



**Reverend Sharon Washington Risher**

**Moms Demand Action**

Women United March Speech

January 25, 2020

Charlotte, NC

What a great day to be alive! As a voice for the voiceless and advocate for all, I stand here today as a woman of faith and a spokesperson for MOM DEMANDS ACTION FOR GUN SENSE IN AMERICA and Everytown Survivor Network.

Nearly 5 years ago, I received the most horrific news that nobody wants to receive. My Mother, cousins and child hood friend was slaughtered in Emanuel AME Church in Charleston SC. I became a part of the loneliest club ever, a club that the only requirement to join is the death of a loved one.

Soon after being back in Texas after the funerals, I was looking through and reading cards that had come from the church. One particular envelope caught my eye. I opened it up and read the most heart wrenching letter, from, now Congresswoman, Lucy McBath. You see Lucy's son, Jordan Davis was killed on Nov 23, 2012, in Jacksonville, FL at a gas station. Lucy immediately began her advocacy work with MOMS which is one of the largest, grass roots advocacy movement to help prevent gun violence.

I immediately called her, and we talked and cried and cried some more. From that connection I became involved with this most important movement. More than 6 million people, mayors, moms, cops, teachers, survivors, gun owners, and everyday Americans have come together to make their own communities safer. Together, we are fighting for the changes that we know will save lives. In our own city in 2019, Charlotte has endured the deaths of 108 people. 108 families whose lives will never be the same. Gun violence has become a public health crisis that is sucking up millions of dollars through our health care industry. When will we realize more people die by gun violence thru homicides, suicides, and unintentional shootings every single day, 100 + people and 8 children die daily? Every month, an average of 52 women are shot and killed by an intimate partner. While the deadly intersection of guns and intimate partner violence affects all women, it has a disproportionate impact on Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic women. In addition, segments of the LGBTQ and people with disabilities are highly vulnerable to death by a gun.

If the nation is going to debate reform, that conversation needs to be holistic and should include all members of our society, particularly those who are most impacted by gun violence. While gun violence may be a relatively new phenomenon in some communities, in many black neighborhoods across America, it's become such a norm that kids have become numb to it and have PTSD as a result of these crimes in mostly Black neighborhoods.

As I have said, time and time again, prayers and vigils are not enough. We have to take action in a real way. We need prayers with feet, prayers with actions. Boots on the ground.

For too long, change has been disillusioned by the Washington gun lobby and by leaders who refuse to take common-sense steps that will save lives through gun law reform and legislation that will bring common sense gun laws to protect all.

Real talk. Ending gun violence is an enormous undertaking and excruciatingly difficult work. Though the majority of Americans want common sense gun laws, a startlingly low number of people are willing to do the actual work to make it happen. They are busy. Or they are afraid to speak up or take action. Or, they believe they won't have an impact. I used to be one of those people. But after the killings in Charleston, God moved me to do something. But innocent people kept getting killed. The number of preventable deaths continued to grow.

We need more than your thoughts and prayers. Many people believe the gun violence we experience in this country is not a political issue; Well I believe it is political, but more than that, I believe, it's a heart condition. A heart condition because if gun violence in America does not make your heart hurt, cause pain in your soul, then nothing will. Well, I say now is the time.

We don't know the day or the hour, we can be killed by gun violence, and I beg you to take whatever means necessary, thru your power of your heart, the power thru your vote and begin to place leaders in power who believe there is a problem and there are ways we can help stop this deadly way of life.

This journey has taken me to places; I never dreamed I would be, talking to people like you who were willing to hear what I had to say. There comes a time in all our lives where we will face some of the challenging experiences of our lives. How we decide to accept and press forward defines who you really are. I didn't ask for this journey I'm on. I would rather not be standing up sharing this with you, but here I am.

I hope you have heard one thing today that you didn't know before. I hope you are motivated to do just a little more, to make this cause a priority. Something that will empower you and stir your hearts to do something you have never done before. Let's stand together, stand united, then doing something and do something again, again and then some more. I pray you will join me in this effort. This is our country too, we have a voice, we have a choice, we must be the change we want to see. God Bless you all.



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