

WE ARE ALL NEWTOWN



MULTI-FAITH SERMON GUIDE

CONTENTS

ABOUT THE FILM _____	02
KEY THEMES AND YOUR FAITH TRADITION _____	06
INTERFAITH PRAYER TO ACCOMPANY THE SERMONIC MOMENT _____	10



IN SEARCH OF THE SAFEST
COMMUNITY, OUR SACRED SPACE:
WE ARE ALL NEWTOWN

PASTOR SAMUEL R. SAYLOR, SR.

SENIOR PASTOR, GARDNER MEMORIAL
A.M.E. ZION CHURCH, SPRINGFIELD, MA

ABOUT THE FILM

We Are All Newtown captures the ocean-sized ampoule of extracted tears – tears forcibly siphoned out of well-watered dreams for too many lives taken without notice. We are here, living under the energy and hopeful pursuit of happiness. Then, suddenly and sadly, the safe narrative gets erased from the song and play of life. What remains is a flint-sized cry disguising a fire-sized scream of betrayal of the heart. *We Are All Newtown* documents the innocence of two theaters of life, two different experiences of the pangs of trauma invasion. Amid our different lives we became conscientious of our sacred space and collective voice. The film demonstrates how two worlds, each unaware and indifferent to the other, collided to create shared community, our safest space in the sacred place called life, in the face of social impotence.



Pastor Sam Saylor.

Our unplanned pain began in one moment through the ravaging senselessness of gun violence. We were never prepared for the fall of loved ones, never ready for the news of our sentence of living loss and grief so significant that its gravitational pull nearly destroyed some part of us.

As a steward of faith and prognosticator of the saving Grace of God and His entire armed forces of justice, surprisingly, our family and I still become exposed to new realities in vulnerability.

While immersed in the dirty waters of destruction, we became recipients of an unwanted sense of aloneness and blinded from faces of empathy. We cried out with an unanswered call for a rewrite of life.

I was caught up in this movement downward toward the depths of grief when I found myself placed next to an unknown man with a unique, yet known weeping pattern, a whisper of deep struggle and loss. My aloneness vanished; it seemed as if someone finally heard me, and not just me, but everyone stuck on that speck of dust, like in Dr. Seuss's tale *Horton Hears a Who!*

We Are All Newtown captures the long-elusive nexus of our brokenness and our hope in our community, in our safe and sacred space. It was always there above the brows of grief and in our resolve. The film is our collective breath of faith. It shows how we came to be ordered by the beat of taking the Golden Rule, a shared tenet in all major spiritual and religious traditions, seriously.

This film is not the end-all for us. It is the beginning. It is a fresh start for securing a new community and sharing values that remove the sting of death.

As a faith leader with the community of God, the energy revealed in the promotion of value and worth assists us building a larger, safe, and sacred community. A new voice is new hope and a collective work worth undertaking.

We Are All Newtown invites us to appreciate and value each other by hearing the personal pain of fellow citizens regardless of the distance between our doorbells. The film shares the power of bringing presence to

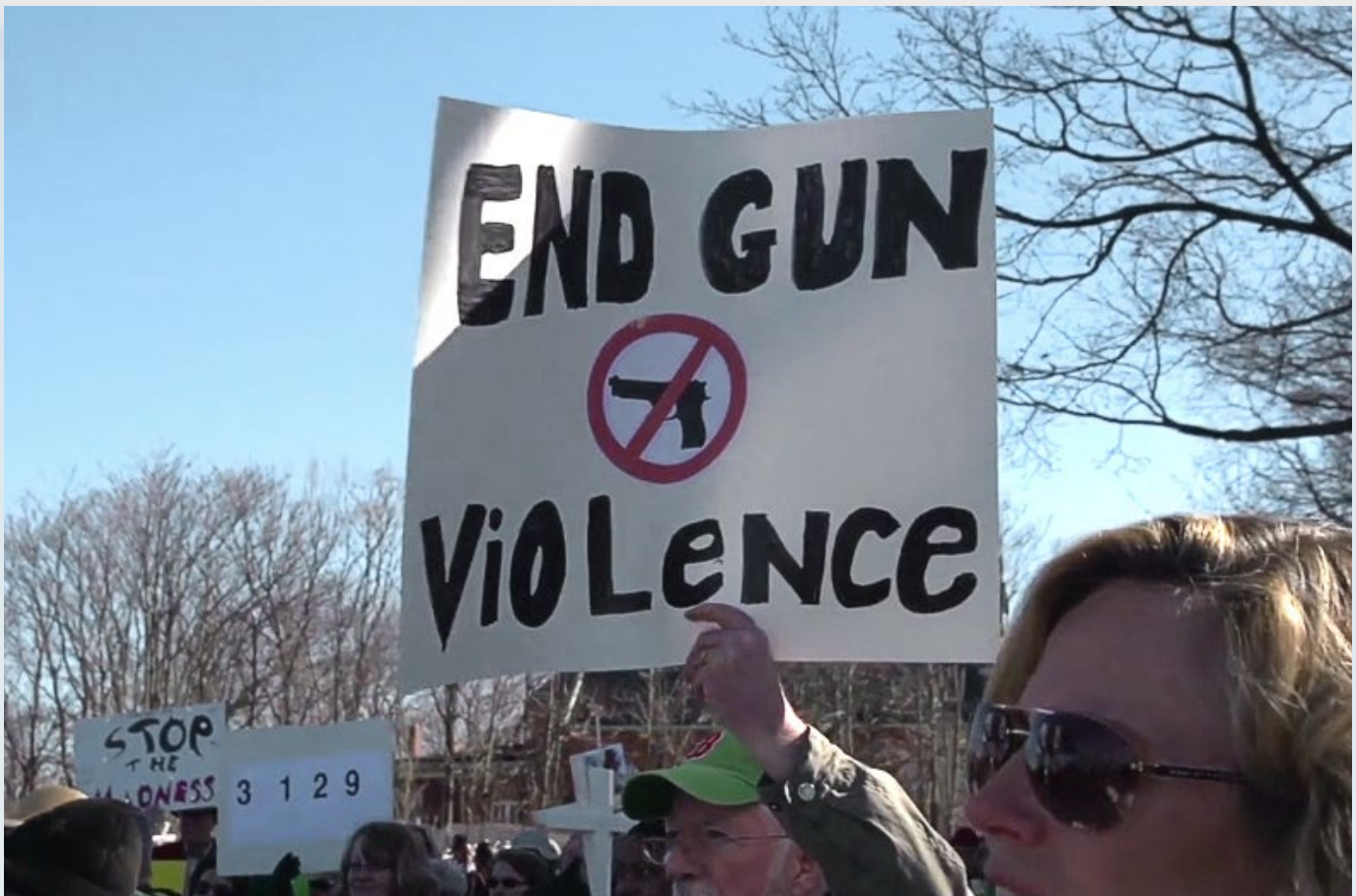
the pain of a grief-stricken life. Our faith is strong enough to take a walk and share in the saneness of the griever's need for answers. Our presence is a witness and a balm. I don't remember the people who came to the community vigil held in response to the murder of my son. I also don't remember everyone who came to the funeral. But I do remember one man who gave me a tissue to blow my tearing nose. The power of a simple act of presence and passion made a difference and left an indelible impression on my heart.

We Are All Newtown captures a moment I initially did not want to be exposed to the world as I lost my aloneness by the simple hugs of fellow brothers of faith. My fellow clergy delivered me from my unwanted moment of grief and pain through the faith of available arms and our connected community. If we are to become that all-inclusive "Newtown," borne out of the darkness of our cumulative losses and grieving sadness, we must connect via our love of God and His people to the justice which flows from the creator's heart.

"We Are All Newtown NOW!"

In faith, and through the eye of faith, I witnessed the cause within the cause, a journey of community.

Yet, while entrenched in pain and trauma, we are re-condemned by a government suffering of rancid empathy for the daily deluge of devastation seeping out of the trauma-toxic pores of Urban America. In February 2013, in response to the broken American lens of assurance, and due to the brutal murder of twenty little children, then Vice President Biden held a day-long workshop to address the "Gun Violence dilemma." Again, I wrestled with anger as my still percolating pain was downgraded to postscript status and footnote charity. I was angered due to the "them" being in and the "us" being out. The pain experienced by "them" got addressed in great words and gestures of empathy, while my "us" was being kicked and placed on the margins of things that matter.





Pastor Sam Saylor, Rev. Matt Crebbin and Rev. Henry Brown.

It was then that my crying sounds acted without my permission and my tears seemed to take up housing in the eyes of a father I did not know. At that very moment, I realized that I had found the long-lost community, that sacred space where the walls of indifference melted away. I discovered in an unknown man, my all too known pain; no more than that, I reclaimed the awesome genesis of love.

The two worlds collided to create shared community, our safest space in the sacred place called life, and illuminated my essence and that of my beloved son, Shane.

KEY THEMES AND YOUR FAITH TRADITION

Community is the preeminent sacred space that seasons our *chronos* time, or human time, with *kairos* time, God's time. There is an in-breaking of God in community that affords us forward motion toward the place where we recognize that we were never alone; we are always together more than apart. *We Are All Newtown*. Through the eye of faith and up from the heart of the community we can appreciate one another in the spirit of unity. We have more in common than we care to acknowledge, and we know that to be true. The breath which gives life to every living force demands the hope of a New Town. The worth of the words "*We are all Newtown*" speaks to the steadfast resolve for a safe space where children play together and any threat to the community is a collective concern.

It is not as radical as it sounds; we can, and we shall, accentuate authenticating a safe life with the hope of maximum inclusivity. It is inherent to the promotion of more vital faith lives. *We Are All Newtown* places excellent opportunities before each person called to share their faith and demonstrate it through active and inclusionary intent. The tears shed by mothers and fathers in urban America are the same size, color, and density to those shed by a parent from rural and suburban towns.

There are four critical factors of faith and community I would humbly ask you to consider as we work to manifest our New Town:

1.
**IN SEARCH
OF OUR
SINGULARITY**

Collectively, even amid our differences, we are searching for a common cause while in the grip of our deepest pain. We must be ready to embody and embrace the elixir for our unwanted pain. We should seek to promote a bond of unity, for it presents an unbeatable power.

As we open ourselves up to such a search, what are the touchstones of such a sacred space?

How do we embrace our diversity while celebrating the joint cause of our campaign?



Pastor Sam Saylor.

2.

TOUCH THE DARKNESS WITH DETERMINATION

Mahatma Gandhi stated that “the common factor in all religions is non-violence.” The thrust of our New Town will spark new light through the intentional agreement to live non-violently. Death presents itself the ugliest when the traumatizing horror of gun violence precedes it. Our New Town must embrace a manifesto against such dark ugliness. As a community of believers, we will tend to such trauma-sponsored injury with hope-loaded language and divinely inspired footsteps toward our unified sacred space.

Can our faith withstand the long, fiery battle before us?

Through our newly acquired New Town lens, can we speak truth to power by courageously calling out and confronting the injustices before us?

Can we get our hands dirty as we offer a faithful reach into the lives of strangers?

3.

OUR NEW TOWN OF FAITHFUL LISTENING

Untimely gun death, really any murder, robs us of the tick of time and breathing space. Gun violence victims and survivors should know that we value their pain by our faithful listening. A New Town-mined believer will hear and respond to the cries of the despondent soul within heart-reach. Our nation yearns for active listening from God's compassionate believers of New Town, which always compels an act of love. So we desperately petition a new listening and hearing community to attune to those deadly and destructive moments and respond in time to usher the injured back to our sacred space of life. Our united force, provisioned with faithful boldness, must work together for a day when the chains of death and deepened sorrow are broken from our community so paralyzed in the tragic moment of unwanted loss. Yet, we are so connected in the truth of life over death.

How do we get to hear Shane and the countless "Shanes" of our community?

How will we put into play a divine ear backed up with love for the assignment before us?

Can I bring my vulnerability into our spiritual space, and will you love me toward wellness?

4.

CIRCLES OF VALUES AND COMPASSION

We Are All Newtown, in its purest genesis, is about a strong desire to be measured, found worthy, and remembered under the illuminance of the Divine will and God's love. The faith community must unite under the bond of mutuality. We should speak life-valued growth into the community's lifeline, for it will facilitate an authentic festival of diversity and inclusion of all people within the wholeness of true essence and worth.

Can that essence, which is intrinsic to our belief, engender a unified voice of value within and beyond the footprint of our local ministries?

Is there a compassionate reach in your congregation where hurt and the hurting souls can find a comforting friend?

Are we able to be better together in our New Town through compassion and hope?

I got up from my chair that faithful day with the sense of a universal pull toward the like tears of my unknown, and yet very known brother, equally bothered by the cessation of our son's breath and promise. I sincerely felt heard and connected to a more substantial possibility.

We are more than adequately equipped to play a vital role in the gun violence reduction campaign. We can reduce trauma-evoking destruction for "*We Are All Newtown*." I stand ready to serve and support as we bring our voices together and promote the sacred space of a safe community.

INTERFAITH PRAYER TO ACCOMPANY THE SERMONIC MOMENT

PASTOR SAMUEL R. SAYLOR, SR.

Our Prayer: We are linked, creating spirit, to the power of divine life. We express our profound resolve to serve the "no-person alone" mandate as it is an outgrowth of our truest, most holy nature. We aim to engender the strength-ordered life grounded in mutual respect and unfettered love for a safe community. We are committed to believing and living in a way that moves us toward putting our hands on the written and realized laws and expectations for ordered peace.