

Annual Conference Sunday
Micah 4:1-4 and Ephesians 6:13-15
August 12, 2018
Pastor Marianne Cotter

I'd like to introduce you to an Annual Conference peacemaker. Leanna Daniels, from the Juda United Methodist Church, is a peacemaker. She does what she can to build bridges and make peace.

She raised \$7,000 to complete a clean water project in Africa, through bake sales, tap dancing in a street corner, a fun run and anything she could think of. It took her two and a half years to meet that challenge. Plus, she raised money for the Imagine No Malaria campaign. She was touched by hurricane victims and raised money to donate to UMCOR to provide disaster relief. She baked cookies for three months. She filled three eight-foot tables at the church with the cookies she baked, and all the money went to help address needs of people suffering from recent hurricanes through United Methodist Committee on Relief. At Annual Conference in June, Bud Buzinski, chair of the Disaster Response Committee introduced the delegates to Leanna Daniels. She received the Love in Action award at the Wisconsin Annual Conference, given by the to a person who has made a difference in their community, state, country or the world. Did I mention Rev. Buzinski said, that Leanna Daniels is twelve years old? Then a slender girl with a pony tail stepped forward to receive her award. The pastor said the take away for all of us is: whenever you hear someone say "I can't do that" or you as a leader are tempted to say "our church can't do that" remember this remarkable twelve year old and what she was able to do. She also received the Thelma Gregg Award, presented by the board of global ministries to someone who has demonstrated Christian commitment in tireless promotion of the missionary outreach of the Church. As the video said, The practice of peacemaking and bridge building begins with you and me.

Story of an Annual Conference Peacemaker – Danielle Delconte

Meet Danielle Delconte, lay member to Annual Conference from Summerfield UMC in Milwaukee and member of the conference board of Church and Society. Danielle told the Annual Conference delegates that when she learned she'd been chosen to introduce the "Call to End Gun Violence" resolution, she did what most millennials would do. First she panicked about publicly speaking. Then took out her phone and searched for "Biblical passages about mass shootings." All focused on God's response to violence; for instance Psalm 34:18 The LORD is near to the broken-hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit." And John 16:33 I have said this to you, so

that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!’ Danielle wasn’t satisfied because she felt these passages distanced people from taking action, and didn’t prompt people to respond. Then a favorite passage from Ephesians came to mind: Ephesians 6:13-15: “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.” This was the passage that echoed in her head, marching last spring as part of the March for our Lives event in Milwaukee. March for our Lives is a youth led gun violence prevention effort, mobilizing youth to get register to vote and promote universal background checks, bans on semi-automatic weapons, and more funding for the CDC to study the epidemic of gun violence.

“I love the image of putting on the armor of God to protest violence in the world.” Then she confessed to us that like many millennials her protesting often stops with her computer screen or yard sign. Her standing before us at Annual Conference was her way of going the next step – taking action. She reminded us that John Wesley said we are saved by grace of God and that grace calls us to take action, consciously advocating for peace. Peacemaking is taking action to bring peace to the world; it’s not just feeling peaceful. Danielle’s words are on the cover of our bulletin today. “God calls us to be active in our pursuit of a peaceful world.” The resolution refers to a resolution in the Book of Resolutions “Our Call to End Gun Violence.” This is a book of resolutions on social issues passed by General Conference, the highest level decision making body in the UMC. This is not a gun control resolution but one that calls for specific measures that can reduce gun violence:

That’s Danielle’s story.

Invitation to Become a Peacemaker

Christ calls all of us as his followers to be peacemakers. Christian peacemaking can include working to end gun violence.

Gun violence is the third leading cause of death among children and youth in this country.

Americans make up 4.4 percent of the global population but own 42% of the world’s guns.

A New Yorker is just as likely to get robbed as a Londoner, but the New Yorker is 54 times more likely to be killed in the process.

According to a Nov, 2017 article in the New York Times, after Britain had a mass shooting in 1987, stricter gun control laws were passed. The same thing happened in

Australia in 1996. “But the United States has repeatedly faced the same calculus and determined that relatively unregulated gun ownership is worth the cost to society.” Is it?

In the spring of 2005 I was pastor serving in Brookfield. That year there was a mass shooting in my neighborhood. Terry Ratzman, a member of the Living Church of God which met in the Sheraton Hotel, came to church and began shooting. Seven people were killed including the shooter. In response, our inter-faith clergy group organized a service of prayer. A little while later I met Janet Fitch, an activist using film to educate and mobilize people on this issue. That was my first experience with gun violence prevention.

You may have heard recently how suicide rates have gone up 30% in the past 25 years in this country. That’s been true except in the states where there are strong gun laws. Research shows that access to lethal means of committing suicide (guns in particular) vastly increases the likelihood that suicide attempts will be fatal.

Last month, the Wisconsin State Journal ran an in-depth series on the city of Madison’s response to increasing levels of gun violence there. Dean Mosiman described how children and youth are more and more likely to be victims and perpetrators of gun violence. Childhood trauma can play in creating the conditions for violence to spread. The series also described the profoundly positive effect that ex-offenders who turn their lives around can have, as they become peer support specialists for families affected by gun violence.

This might be a good time to look over the blue insert in your bulletin. The statistics here are from a gun violence prevention group called Moms Demand Action (which includes men and women). Every day 93 Americans die from gun violence (this includes suicides, intentional and unintentional homicide and accidents). Since Newton, there have been over 200 school shootings – one almost every week.

A local chapter of Moms Demand Action helped support the student leaders of the protest held On March 14 of this year. That day 200 Baraboo middle and high school students walked out and joined adults in a protest against gun violence in the wake of the school shooting in Parkland Florida where 17 students were killed. This is the color of the gun violence prevention movement. This is the color hunters wear – orange says “don’t shoot me.” Orange is the color that Hadiya Pendleton’s friends wore in her honor when she was shot and killed in Chicago at the age of 15 — just one week after performing at President Obama’s 2nd inaugural parade in 2013. After her death, they asked others to Wear Orange to raise awareness about gun violence.

If you want to include gun violence prevention efforts in your peacemaking, here are five things you can do:

- 1) tell a friend or family member about this service. Talk with them about gun violence and why this problem needs addressing.
- 2) Join Moms Demand Action (it's free). You can text 64433 and text the word "join." It's free. And you'll learn about local efforts you can be part of: efforts like an annual lobbying day at the Capitol held every spring.
- 3) Before you vote, research which candidates have a good record on gun violence prevention. The Moms Demand Action web site has more information.
- 4) Contact your elected officials about this issue.
- 5) Share the insert with a family that has guns in their house. Part of the information here summarizes the Smartkids.org campaign. This is an effort to reduce gun violence and deaths among children and youth through common sense safety tips. There are simple things you can do to make it less likely your children, the children of your friends and family will be victims of gun violence.

Blessed are the peacemakers. A peacemaker is someone who chooses to move towards not away from conflict/suffering in the world and takes the action he/she to build bridges and create peace. As the UM Communications video said, peacemaking comes in many forms. Blessed is twelve year old Leanna Daniels who raised money for Africans in need of clean water and Texans in need of hurricane through cookie sales. Blessed is Ally Barrett who writes hymns in response to the violence in our world. Blessed is Danielle Delconte who uses her phone, and computer, and speaks in public about ending gun violence.

What form will your peace making take in the time to come? Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

“What Explains U.S. Mass Shootings? International Comparisons Suggest an Answer” Max Fisher and Josh Keller Nov. 7, 2017 The New York Times