Gun Violence Prevention Task Force
Annual Report, March 29, 2017

The purposes of the UULMNJ Gun Violence Prevention Task Force (GVP-TF) is to support or defeat legislation, educate within congregations and the larger communities. It also advocates for those with a personal history of gun violence and high risk populations. In 2016, there were a couple of opportunities where a GVP-TF representative spoke at a press conference called by legislators, once at the NJ State House and another at a public memorial.

The GVP-TF supported multiple NJ legislative bills in 2016. They sent out action alerts, made calls and engaged in letter writing individually and en masse. They succeeded in passing a bill to close loopholes in current NJ law. Bill S2483/A4126 passed with strong bi-partisan support in early January of 2017. We also have sent letters to our representatives in the US House and Senate to express our concerns on Bill HR 38, a concealed carry reciprocity bill. This bill has strong sponsorship and is expected to be presented in the House in the next 3 to 12 months. This bill would force NJ to accept concealed carry permits of all states, including those with weak laws related to gun safety. It threatens the long-standing high standards of NJ law regarding gun safety.

On the education/media front, task force members engaged in a broad range of activities. Often their activities incorporate music, film or art to communicate to the audience. One church screened several films in 2016 including “Under the Gun”, “Making a Killing”, and “91%”, with a healthy audience response. At least one congregation marked the June 2nd National Day of Gun Violence Awareness with a speaker panel that included a state and federal legislator, the local mayor and chief of police. Several congregations hosted concerts in accordance with the September 25th “Concerts Across America to End Gun Violence”. These congregations made history by joining with 350 churches and nonprofits across the nation to express their passion to end gun violence through music. Finally, several congregations marked the 4th anniversary of the Sandy Hook Shootings with vigils, memorials and/or music.

The GVP-TF met during the Oct. 2016 UULMNJ Issues Conference and set several goals. First, they wanted to develop an identity as a GVP-TF group across NJ. They decided to conference by phone each month. Secondly, they wanted to increase the breadth of congregations actively involved in GVP. Last October, there were three active congregations. Now there are seven. Third, task force members wanted to create a Facebook page to broadcast ideas, share documents and events. It has been in place since late October 2016.

In 2017, we will strive to defeat Bill HR 38, the federal concealed carry reciprocity bill. There are also federal laws on the books which the NRA would like to roll back, such as the removal of restrictions on silencers and gun-free school zones. On a state level, there are several bills we will be tracking including a bill that would mandate mental health professionals to report clients deemed at risk to use a firearm against oneself or another. We will continue to educate ourselves and pass what we learn onto our congregations and larger communities. There is a May 1st-2nd summit organized by the Brady Campaign and Americans for Responsible Solutions in DC. It will include high level training and interaction with congress people on the Hill. Some members may attend.