Holding Space for Gunfire Victims

The Soul Box Project
for Faith Communities

Art revealing the gunfire epidemic
SoulBoxProject.org

October 2019
**Mission:** The Soul Box Project raises awareness of the U.S. gunfire epidemic by counting and honoring victims, offering healing participation to those seeking solace, and providing dramatic visual support for all initiatives working for a safer, more civil society.

**Overview**

- **The Soul Box Project is a national community art project** collecting handmade origami Boxes. Each represents one person killed or injured by gunfire in the U.S. Displays of thousands of Soul Boxes in public spaces illustrate the number of victims of gunfire violence, defense, accidents and suicides. These exhibits evoke an emotional response that compels actions and changes individual behaviors. In time, these changes will shift the U.S. gun culture around how, when, why and by whom guns are used.

- **In two short years over 69,000 Soul Boxes have been collected from around the country.** From October 3-4, 2020, the Project will exhibit 200,000 Soul Boxes on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. to show the truth, reach hearts, promote action and save lives.

- **Anybody can make a Soul Box and send it in.** The only materials needed are two sheets of 8 1/2-inch square paper – easily cut from a standard letter sheet. Every Soul Box holds space for one life torn apart by gunfire.

- **Folding Soul Boxes in the company of others can provide a safe environment for difficult conversations:** sharing experiences, remembering victims and responding to shooting tragedies.

- **Soul Boxes represent victims of gunfire violence, defense, accidents and suicides.** The act of folding – one small step in the healing process – offers solace to anyone experiencing grief or trauma from gunfire.
How Can You Participate?
When your faith community adopts Soul Boxes into your practice you are saying, “We will not forget. We will not give up.” Faith communities like yours have already contributed around 25% of the total Soul Boxes collected.

Each faith community uses Soul Boxes in its own way: Some set aside a specific day – for example, commemorating a past gunfire event or participating in a designated gun-sense sabbath – and offer materials and guidance to fold Soul Boxes together. Others introduce Soul Boxes as an ongoing social justice activity, with members folding at home and after services. Some host exhibits. Some carry Soul Boxes in bags or backpacks in marches and vigils. As you’ll see in this guide, there are several ways to get involved with The Soul Box Project.

No matter how you participate, you’ll find folding Soul Boxes is a fresh way to take action. It goes a step beyond writing to lawmakers, donating to causes, demonstrating – even thoughts and prayers. Folding a Box is a way to add to the gun conversation without being confrontational. It can give a voice to people confined to their homes. The very act of folding can be meditative and healing.

When people come together to fold Soul Boxes, it builds community.
When people work together for a cause, they get to know each other better. A gathering can be a designated time to bring people together from across your community. It can also be a monthly program for a youth group, a women’s group, a craft group or a social justice group. There is no large outlay of money or planning. (See How to Organize a Box-Making Gathering.)

All that is needed are some tables, a few supplies and people.
A Box-making gathering can also be a place for people in your community to come together after a tragedy, such as a mass shooting. It provides a safe space to voice fears, anguish and confusion while taking thoughtful action.

No matter what the gathering, once the folding begins, so do the stories. Some people focus on the gun conversation – people they’ve lost, experiences they’ve had, frustrations they feel. Other people concentrate on making protest art – ways to get their message across on a small origami Box. Some will fold Boxes for a specific person they know or have just heard about in the press, to honor their memory.

One model that works well is to have a Soul Box Project “station” – a table with supplies and at least one person who can teach people to fold boxes – set up after worship. Many people (especially singles, newcomers and introverts) appreciate the activity and the opportunity to contribute. This can be scheduled every week or, as some congregations have done, monthly.

In our experience, after people learn to fold Soul Boxes they keep folding. Shopping bags full of Soul Boxes appear each week. People bring in Boxes they’ve folded by themselves. They bring in Boxes they’ve folded with family and neighbors. They bring in Soul Boxes that they’ve folded at the kitchen table, waiting for their kids to finish eating – or at the monthly council meeting!

Providing pre-cut paper for people to fold at home adds to the enthusiasm.
Commentary: Soul Boxes honor lives, underscore gunfire epidemic

The police were still searching the Pittsburgh synagogue when our women's circle convened. The news was fresh enough that some of us hadn't heard about it yet. Before we began that meeting, as we shared what we knew, we began to fold Soul Boxes. It wasn't long before we had eleven small origami boxes, one for each person killed at the Tree of Life Synagogue on October 27.

The Soul Box Project is collecting one origami box—a Soul Box—for every person killed or injured by gunfire in the United States since 2014. The Boxes will be displayed in public spaces around the country to raise awareness about the epidemic of gun violence. The Project began after the mass shooting in Las Vegas on October 1, 2017. Our congregation at First Congregational UCC began making Soul Boxes a few weeks later.

We folded Boxes during fellowship hours. We brought in Boxes that we'd folded at home with our families, friends and neighbors. In February, our church’s ArtReach Gallery hosted the first public display of Soul Boxes—733 Boxes for the children under age 12 shot in 2017. In March, we joined young people in the March for our Lives, carrying 4,624 Soul Boxes—one for every child shot since January 2017.

Some of us remembered the AIDS Memorial Quilt in the 1980s. We understood the power of art to change perceptions. What we didn't understand was the power of taking time to purposefully acknowledge a victim.

We saw people who would never protest at a rally take this one small action for responsible gun control. We heard people share their stories. We felt our hearts open to healing as we folded. After an accident. Or a suicide. Or an ambush in a place of worship.

The day after our women's circle meeting in late October, our senior minister delivered the eleven Soul Boxes to an interfaith vigil at a local synagogue.

We participated in the We'll Take the Sabbath initiative this fall. To hold space for the 100 people shot on an average Sunday, we folded 100 Soul Boxes each week. In December we blessed 3,456 Soul Boxes to be used in future installations. In February, we'll march in a funeral cortege of 36,000 Boxes—one for each person shot in the U.S. in an average year— at the Oregon State Capitol. And until the gunfire epidemic in our country is under control, we'll continue our Soul Box-folding practice.
**How Will You Display Your Soul Boxes?**

As your faith community begins to produce Soul Boxes, you may want to show what you’ve made in a local display. As the weeks go by, the display will grow. The display can be an organic tumble of Boxes in a corner – or a line that stretches around your place of worship, showing off each individual Box. What form it takes is up to you.

Soul Box displays are used to show visitors the number of people being killed or injured by gunfire. You can use the Soul Boxes you fold to represent a specific number. For example, the display to the right includes 733 Soul Boxes – the number of children under the age of 12 killed or injured in 2017.

[GunViolenceArchive.org](http://GunViolenceArchive.org) includes databases that can help you find a representative number.

A Box-making station can be part of the installation, inviting people to fold a Box and add it to the display on-the-spot.

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Examples of Displays in Faith Communities

Soul Boxes provide a visual, visceral reminder of the number of lives torn apart by gunfire.
**Keeping Your Community Motivated**

When your faith community makes Soul Boxes, you become part of a movement of people using art for activism – *ARTivism*. In October 2020, The Soul Box Project will exhibit 200,000 Soul Boxes in Washington, D.C. on the National Mall. To meet that goal, we need to spread the power of Soul Boxes across the nation.

Many faith communities have already joined us in this movement. To keep their members motivated to fold Soul Boxes, they’ve set smaller goals for themselves. Some congregations use barometers to track their progress. Others tie their Box-making to a representative number of victims.

**One model is called “We’ll Take the Sabbath.”**

Your congregation commits to collecting 100 Soul Boxes every week for a specified period of time. Why 100 Soul Boxes? On average, 100 people are killed by gunfire every day in the U.S. By committing to folding 100 Soul Boxes every week, your congregation says, “We will hold space for the 100 people who are shot on our Sabbath day.” Some churches call it, “We’ll Take Sunday.”

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**Art revealing the gunfire epidemic**

**Soul Box**

SoulBoxProject.org

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Over 100 people are shot every day in the US. At First Congregational UCC, we’ve committed to fold 100 Soul Boxes every week. It’s our way of holding space for the 100 people who are shot on an average Sunday. That’s 100 Soul Boxes total, as a congregation.

The Soul Box Project is a national community art project raising awareness of the US gunfire epidemic by counting and honoring victims. In the tradition of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, the Project is collecting one hand-folded paper box – a Soul Box – for every person killed or injured by gunfire in the US since 2014.

On February 15, 2019, the Project will fill the gallery of the Oregon State Capitol with 36,000 Soul Boxes – one for every person shot in the US in a year. The Soul Boxes at First Congregational UCC will be added to that installation.

For more information about We’ll Take Sunday at First Congregational UCC, please contact ___________.

For more information about The Soul Box Project:

www.soulboxproject.org  @soulboxproject   #soulboxproject
What Happens to Your Soul Boxes After You’ve Collected Them?
Every Soul Box is eventually used in our large-scale displays. Those with names, messages or artwork are attached to display panels.

Plain Soul Boxes are gathered in bags. These bags are stacked in exhibits and used in processions. Unadorned Boxes represent the unnamed victims of gunfire, those people who aren’t in the headlines, but are still missed and remembered.

Displays and processions are where the final power of The Soul Box Project lies – a community effort where people’s voices come together – Soul Box by Soul Box – to say “Enough!”
When people come face to face with the thousands and thousands of Soul Boxes, they understand the horrific numbers.

Our exhibits create emotional responses and inspire people to be responsible of their own accord, not because of a law. Compelling people to take individual actions and appeal to each other for change, rather than waiting for legislation, is key to this Project.

Leslie Lee, founder of The Soul Box Project, has been quoted as saying, “What we are doing is providing an opportunity for someone walking into these displays to have a moment of clarity about the magnitude of this epidemic and their responsibilities. It might mean a person goes home and locks up their guns. Or a mother talks to her kids about dealing with anger and depression. Or a gun club adds another safety class. Or a voter writes to his legislator. Or a person reaches out to a friend who’s struggling. If any of those things happens, this Project will have succeeded.” With more people choosing actions regarding responsible gun use that reflect their values, priorities and beliefs, we will move closer to a safer, more civil society.

Faith communities across the nation have the power to help make these changes happen.
From Soul Box Founder Leslie Lee

The Day We Took 36,000 Soul Boxes to the Oregon State Capitol

On February 15, 2019, the day after the first anniversary of the Parkland shooting, over 100 volunteers travelled wintery roads to Salem to carry clear plastic bags filled with Soul Boxes into the Oregon State Capitol. They were led in solemn procession by a high-school snare drummer and a woman with a walker. The pace was funereal. The volunteers were silent.

The long line made its way down the block, stopping traffic as it crossed the street and snaked up the access ramp into the Capitol Building. The rat-a-tat of the drum echoed under the dome of the Rotunda as the line circled the space and filled the majestic staircase. Raising the bags above their heads, the volunteers showed the attending press, passersby and the watching world what 36,000 men, women and children killed by gunfire in just one year looks like. As they stacked their bags in the lobby of the building, they gave life to an incomprehensible number with a pile of Soul Boxes 10 feet long, 16 feet wide and 8 feet high. The pile was too huge to be ignored. Visitors, staffers and legislators stopped to fold Soul Boxes, adding their acts of remembrance and protest to the count.

As the founder of The Soul Box Project I still get goosebumps when I tell this story because it truly felt like we were carrying those lost lives in our hands and in our hearts. We held those trash bags with reverence, belying the image that our nation treats these lives as disposable.

This kind of ARTivism can often accomplish much more than statistics or legislation because it calls for individual action spurred by an emotional awakening. Twenty-five years ago the AIDS Memorial Quilt toured the country, eventually covering the National Mall with 37,000 panels made by friends, family and lovers to help raise awareness of an epidemic that was being ignored. The visual of the Quilt reached hearts and helped compel transformative actions: After 15 years of escalating deaths from AIDS the toll dropped in three years, from 50,000 deaths a year in 1996 to 20,000.

In October 2020, our Project will take 200,000 Soul Boxes to our nation's capital. Thousands of participants, from all over the country, will find solace in making those Boxes and over 400 volunteers will process them onto the National Mall as the press and social media cameras roll. When hundreds of thousands of little Soul Boxes provide a visceral accounting of lives lost there will be, without question, too many to ignore.

See our website for information about the 2020 Washington, D.C. event.
How to Organize a Soul Box-Making Gathering

Box-folding instructions and Box-making gathering ideas can be downloaded at www.soulboxproject.org/share

Box-making gatherings are fun, with a meaningful purpose. The conversations are interesting when people gather together.

To add more depth to your gathering, contact us at soulboxteam@gmail.com to get a list of victims who have not had Soul Boxes made for them. This helps us avoid duplicates.

Here are a few tips to help your Soul Box-making gathering be satisfying to those who attend:

- Include the SoulBoxProject.org link in your announcement and ask people to watch the instructional video before they arrive to make boxes. You can also print the PDF of our flyer and instructions on our website; one for each participant.

- Have some well-made box samples ready to show - some very simple, some more complex. Beautiful Boxes commemorate a beautiful life lost, often naming a victim. Protest art is appropriate, as well. Blank Soul Boxes are also appropriate. They represent the thousands of unnamed victims.

- The first key to a successful party is having the paper pre-cut to 8 1/2” square. This cannot be overemphasized, as measuring and cutting paper slows enthusiasm. Large quantities of paper can be cut at a printing business at a minimal cost (or often at no cost, if you explain the Project). At least have a paper cutter available. Boxes not made to this size are difficult to include in display panels.

- We encourage you to use paper that’s destined for the recycling bin. Slightly heavier stock makes a sturdier box. Creasing should be done with plastic cards or the folds are soft and hard to distinguish. (All those unsolicited charity cards and used gift cards come in handy here.)

- If you are in the Portland, Oregon area SCRAP on SW 17th and Alder is a great inexpensive source for various papers, or email us at soulboxteam@gmail.com to use some of our donated supply.
● When announcing your gathering ask people to start collecting images and text from magazines, mail or printed images from the internet. Not everyone will want to collage their boxes, but having material for those who do is inspiring. Plain Boxes count, too!

● Old phone books and magazines are perfect for applying paste to collage pieces, just turn the page for a non-sticky surface. (Or use the gluey page for stuffing.)

● Have one person who knows how to make boxes for teaching every three or four beginners. Folding a Box is easy – but not the first or even second time. People get discouraged and do not want to continue if they are not successful. What we want is for them to enjoy making these Boxes to keep them pouring in.

● Please stuff the boxes. Two crumpled phonebook pages, gluey or not, are perfect for stuffing Boxes. One piece of letter paper from the recycle bin also works. Firmly stuffed Boxes with well-fitting lids are very sturdy and will hold up to all the repeated handling they get. If the box flexes when gently squeezed it needs more stuffing (but not so much it pops the top).

Getting Your Soul Boxes to the Project
It’s surprisingly inexpensive to send Soul Boxes by U.S. Mail. Send your Soul Boxes to: PO Box 19900, Portland, OR 97280. There is more information on the website.

If you have hundreds – or thousands – of Soul Boxes to send, contact us at SoulBoxTeam@gmail.com to figure out the best delivery method.

Check our website for current public drop-off locations in Portland and a few other cities. If your faith community would like to serve as a public drop-off point, please contact us. If you’re in the Portland area, contact us at SoulBoxTeam@gmail.com to arrange pickup or drop-off of your Boxes.
Thank you for considering The Soul Box Project for your faith community’s social justice program.

Our website SoulBoxProject.org has all sorts of additional information, including the latest Soul Box count, announcements of upcoming events and information about donating to the Project.

If your faith community does participate, please contact us at soulboxteam@gmail.com to let us know and post to our social media accounts to keep us updated. We’re active on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, @soulboxproject #soulboxproject.

Thank you!

The Soul Box Project envisions a society where all people living in the U.S. are empowered to choose responsible actions regarding gun use that reflect their values, priorities and beliefs so that we can live in safe communities, talk to resolve conflicts, have schools focus on learning, gather to worship in peace, and thrive in economies that foster trust and unity.
Download this flyer and folding instructions at SoulBoxProject.org

Art revealing the gunfire epidemic.

If you could save a life by folding two pieces of paper, would you do it?

Over 42,000 people are killed or injured by gunfire in the U.S. every year. Another 22,000 die from suicides with guns.* How do we put meaning to those numbers, the individual lives torn apart by gunfire? Statistics can tell us facts, but they do not reveal the pain. How do we respond?

The Soul Box Project is showing people the numbers. We are collecting one hand-folded origami box for every victim of gunfire in the US and displaying tens of thousands of them in public spaces around the country. When people see the numbers, they feel the magnitude of this gunfire epidemic. They get it. And they realize they can make a difference: By locking up their guns. Or supporting a friend who’s struggling. By writing to their legislators.

Every Soul Box holds space for a single life. Anyone can fold a Soul Box and send it in to be included in the Project’s exhibits. The very act of folding can provide solace to a person experiencing trauma — directly or indirectly — from gunfire incidents. Gun violence. Suicides. Defense. Accidents. Folding a Soul Box is a nonconfrontational, nonpolitical way to take action. To express outrage or frustration. To honor a victim. To help heal a grieving heart.

“Activism” can reach hearts, change minds and shift culture. The AIDS Memorial Quilt proved it 30 years ago. Today we have a new epidemic of gunfire deaths. Once again, people across the country are responding, this time to huge piles and long walls made with individual Soul Boxes.

Won’t you join in? It begins with two pieces of paper, when you fold a Soul Box to acknowledge one life. It comes together in a massive art statement. The movement continues with a cultural shift, as people comprehend the devastating loss of lives and take actions that align with their concerns.

*GunViolenceArchive.org

Make a Box. Send it in. It counts.
SoulBoxProject.org
info@soulboxproject.org

Turn this sheet over and start saving lives.
Make a **Soul Box** - Art revealing the gunfire epidemic.

First - **WATCH A VIDEO** > bit.do/foldbox

Use medium weight paper 8 1/2" square.

1. Begin with the side of the paper you want showing face up. Fold in half both ways.
2. Fold the four corners into the center point.
3. Fold the top and bottom to the center so it looks like #5, then unfold. Open the top and bottom flaps. #6
4. Fold each side into the center and crease. Open the flaps to an upright position to form the sides of the box.
5. While holding the side flaps open push in the diagonal folds between fold B & C with index fingers, forming figure #10

**BOX TOP**

6a. Repeat steps #1-3. In steps #4 and #6, make this top slightly larger by folding the sides a little shy of center leaving a 1/8" gap for most papers, slightly larger for heavier papers.

You can add a name or message to the top of your Soul Boxes, then send them to
PO Box 19900 Portland, OR 97280
More info and examples at
[SoulBoxProject.org](http://SoulBoxProject.org)

Follow us! @soulboxproject on Facebook, Instagram & Twitter

Download at [SoulBoxProject.org](http://SoulBoxProject.org)