

Thoughts, Prayers, Action

As Christians, we recognize that combating gun violence with thoughts and prayers is not ineffective, but it is incomplete.

Students, teachers, and coaches of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., are the latest victims of a mass shooting by a gunman with a semi-automatic firearm. Seventeen lives were lost, and yet again our nation mourns.

Since 2013, there have been nearly 300 school shootings in America — an average of about one per week. Gun violence in schools is not the only reason for alarm. Ongoing incidents of gun violence outside of schools are also a crisis. Often, children who are exposed to gun violence on a day-to-day basis are overlooked.

We cannot ignore the threat gun violence poses to young people and communities everywhere.

The surviving students of Parkland have decided to no longer accept this violence as normal. They are demanding change and have declared that “thoughts and prayers are not enough.” Sojourners agrees. As believers, we recognize that a strategy to combat gun violence that includes thoughts and prayers is not ineffective, but it is incomplete.

There is an urgent public debate that needs to take place around gun violence. Now is the time for congregations to actively support the leadership of students who are working to change the narrative and political realities of this country.

With this in mind, we propose a “Thoughts, Prayers, Action Campaign.”

Calling congregations to prayer and action

On Sunday, March 18, 2018, before the attention of the country turns to Washington, D.C., as students gather for the March 24 “March for Our Lives” rally, we encourage:

■ **Pastors to take a moment during their services** to call their congregation’s attention to the moral and spiritual dimensions of this moment. We must see gun violence as a faith issue and use our services as a time for processing and reflection. Pastors can use the information here for a slideshow presentation or for their church’s bulletin, to help provide their congregations a basic overview of the impact of gun culture on our nation.

■ **Congregations to designate a time for special prayer** during each of their Sunday morning worship services on March 18, to pray for the students that worship in their churches. We invite congregations to consider inviting their youth and teens to the altar as pastors lead the congregation in a time of Intercessory Prayer for the safety, protection, and welfare of the young people. Every day, we entrust our youth to teachers, school administrators, and coaches. Pastors should consider inviting them to join their young people at the altar for prayer.

■ **Churches to prayerfully consider sharing the three actions** that are the centerpiece of the students’ demands. God’s word in James reminds us that “faith without works is dead.”

• **Pass truly universal background checks.** No exceptions or loopholes for anyone buying a gun at any time or any place.

• **Ban assault weapons.** One of the most consistent demands of students is to take weapons of war out of civilians’ hands. We should also put common sense limits on rifle magazine size and ban “bump stocks,” which allowed the 2017 Las Vegas

mass shooter to fire his semiautomatic rifles as though they were fully automatic.

• **Participate in boycotts.** We ask pastors to prayerfully consider encouraging their congregations to join a national boycott of companies that continue to support the NRA and advocate that your member of Congress refuse to accept NRA funds.

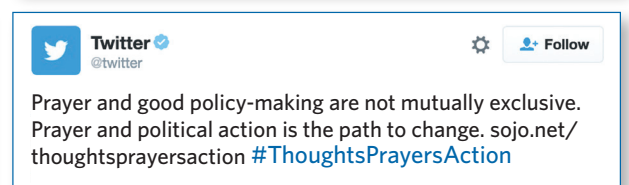
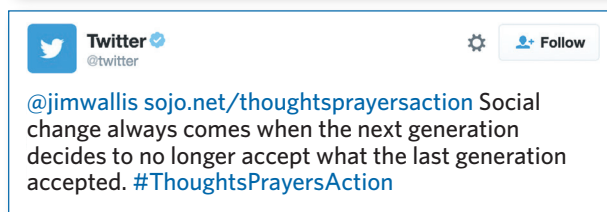
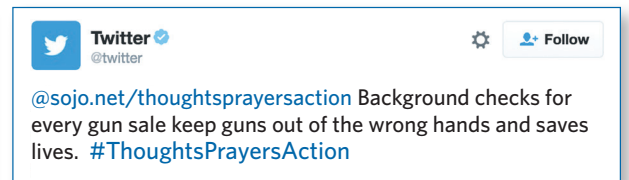
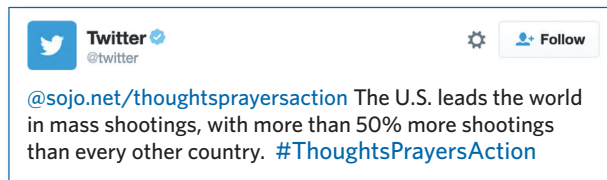
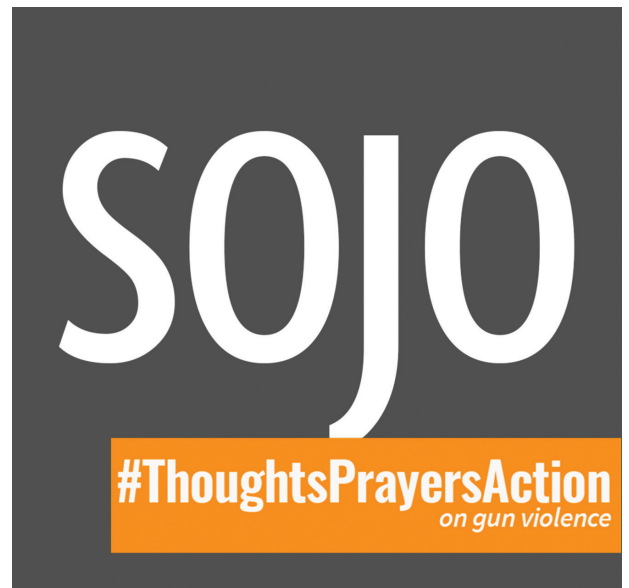
Using social media

We are asking congregations to capture photos of their youth and parishioners praying during their services on March 18 and share their photos on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, using the hashtag **#ThoughtsPrayersAction**. We also ask that congregations use the hashtag for related social media posts.



We want the activity of engaged young believers and their congregations to be on full display as we look to God for protection and guidance in our efforts.

Encourage your congregants to add a **#ThoughtsPrayersAction** frame to their Facebook profile photos. Add the frame by logging into Facebook and clicking here.



What else can young people do to stop gun violence?

Register to Vote

Millennials are now the largest generation in the electorate. This generation has demonstrated its concern with how the gun violence debate is being handled in Washington, D.C.

Millions of young people who are old enough to vote are not registered to vote. Millions more are registered to vote, but do not vote. Young people must exercise their right to vote and take a stand against gun violence.

Resources for further information

<https://everytownresearch.org/school-shootings/>

<http://apps.urban.org/features/everydayviolence/>

<http://www.bradycampaign.org/about-gun-violence>

Members of Congress who receive NRA funds

https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/nra-donations/?utm_term=.229999b638c0

Companies that support the NRA

<http://www.businessinsider.com/which-companies-still-support-the-nra-2018-2>

Companies that have broken ties with the NRA

<http://money.cnn.com/2018/02/25/news/companies/companies-abandoning-nra-list/index.html>

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/harvard-millennials-now-biggest-voting-group-in-us-2-1-democratic/article/2642567>