed, crime experts say they expect 2020 will mark the biggest single-year national jump in homicides since national crime statistics began to be released in the 1960s.

A preliminary government estimate shows a 25% single-year increase in killings in 2020. In some larger cities, the number of homicides has remained higher than usual through the early months of 2021.

While official national crime data will not be released for months, some trends are clear. The 2020 homicide increase happened across cities and towns of all sizes, from those with fewer than 10,000 residents to those with more than a million, according to preliminary FBI data.

The rise in homicides likely translated into an additional 4,000 to 5,000 people killed across the country compared with the year before, according to early estimates.

It was an especially hard year for cities that have never seen decreases in gun violence to match the overall national trend. Philadelphia and St Louis returned close to their historic highs for the number of people killed in a single year, according to the Philadelphia Inquirer and the St Louis Post-Dispatch. Chicago, which had seen homicides fall below 500 in the early 2010s, saw them jump to 770 in 2020, though not to its historic 1974 high of 970 homicides, according to the Chicago Tribune.

It does not take a huge numerical increase in killings to translate into big percentage increases in a city’s homicide rate. Chicago, a city of 2.7 million people, saw 300 more people killed in 2020 than in 2019, and more than 1,000 additional nonfatal shootings, according to data from AmericanViolence.org.

New York, a city of 8 million people, saw an increase of about 150 homicides and 700 nonfatal shootings.

Smaller cities saw smaller total increases: Oakland and Minneapolis, which both have populations of about 400,000 people, each saw homicides increase by about 30 additional people killed last year, and between 100 and 270 additional nonfatal shootings.

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HOW BAD IS THE RISE IN U.S. HOMICIDES? FACT-CHECKING THE ‘CRIME WAVE’ NARRATIVE POLICE ARE PUSHING

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And yet, even after an estimated 25% single-year increase in homicides, Americans overall are much less likely to be killed today than they were in the 1990s, and the homicide rate across big cities is still close to half what it was a quarter century ago.

New York City saw more than 2,200 killings in a single year in 1990, compared with 468 last year, according to city data. In the bigger picture, that’s a nearly 80% decrease.

Los Angeles saw more than 1,000 homicides a year in the early 1990s, compared with fewer than 350 last year.

What we know and don’t know

The homicide increase appears to be primarily driven by rising gun violence, with the nonprofit Gun Violence Archive reporting nearly 4,000 additional gun killings nationwide in 2020 compared with the year before.

But what’s happening with homicides is not part of some broader “crime wave.” In fact, many crimes, from larcenies to robberies to rape, dropped during the pandemic, and continued to fall during the first few months of 2021. “Crime” is not surging. Even the broader category of “violent crime” only increased about 3% last year, according to the preliminary FBI data from a large subset of cities. It’s homicide in particular that has increased, even as other crimes fell.

Early data also suggests the homicide increase isn’t happening at random, but that much of the additional violence is clustered in disadvantaged neighborhoods of color that were already struggling with higher rates of gun violence before the pandemic, according to Richard Rosenfeld, a criminologist who has authored multiple national reports on crime and violence trends.

“Everything we know suggests that the increases in homicide are occurring in the very neighborhoods where homicide has been traditionally concentrated,” he said. “What we’re not seeing is a spreading-out of homicide.”

National demographic data for the people killed in 2020 is not yet available. But it’s likely that a substantial proportion of the homicide victims were Black Americans, at the same time that Black Americans were suffering disproportionate rates of Covid-19 infection and death, as well as witnessing the aftermath of a global uprising against police killings of unarmed Black people.

Reasons for the increase

No single narrative can ever explain the dynamics of violence in a single city, much less across an entire country. Fatal violence is relatively rare and often intensely personal: according to FBI data, many American homicide victims know their killers. National crime data is usually just the sum of a range of contradictory, extremely local crime trends.

But there is some evidence that national factors, including the many stresses and disruptions of the pandemic, may have played a role in the 2020 homicide increase. The uptick was “widespread,” Rosenfeld said. In an analysis of big city crime trends for the nonprofit Council on Criminal Justice, “We found very few cities that did not experience pretty significant rises in homicide during 2020,” he said.

Homicide rates were higher during every month of 2020 – even before pandemic-related shutdowns started in March, the analysis found. But there was also a “structural break” in the data in June, indicating “a large, statistically significant increase” in the homicide rate, around the same time as the mass protests that followed the murder of George Floyd.

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So far, there’s a lot of political rhetoric, and relatively little data or hard evidence, about how substantially different factors may have contributed to the 2020 increase.

Alongside a global pandemic, and a major protest movement against police violence and systemic racism, the US saw a historic rise in gun sales during 2020.

A pre-print study from researchers at the University of California, Davis, which has not yet been peer-reviewed, suggested that a spike in gun purchases during the early months of the pandemic was associated with a nearly 8% increase in gun violence from March through May, or 776 additional fatal and nonfatal shooting injuries nationwide. The researchers found that states that had lower levels of violent crime pre-Covid saw a stronger connection between additional gun purchases and more gun violence.



People wait in line to enter a gun store in Culver City, California, 15 March 2020. Photograph: Ringo HW Chiu/AP

Community groups say that the pandemic forced them to shutter prevention programs, and created huge challenges for the work of violence interrupters, who rely on close relationships and in-person interventions with people at risk of shooting or being shot.

Many of the political claims about the homicide increase focus on pro- and anti-police sentiment, and about the future of the controversial effort to shift public dollars away from police departments and towards community violence prevention programs. Some police officials and their allies have asserted that last summer’s big, volatile protests against police violence diverted police resources and attention away from their normal patrols, and have suggested that demoralized, angry police officers might be less proactive or effective in dealing with violent crime.

But Jeff Asher, a crime analyst who writes extensively about homicide trends, examined 60 cities and found no correlation between the number of Black Lives Matter protests, and the size of a city’s homicide increase.

Rosenfeld cautioned that any policing-focused explanation for the homicide increase needed to explain why the change would have only affected serious and deadly violence. “Most crime is down, including most felony, serious crime,” he said. “If the de-policing argument is correct, why did it only affect an uptick in violence and not other street crime?”

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Attempting to link changes in how police operated to the political protests after George Floyd’s murder also made less sense than looking at the sweeping disruptions in operations due to Covid-19, he argued.

“If there has been substantial de-policing, suspect number one is the pandemic,” he said.

While elevated homicide rates had continued into early 2021 in some cities, Rosenfeld added, the increase already appeared to be slowing. “I do not expect homicide rates to reach the levels this coming summer that they were at last summer,” he said.

‘People do not want to understand’

For Americans who have spent years working to reduce gun violence at the community level, the media response to the rise in killings is deeply frustrating.

“There may have been an increase in 2020, but that’s not what the media portrayed: they portrayed it as ‘Shit’s off the hook,’” said DeVone Boggan, the founder of Advance Peace, a community violence intervention strategy first developed in Richmond, California.

The Bay Area city saw gun homicide rates drop by nearly 70% over the past decade. In 2020 the city saw a modest increase in homicides with 22 people killed that year compared to 17 the year before.

“Those increases that the city had are unfortunate, but they’re not as high as they were before strategies like ours.”

“People do not want to understand the level of distress, grief, trauma and destabilization, both economically and socially, that Black communities have had to endure in this once-in-a-generation global pandemic,” said Pastor Michael McBride, the executive director of Live Free USA, a national advocacy organization. McBride has worked for nearly a decade at the intersection of criminal justice reform and gun violence prevention.

“The way we cover death in America is always different when the victims are Black, and right now, we ought to be talking about the victimization of Black victims and community and not the ‘crime rate.’”



GEORGE WASHINGTON PREDICTED DONALD TRUMP: WHY DOESN'T EVERYONE KNOW THIS?

By Matthew Rozsa a staff writer for Salon



As my colleague Amanda Marcotte frequently points out, conservative ideology these days seems to boil down to little more than "owning the libs." If you manage to achieve "triggering a lib," maybe you get imaginary bonus points — perhaps the Star Theme from Super Mario Bros. plays in your head.

Well, I think it's time for liberals to return the favor. We should repeatedly bring up the fact that America's most important founding father, George Washington, warned us about the rise of Donald Trump.

No, he didn't know the man's name, of course — he wasn't a time traveler or a clairvoyant — but he described Trump's personality and actions in detail. Washington was president as the United States prepared to hold its first contested presidential election — he was elected twice without opposition — and wanted to make sure it would run smoothly. More than that, he wanted to make sure *all* future elections ran smoothly. So in his famous Farewell Address, he outlined what an enemy of this democratic process might look like. The speech was published during the 1796 election between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, the two great rivals of early American politics

The most relevant section of the document (most of which reads as fairly antiquated today) is pretty much a giant spoiler alert for everything Trump did to undermine the results of the 2020 election, an effort that began long before a single ballot had been cast. When you get right down to it, one of the likeliest ways for American democracy to reach its breaking point would be if a presidential candidate refused to accept the will of the people. More than two centuries before that happened, Washington foresaw exactly how it would go down.

Although the ideas were entirely Washington's, the address was largely written by Alexander Hamilton. At one point, the man on the one dollar bill warns that partisanship could lead to the rise of a dictator. Decrying the "baneful effects of the spirit of party generally," he argued that if partisanship reaches a fever pitch, it could "gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual."

Washington also warned that hyper-partisanship "opens the door to foreign influence and corruption, which finds a facilitated access to the government itself through the channels of party passions." He was worried that these factors could facilitate the rise of "cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men" who would manipulate partisan anger to "subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion."

Does any of that sound familiar? Trump has close and somewhat mysterious ties to Vladimir Putin's government, and former special counsel Robert Mueller's report demonstrated that his campaign worked with individuals connected to Russia during the 2016 presidential election. When Trump abused his power in an effort to pressure Ukraine into opening an investigation into Joe Biden, Senate Republicans — intimidated by a voter base that, intoxicated by "the baneful effects of the spirit of party," had come to value defeating Democrats over everything else — rigged his impeachment trial so that partisanship would prevail over justice.

Then Republicans did it again when, after years of conditioning his supporters to believe that

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GEORGE WASHINGTON PREDICTED DONALD TRUMP: WHY DOESN'T EVERYONE KNOW THIS?

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any election he loses has been stolen, he became the first defeated president to refuse to accept his loss — and led an insurrection attempt as a result. (After John Tyler, who sided with the Confederacy during the Civil War, Trump became the second president to indisputably betray the Constitution.) Now Republicans have allowed Trump to transform the party in his image, not caring that he put many of their own lives in danger. They are using a Big Lie to erode democracy.

And what did Washington think the climax of all of this hyper-partisanship — as manifested in the above "hypothetical" examples — would be? The disorders and miseries which result gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual; and sooner or later the chief of some prevailing faction, more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of public liberty.

Trump is, to a T, what the Father of His Country predicted. Opponents of Trump, Trumpers and Trumpism need to bring this up *waaaaaay* more often.

For what it's worth, I was tempted to bring up two other relevant sections of Washington's Farewell Address. One, which pertains to foreign policy, prophesied the rise of American imperialism and is interesting for that reason, but isn't directly relevant here. The other, which denounces "all obstructions to the execution of the laws, all combinations and associations, under whatever plausible character with the real design to direct, control, counteract, or awe the regular deliberation and action of the constituted authorities," I simply don't support. True, that suggests Washington would clearly have disapproved of the Jan. 6 rioters and their defenders, but not necessarily for the right reason. The problem with the Capitol attack, at its core, is that it was a battle for a baseless and unjust cause. If the rioters had been fighting for human rights rather than fascism — like the civil rights protests of the 1960s, or at least a cause better than shared omnipotence with a malignant narcissist — their actions might have been theoretically defensible.

In any case, those who fight for democracy today should embrace Washington's Farewell Address. We don't need to pretend that Washington was an impeccable and virtuous hero, or look past his numerous flaws. But he wasn't wrong about democracy. His greatest achievement was not defeating the British in the Revolutionary War. It was leaving office in 1797 and handing the reins to Adams, his elected successor — establishing a precedent that Adams knew he had to follow four years later, when he lost his rematch with Jefferson in the bitterly contested election of 1800. It was the precedent that every president followed until Trump lost to Biden in 2020. Washington showed that democratic government could function, for the first time in modern history, because the nation's leaders would respect the will of the people.

I once attended a reenactment of Adams' inauguration as part of my journey covering Barack Obama's second inauguration for Mic (then PolicyMic) in 2013. When the tour guide read from a contemporary account describing the tension in the room as people wondered whether Washington's troops would arrest Adams so the first president could stay in power, it felt like a bizarre account from ancient history. Only eight years later, the very people who would claim to venerate Washington's footsteps have made that 1797 report seem like this week's headlines.

Washington stepping down from power was the first thing that made America great. If Republicans really want to Make America Great Again, they need to heed Washington's message — and dump the "cunning, ambitious and unprincipled man" on whose behalf they seem willing to destroy democracy.

OUR DEMOCRACY IS NOT A GIVEN

BY ADAM RUSSELL TAYLOR-SOJOURNERS MAGAZINE

On July 1, as many people in the United States prepared for the holiday weekend, the Supreme Court's conservative 6-3 majority upheld two laws that restrict voting in Arizona. The first law the court upheld disenfranchises voters if they cast a ballot in the wrong precinct, invalidating not just their votes for local races, but also their entire ballot, including votes cast in U.S. presidential elections or Senate races, even though all eligible voters in Arizona can vote in those races regardless of residence. The other law upheld makes it a crime for anyone but a family member or caregiver to deliver another voter's ballot.

This ruling — *Brnovich v. DNC* — was the third time in the last eight years that the Supreme Court's conservative majority has acted to significantly weaken the 1965 Voting Rights Act. The court previously weakened the law in its rulings on *Shelby County v. Holder* in 2013 and *Abbott v. Perez* in 2018. In upholding the Arizona laws, Justice Samuel Alito, writing for the majority, introduced a new and somewhat confusing five-factor standard by which to evaluate whether voting laws will result in a disparate impact on voters of color.

The ruling weakens Section 2 of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, making it more difficult for advocates to prevail in lawsuits challenging voting restrictions because of their disparate impact on voters of color. The ruling will also embolden state legislatures around the country to pass further voter suppression laws, often under the false pretense of protecting election security. In the dissenting opinion to this ruling, Justice Elena Kagan captures both the hypocrisy of this ruling and the depth of what is at stake: "What is tragic here is that the Court has (yet again) rewritten — in order to weaken — a statute that stands as a monument to America's greatness, and protects against its basest impulses."

As many people in the United States hosted barbecues and set off fireworks to celebrate the nation's 245th birthday, a diverse group of Christian leaders organized by Red Letter Christians gathered virtually to read Frederick Douglass' 1852 speech, "What, to the Slave, is the Fourth of July?" In this speech, which I believe should be a key part of every U.S. history and civics curricula, Douglass describes his respect for those who shaped the nation's founding principles of liberty and justice. At the same time, Douglass exposes the glaring hypocrisy caused by the nation's embrace of slavery and the degree to which the U.S. project has been haunted and undermined ever since: "The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes of death to me," he said. "This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn."

Reflecting on Douglass' words, I wonder what he would say to our nation today, particularly in light of our ongoing struggle for racial justice. I imagine him saluting considerable progress while excoriating all the ways in which Black and brown lives are still so often criminalized, devalued, and dehumanized. I suspect he would be filled with righteous indignation about growing efforts to suppress and disenfranchise voters of color through a concerted strategy to shrink the electorate and make it more difficult to vote.

We are facing a dangerous backlash and counter-revolution to last summer's racial awakening in response to the brutal killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many others. While I'm grateful that Congress overwhelmingly approved making Juneteenth a federal holiday, in the same breath, many of these same elected officials refuse to acknowledge (let alone make amends for) how the history of slavery and white supremacy — and its mutated forms of racial terror, including Jim Crow segregation, mass incarceration, racialized policing, and voter disenfranchisement — continue to reverberate through our present and into our future.

(continues on page 15)

OUR DEMOCRACY IS NOT A GIVEN

(continued from page 14)

Our democracy is not a given; it has been contested since our nation's founding and must be fought for, defended, and constantly expanded. The right to vote represents the lifeblood of our democracy; it is what gives democracy its legitimacy and power. As Rep. John Lewis so often reminded us, voting "is the most powerful nonviolent tool in our possession."

I believe the *Brnovich v. DNC* ruling makes it even more imperative to pass federal legislation that will restore teeth to the 1965 Voting Rights Act; since voter suppression has been upheld in the Supreme Court, we need a federal solution.

Morally, suppressing the right to vote is a direct assault on both our civic equality and our Christian conviction that all people are made in the image of God. This dangerous inflection moment for our democracy requires that we tap into the boldness and truth-telling of the biblical prophets who never minced words when challenging hypocrisy and unjust laws: "Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people," warned the prophet Isaiah (10:1-2). We can also pastorally appeal to a shared commitment to justice and equality, which must supersede the thirst to hold onto power and the tendency of the powerful to favor incremental change.

This perilous moment calls for a modern-day equivalent of the Freedom Summer, which, at great risk, registered thousands of Black voters in the deep South in the summer of 1964 and galvanized public awareness and political will behind the need for a Voting Rights Act. With a Supreme Court that continues to uphold an unequal and racialized system, our own efforts will need to stretch into the fall, educating people about their voting rights, explaining that our democracy is at stake, and galvanizing unprecedented pressure to pass the For the People Act and an expanded John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. In other words, we need to out-organize efforts to discourage or restrict voting.

To this end, Sojourners and the Skinner Leadership Institute, along with other multi-faith and multi-racial partners, recently launched the "Faiths United to Save Democracy" campaign. The campaign builds on our Lawyers and Collars and Turnout Sunday initiatives, which mobilized thousands of clergy in nine states to protect the right to vote in the 2020 election — work that is even more urgent given the continued cancerous effects of the "big lie" that the last election was stolen and the torrent of nearly 400 laws that have been proposed in 48 states that would further suppress the votes of historically disenfranchised communities. It was incredibly inspiring to see such a diverse group of leaders join together in common cause to protect the right to vote, including faith leaders like Barbara Williams-Skinner, Rabbi Jonah Pesner, Rev. Hyepin Im, Rev. Otis Moss III, Rev. Jim Wallis, and Rev. Eli Valentin, among many others. I hope you will support this nonpartisan and pro-democracy campaign, which will register voters, ensure that voters can secure voters IDs in states that now require them, bolster voter turnout, and work to protect the right to vote.

So what does the Fourth of July mean to me? Yes, it means a moment for celebrating our nation and its highest ideals, but it is also a moment to rededicate ourselves to forming a more perfect union by striving tirelessly to become a more perfect and just democracy. And now the most imperative fight is to protect the sacred right to vote and ensure all eligible voters are able to make their voices heard in this imperfect union.

BISHOP EATON ISSUES PASTORAL MESSAGE ON FULTON V. CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

As children of God, we give thanks for all of the LGBTQIA+ people who experience God's calling to the holy work of parenting. In particular response to the June 17 Supreme Court ruling on [Fulton v. City of Philadelphia](#), the ELCA stands with our LGBTQIA+ siblings in Christ and reaffirms our commitment to equal protection, opportunities and responsibilities under the law ([Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust](#), p. 33).

Children and youth in the child welfare system are among the most vulnerable members of our society, and a disproportionate number of young people in the child welfare system are LGBTQIA+ and in need of compassionate and supportive homes. Our concern as disciples of Christ is for their best interests. This includes recognizing and affirming the vocation of LGBTQIA+ people as parents and foster parents.

Each of us can respond through ongoing education and action in support of LGBTQIA+ people, including those who are called to provide loving care for children, and through compassionate care for our most vulnerable children and youth.

Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

<https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/8111>



CLEAR IT OUT, DE-CLUTTER-THROW IT AWAY???? By Nancy Urban

Remember a few years ago the whole declutter thing? Goodwill stores were so overwhelmed by all the stuff people were getting rid of they had to stop accepting donations. I suppose then people just had to Throw it Away.

When our grandson was about 10, he decided to clear out his room of things he was no longer using or really had never used. Two garbage bags full of small items such as Happy Meal toys, little cars and trucks, goofy figures, trolls, birthday party favors, etc. showed up at our house to be part of a tag sale. It seems that no one else wanted this stuff either as it did not sell, so we just had to Throw It Away.

Where Is Away? There is no such place. When we throw something away it goes somewhere and where it goes is not only a creation care issue but also a justice issue for those who have their lives negatively impacted by our garbage and the pollution that it creates. Trash to Energy? Landfills? Ship it overseas? Some of these solutions are better than others but all have the problem of polluting the air we breathe, leaking contaminants into the ground water, or just hanging around and eventually being washed to the sea.

Recycle it? Recycling metal, glass, paper, and cardboard are all quite workable. Most of our towns have easy recycling programs and there is no reason for these items to end up in the garbage system as long as we are being responsible to put in only the correct items and they are clean. If the recycling load is too contaminated, it is **Thrown Away**—just goes to the garbage bin.

Recycling plastic is another matter. We have been led to believe that all that plastic that we throw in the blue bin gets used in some way, but recent reports show that much of it was contaminated with food waste, plastic bags, and other items and so went into the garbage or it was bundled up and shipped overseas, often left unattended and eventually finding its way into the oceans and on the beaches, causing great damage to wildlife and the land. We have cast “away” so much of our plastic garbage that many places no longer want it. They say, and rightly so—“We are no longer willing to be the garbage dump for the United States”

Every time we throw something **“AWAY”** we are helping to pollute ground water; destroy land; kill off coral reefs and ocean animals, kill off birds, create plastic islands in the sea, negatively impact people’s health—the list could go on, but you get the idea.

Seeking to be a responsible person, one who has been given the task of caring for this beautiful creation that God has given us can start to seem overwhelming and it is easy to just give up and go on as we have always done. I would suggest that this is not ok. We are in a crisis regarding our care for the earth and each of us can do something to reduce our garbage production.

Best thing? Just say NO. You Don’t really need it , don’t buy it. Stop buying all those cute little plastic do dads, toys, decorations, single use items etc. If it comes in plastic choose the alternative—glass or metal.

Next best? Start making changes in what you do buy. Let me share my journey in this “making changes”. Several years ago I started buying organic fruits and vegetables and then moved to using stores and farmers markets that do not package things in foam and plastic containers. Then I started doing the same thing for meats. This past year I signed onto a laundry detergent that comes in the form of a sheet that dissolves in the water; no plastic lined box and no plastic container. I just now purchased compostable trash bags for use in the boat and at home.

As I have looked around and researched, there are many alternatives to the items that create our trash problems. Many were listed in a previous issue of Grace Notes. Let’s support those products, keep making changes in our lives and continue to care for all of God’s Creation.



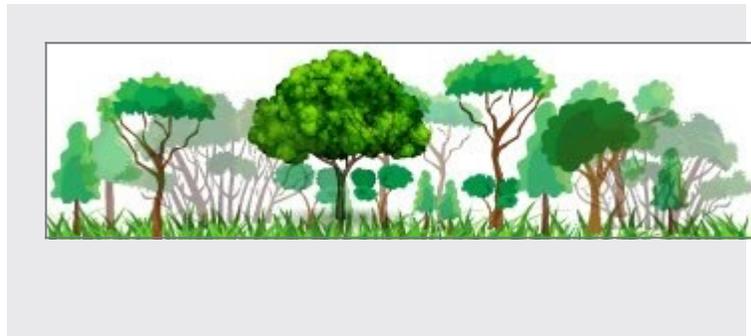
Monthly Energy Production Report for Grace Evangelical Church

Enphase Energy maximizes your solar energy production and keeps you informed about your system. Your monthly energy report shows how your system performed and how much you contributed to offsetting the global carbon footprint.

Week	Peak Power	Energy Produced
05/01/2021 - 05/07/2021	14.8 kW	513 kWh
05/08/2021 - 05/14/2021	14.8 kW	592 kWh
05/15/2021 - 05/21/2021	14.8 kW	738 kWh
05/22/2021 - 05/28/2021	14.8 kW	689 kWh
05/29/2021 - 05/31/2021	10.9 kW	89.4 kWh
May 2021 Total:		2.62 MWh
Previous Month Total:		2.33 MWh
Year to Date:		9.77 MWh

Your Carbon Offset for this month: 1.81 tons

You have offset the equivalent of: 46 Trees



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July & August 2021 Birthdays & Anniversaries!



Happy Birthday	
Elsa Koulla	1-Jul
Leslie Manchester	1-Jul
Waneta Jacobs MacDonald	2-Jul
Carl Lindstrom	3-Jul
Michael Lewis	9-Jul
Brian Phelan	14-Jul
Emmanuella Hart	17-Jul
Belinda Yigle-Kaljob	18-Jul
Petre McAdams	19-Jul
Adrian Mathura	23-Jul
Edith Mamet	26-Jul
Bernadette Friedrichs	27-Jul
John David	30-Jul

Happy Birthday	
Alexander Mathura	3-Aug
Catherine Abrom	4-Aug
David Kremer	4-Aug
Sonia Wellington	10-Aug
Kevin Yigle-Kaljob	10-Aug
Clifton Bullock	10-Aug
Irene Kirschner	14-Aug
Eric Crawford	14-Aug
Sarah Gagnon	18-Aug
Marion Green	20-Aug
Susie Brown	21-Aug
Cynthia Hudson	24-Aug
Nancy Urban	27-Aug
Cephus Nolen Jr.	31-Aug

Did we miss your birthday or anniversary?
 Contact the office,
 860-527-7792 or email
office.gracelutheranhartford@gmail.com
 to update our records.

Happy Anniversary	
Dale & Donna Eberhardt	07/05
Lloyd & Mavis Smith	07/26
Brian & Donna Phelan	08/04
Cephus & Sally Nolen Jr.	08/24





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