



THE ARMOR *of* LIGHT

COMMUNITY AUDIENCE GUIDE

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ABOUT *The Armor of Light*



Reverend Rob Schenck is an Evangelical Minister of more than 30 years and is known for his belief that one's Christianity must be expressed vigorously through one's relationships and actions. As his ministry and influence grows he is confronted with the controversial debate surrounding gun violence in the U.S. When he begins to explore gun violence from a faith-based perspective, he is shocked by the opinions of longtime friends and colleagues who caution him to tread carefully on such a politically divisive issue. An ardent pro-life activist, Reverend Schenck struggles with the ethical implications of being both pro-life and pro-gun as he seeks to facilitate conversation and understanding amidst a country divided.

Throughout his journey, Rev. Schenck links up with Lucy McBath, the mother of Jordan Davis, an unarmed teen who was murdered in Florida and whose story cast a spotlight on "Stand Your Ground" laws. Despite being pro-choice, McBath and Schenck resolve to work together as they explore the moral underpinnings of gun violence and their desire to protect human life. Lucy must cope with the loss of her son while using her grief to catalyze conversations about gun violence and fuel a movement towards effective and practical change.

These two unlikely allies confront rejection, heartbreak, and anger as they work boldly to get people to examine gun violence from a moral and ethical perspective. On their journey, they bring people together across deep party lines to have a discussion about beliefs and the value of human life. Their ability to transcend disparate beliefs illuminates our individual capacity to hold productive conversations and make the conscious decision to find common ground.

LETTER FROM *the Director*



"Miraculous things can happen when people put aside their differences and choose to inhabit the spaces they share. Those spaces tend to be way above politics. That's what Rob and Lucy and I chose to do. And I think we have all been changed for the better."

Abigail E. Disney

I was raised in a filmmaking family. We talked about "story" and took apart other people's films over dinner. To me, it was just business, and when I was young I didn't think about making my own films. My family was also church going. I was raised on the Bible and the teachings of Jesus Christ. But along with filmmaking, I left faith behind when I left home for college.

So it's interesting to me that when I did finally come to filmmaking I was drawn to stories about people of faith—remarkable people who put themselves on the line for what they believe. They succeed because of, or possibly in spite of, doing the unexpected. They can be contrary, they can be bold, but they are willing to take risks for something bigger than themselves.

Reverend Rob Schenck is one such person. The subject of guns was not on his front burner when I approached him about an idea for a film in 2013. I was looking for someone—anyone—from the pro-life movement who would be willing to entertain the idea that there were some logical and even theological inconsistencies in the positions that many conservative evangelicals were taking on abortion and guns. In short, I wanted to know how a person could be both "pro-life" and "pro-gun."

For instance, most conservative Christians back "Stand Your Ground" laws. Those laws essentially say that when a person carrying a weapon feels threatened, he or she can shoot without first trying to de-escalate the situation. It seemed to me that if the law relieved citizens of the burden of retreat from conflict, then it was stating that there are some things that are worse than taking a human life. Whether a life is that of a good person or a bad person is irrelevant—Jesus charged us with loving all of them.

From my perspective, shooting first is not a pro-life ethic; I wanted to find someone who could explain why so many Christians are arming up these days. I called many faith leaders and got nowhere. I was just about to give up when Reverend Schenck invited me down to Washington for a conversation.

I was worried. Reverend Schenck had spent a lifetime fighting with all his heart and soul on the opposite side of every social issue I believed in— most importantly abortion. He was a founding member of Operation Rescue. To my friends he was the "devil." Yet Reverend Schenck was full of surprises. He said the growing gun violence in our culture could no longer be ignored; he wondered why so many Americans were living in fear and taking up arms. And it goes without saying that far from being the devil, Rob is extremely nice, smart, literate, and tolerant. Shame on me for my preconceptions.

I have learned some important lessons on this journey, the most important of which is that if you approach people with genuine respect and an open heart, they will almost always respond to you in the same way. Reverend Schenck and I formed the most unlikely friendship and it was in that spirit that we went forward on this journey together, poking into the darkest of political corners, asking the hardest, most sensitive of questions and pushing back on some of the most dearly held American creeds.

Lucy McBath, also a deeply faithful person, was far easier for me to meet and to understand. She is warm, eloquent and passionate. The story of her love for the son she lost in what can only be described as a monstrous act of cruelty was too awful to listen to, and too compelling to turn away from. Her honesty, her willingness to fight against the "shoot first" mentality that contributed to her son's murder, and her deep convictions as a Christian moved Rob to take more risks and to dig yet deeper for his moral courage.

Miraculous things can happen when people put aside their differences and choose to inhabit the spaces they share. Those spaces tend to be way above politics. That's what Rob and Lucy and I chose to do. And I think we have all been changed for the better. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk about this film. May it inspire deep introspection and the spirit of cooperation in each of you.

EVENT *Intention*

All of us are affected in one way or another by gun violence, whether through a family member, friend, colleague, community member, or through the news. It is important to discuss the issues that affect us all and to understand why people hold differing beliefs. Screening *The Armor of Light* offers a unique forum for education, discussion, self-reflection, and unity.

The purpose in holding this event is to help promote a respectful conversation about firearms and community safety. We want people to share perspectives on these issues in ways that others can hear and understand, and for people to be able to listen with the intention of understanding others, even those with whom they disagree. The goal is not to debate with one another, but rather to use the film as a springboard for conversation that brings new insights, deepens understanding, and identifies shared values.



CONVERSATION *Agreements*

Agreements about communication help create a safe enough space for people to speak thoughtfully, listen respectfully, and have an honest, productive conversation.

The following are suggested guidelines.

WE WILL KEEP CONFIDENTIALITY.

People may want to express sensitive opinions. We agree not to share what we hear from others in a way that they can be identified, without permission.

WE WILL PARTICIPATE VOLUNTARILY.

If we don't feel comfortable answering a question at any point, we may feel free to "pass" or "pass for now."

WE WILL USE RESPECTFUL LANGUAGE.

Productive discussion requires that we not disparage others' opinions or beliefs. We will refrain from attacking or criticizing others, and ask questions instead to deepen our understanding of how they came to their views.

WE WILL BE OPEN.

We will attempt to recognize and set aside assumptions we may have about the experiences, beliefs, and motives of others. We will do our best to be open to learning from one another.

WE WILL LISTEN ATTENTIVELY.

We will give speakers our full attention and listen without interrupting.

WE WILL SPEAK FOR OURSELVES.

We will avoid using generalizations like "we all" and "nobody." We don't want to assume where everyone is coming from or isolate anyone from the conversation. Let's use language like "I believe" or "I think."

WE WILL STAY ON TOPIC.

Staying on topic allows us to explore the many viewpoints and beliefs that stem from this issue.

SELF-HELP TOOLS *for Participants*

Controversial topics often make for excellent discussions. But by their very nature, those same topics can also give rise to deep emotions and the expression of strongly held beliefs. These strategies are helpful in working through any challenges that may arise.

IF YOU FEEL CUT OFF, say so or override the interruption. ("I'd like to finish...")

IF YOU FEEL MISUNDERSTOOD, clarify what you mean. ("Let me put this another way...")

IF YOU FEEL MISHEARD, ask the listener to repeat what she heard you say and affirm or correct her statement.

IF YOU FEEL HURT OR DISRESPECTED, say so. If possible, describe exactly what you heard or saw that evoked hurt feelings in you. ("When you said x, I felt y..." where "x" refers to specific language.) If it is hard to think of what to say, just say, "OUCH" to flag your reaction.

IF YOU FEEL ANGRY, express the anger directly ("I felt angry when I heard you say x...") rather than expressing it or acting it out indirectly (by trashing another person's statement or asking a sarcastic or rhetorical question).

IF YOU FEEL CONFUSED, frame a question that seeks clarification or more information. You may prefer to paraphrase what you have heard. ("Are you saying that...?")

IF YOU FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THE PROCESS, state your discomfort and check in with the group to see how others are experiencing what is happening. ("I'm not comfortable with the tension I'm feeling in the room right now, and I'm wondering how others are feeling.") If others share your concerns and you have an idea about what would help, offer that idea. ("How about taking a one-minute Time Out to reflect on what we are trying to do together?")

IF YOU FEEL THE CONVERSATION IS GOING OFF TRACK, share your perception, and check in with others. ("I thought we were going to discuss x before moving to y, but it seems that we bypassed x and are focusing on y. Is that right?" [If so] "I'd like to get back to x and hear from more people about it.")

CONTINUING *the Conversation*

Filmmaker Abigail Disney made *The Armor of Light* in hopes of changing the conversation about guns in America. Now you're invited to keep the conversation going.

Should you choose to talk about the film with others, here are some sample discussion questions:

- 1) The film suggests various ways that people's life experiences have influenced their perspectives on gun violence and safety. What experiences in your life have shaped your beliefs or feelings about guns?
- 2) *The Armor of Light* shows that people have strong emotions about protecting their families, which in some cases makes them want to keep a gun on hand, and in others, motivates them to advocate for gun regulations. Does this desire inform your beliefs around guns, and if yes, how so? Can you empathize with the point of view of someone who is approaching this differently from you?
- 3) How does terminology surrounding the issue, such as "gun control," "gun rights," and "pro-gun," affect the debate at large? How do the terms that people put on this debate accurately or inaccurately describe your position? What would accurately describe it?

No matter where you may stand, let your voice be heard, and listen deeply to others.

Director Abigail Disney says: "*The Armor of Light* is an attempt to do the moral homework of guns and violence in America, an attempt to kind of step back from the yelling and ask ourselves what our values are around the taking of human life, and then to have a look at policy and legislation and the rest of it. ... You don't have to go that deep to find common ground with someone who's incredibly different from you, honestly. The first time Rob and I ever spoke, I said, "Rob, I know that we violently disagree, and I know that if we wanted to, we could have a great big fight pretty quickly here. But I also know you do what you do because you're a good person and you see things differently than I do. So let's make a decision to put the disagreements over here—not to ignore them, but just to say we'll get to those later. And then, once they're over there, let's choose to inhabit all of the rest of the space we occupy, emotionally, morally, intellectually, and see what happens. And what happened was, we have a profound friendship that was a shock and amazement to both of us."

"I was one of those people who when I would hear about shootings and gun violence and everything, I would pray for the people, but I never thought it would ever happen to us."

— Lucy McBath,
mother of teen victim of gun
violence Jordan Davis

"Lucy's personal experience moved me past a kind of point of inertia. I knew this issue required critical attention, but I couldn't get past that point of inertia. But her story was so compelling that it pulled me across the threshold. And I'm hoping to persuade some people that there's a better path to take in all of this. That there's something closer to what Christ taught and modeled for us."

— Reverend Rob Schenck,
president of Faith and Action

"I want my son's legacy to be something that makes a difference for everybody. This is not just for Jordan. This is for Trayvon. This is for Sandy Hook. This is for Aurora. This is for Virginia Tech."

— Lucy McBath

"I love and respect the folks that are my family, but it gets harder to reconcile these two conflicting positions of being pro-life and what I'm going to call pro-gun."

— Rev. Rob Schenck

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