

Why I'm wearing orange on June 2

By [Ian T. Douglas](#)

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Here in Connecticut, we have learned about remembering those who have lost their lives because of senseless gun violence. An image, a phrase, a chance meeting, or a date on the calendar so easily brings back the profound tragedy of December 14, 2012, when Adam Lanza shot and killed first his mother, and then 20 school children, six adults, and finally himself at Sandy Hook Elementary School. With sacred and secular rituals of memorial services and vigils, we struggle to honor and cherish the loved ones we have lost.

We owe our children something we can no longer give them—safety, protection, a society in which the slaughter of innocents is unthinkable rather than routine. Sadly, the best we can do is redouble our efforts to provide some sense of security to the children who are still with us. The work is urgent: in the three years after the tragedy in Newtown, a child under 12 was shot and killed in this country [every other day](#).

That is why I am wearing orange on June 2 to mark National Gun Violence Prevention Day. I hope you will, too.

[The Wear Orange movement](#) began in Chicago to honor Hadiya Pendleton, a 15-year-old honor student who was shot to death in January 2012, two weeks after marching in President Obama's second inaugural parade. Her friends, searching for a way to mark their loss, asked their friends to wear orange in Hadiya's honor. Orange is the color hunters wear so they will be seen and not shot. From that gesture, a movement was born.

Hadiya would have been 19 this June 2, and in her honor, millions of Americans will wear orange to demonstrate our commitment to reducing gun violence. The skyline of her hometown and public buildings in other cities will be lit with orange light. The following Sunday, some clergy will [wear orange stoles](#) as they preach about preventing gun violence.

The Wear Orange movement is now coordinated by major gun violence prevention groups and includes more than [85 partners](#), including numerous religious organizations such as [Bishops United Against Gun Violence](#), a group of more than 60 Episcopal bishops in which I serve as a co-convenor.

Whenever faith leaders take up a cause such as gun violence prevention we can count on a few correspondents urging us to stay out of politics and stick to what we know. So here are a few things I know:

- More than 34,500 people died of gunshot wounds in this country last year. Of that number [more than 21,000](#) killed themselves. [Some 27,000](#) people received gunshot wounds and lived.
- The price of gun violence is borne by women, children, and people who are already victims of poverty and racism.
- [More than 750 children](#) were killed by gunfire in 2015.
- [Almost 560 American women](#) are shot to death by a romantic partner every year.
- Homicide is the [leading cause of death](#) among African American women aged 15 to 45.
- Black men make up six percent of the U.S. population and about [half of those killed by gunfire](#) each year.

One more thing I know: a society that does not work to end violence against God's children has no claim to righteousness.

Bishops United believes that reducing gun violence requires a longterm social and political commitment to ending poverty and racism. But we also believe that Congress and our state legislatures can take steps now: mandatory background checks on all gun purchases, licensing requirements on handgun purchases, restrictions on gun ownership by domestic abusers and others convicted of violent crimes, effective federal legislation against gun trafficking, federally funded research into gun violence prevention strategies, and the encouragement of "smart gun" technology.

Many of these measures—especially universal background checks and measures to keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers—are [supported by large majorities](#)

of Americans. Yet our elected representatives fear the leaders of the National Rifle Association, and they will not act.

To pass common sense legislation to prevent gun violence, we will need to persuade our legislators that there is a political cost to ignoring gun violence—to offering only thoughts and prayers when they could do so much more. Wearing orange on June 2 (and telling people about it on social media #WearOrange) is a step in that direction. Supporting organizations that work to reduce gun violence is another.

The struggle against the NRA and the firearms industry won't be easily won, but Jesus told a parable about that, and the next time I meditate on the persistent widow, I will imagine that she is wearing orange.