



## Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

[presbypeacefellowship.org/ga223](http://presbypeacefellowship.org/ga223)

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## Briefing Paper for GA Committee

# 11

## Social Justice

### Dear Members of Committee 11,

Greetings as you prepare for the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly! Presbyteries and standing committees have brought an extraordinary agenda of items to Committee 11. We write because each action before you overlaps with Presbyterian Peace Fellowship concerns on violence, exploitation and human rights. We also want to share some suggestions on the item on gun violence prevention and our concerns on one plenary issue. God bless you in your service in St. Louis. If there is any way that PPF can be of help to you, please call on us.

Sincerely,

Rev. Emily Brewer, Executive Director

[ga@presbypeacefellowship.org](mailto:ga@presbypeacefellowship.org)

**Please see p. 3 for GA Plenary Information**

### Racism & Equality, Violence & Violation

We celebrate *A Gospel from St. Louis* (11-10), focusing the attention of the GA on the challenges faced by the local community, especially in the area of racial justice, and the creative and determined ministries of congregations in the St. Louis area. We take hope in the recommendation (11-11) to declare a Decade of Intercultural Transformation, train anti-racism facilitators, and encourage anti-racism training throughout the church.

We support overtures (11-04, 11-12, 11-13) that nurture full equality for LGBTQ persons in both the church and community. We affirm the importance of *A Resolution to Respond to Disparities Experienced by Black Women and Girls* (11-07), which offers next steps to explore this topic and develop recommendations.

We support Overture (11-02) for a moratorium on the violence of executions, reaffirming PC(USA) long-standing opposition to the death penalty. Clergy sexual misconduct is addressed in a resolution (11-09) calling for greater transparency about the scope of this problem. We support this. Another important item to be considered is a major report (11-08) on drug policy with recommendations for treatment-based rather than criminalizing approaches. We affirm this proposal.

(See Over on Gun Violence Prevention)

### Celebrating 74 Years!

**Who we are:** Founded in 1944, the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship is a nation-wide community of Presbyterians who act on the example of Jesus to reduce war, violence and exploitation. We are a non-partisan group, open to all Presbyterians. Except for a small staff, we are volunteers who pay our own way to GA. We do not work for or represent any government or outside lobby group. Because of our focus on peacemaking, we have divested our Peace Fellowship Endowment Fund at the Presbyterian Foundation of all fossil fuel companies and over 20 companies that profit from or enable the Occupation of Palestine by Israel.

**Be Bold! Nonviolence Works.**

Please see [presbypeacefellowship.org/ga223](http://presbypeacefellowship.org/ga223) for information on all peacemaking issues coming to the 223<sup>rd</sup> GA. If you have questions or suggestions at GA, you can always text us. Text GApeace to 33222.

In the GA Exhibit area, visit us at **Booth 119-121** for conversation & for education/action resources.

### Join Us for the Peace Breakfast!

**Wed. June 20, 7am, Tickets at [ga-pcusa.org](http://ga-pcusa.org)**

### Progressive Presbyterians GA Issues Briefing Breakfast, Sat. June 16, 7-9 am

at Centenary Methodist Church. No ticket is required, but please register at [presbypeacefellowship.org/ga223](http://presbypeacefellowship.org/ga223)  
Option: Following this briefing, join the last leg of the 260 mile PCUSA Walk for a Fossil Free World, from the Centenary Methodist Church to the General Assembly.

### PCUSA Walk for a Fossil Free World

**June 1- 16,** We are walking from the PC(USA) offices in Louisville to the GA in St. Louis. Step-by-step, the walkers join 40 presbyteries that have called for action at the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly to protect creation by divesting from fossil fuel stocks. **See [pcusawalk.org](http://pcusawalk.org)**

To join The Walk for the final day, including the entry into St. Louis, contact [info@presbypeacefellowship.org](mailto:info@presbypeacefellowship.org)  
**Closing Worship** –Join in The Walk's closing worship service on Fri. June 15 at 7pm at Centenary Methodist Church, 55 Plaza Square, St. Louis.

You can also view live-streamed teach-ins and worship from The Walk each night June 1- 15 at **#walk2divest** or [pcusawalk.org](http://pcusawalk.org)

## Gun Violence Prevention

The item before your committee with which our group has the greatest expertise is Overture (11-14) *On Praying for a Movement of the Spirit to Engage Presbyterian Congregations in Nation-Wide Action to Prevent Gun Violence*. We support this overture.

**This is not an overture asking the GA to create another policy or statement on gun violence. It is a not another overture calling for national offices of the church to take action. This is not a prayer for victims of gun violence.**

Instead, this overture is a call to prayer *for ourselves* in the local churches of the PC(USA). It asks us to pray to God to help us find our footing for action on this issue. Fifty years of national PC(USA) policy needs local action. This overture seeks to start a coast-to-coast Presbyterian prayer, asking God to help us overcome whatever has held us back from acting on our gun violence prevention policies and hopes.

In the last year, over 36,000 Americans died from gun violence. Our schoolchildren fear being shot at school every day. No other nation in the world lives this way.

With each mass shooting, momentum for change rises and then falls away. Our nation needs the help of local churches on this issue. Americans need safe places to talk together about the issue, study groups to learn what steps are possible to prevent gun violence and to share their own experience with gun violence. Local churches can mobilize a national conversation with our elected officials to find compromises that will make a difference, balancing gun rights with public safety. Yes, some churches are already involved, but most of us are not.

### What Can Committee 11 Do?

Can your Committee inspire the community of commissioners and visitors gathered at the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly to take this prayer far and wide throughout the PC(USA)? Might an anointing of the spirit occur to and through the Presbyterians gathered at GA? Might God start to answer this prayer through you?

#### Some ideas:

1. Pray the overture prayer together in your committee. Spend time in conversation among yourselves about local church action to help reduce gun violence. The best next step may emerge in your conversations.
2. Listen carefully to the Overture Advocates who will speak in your committee. Their spirits seek to be part of a national movement of local Presbyterians acting to prevent gun violence. Invite them to work with you.
3. Ask the full General Assembly plenary to stand and pray this or a similar prayer together. Find a way to

inspire each commissioner and visitor to take the prayer process home to their church and presbytery.

4. Make it visible. Make use of buttons that PPF will bring to GA: **Gun Violence Prevention – Count Me In!**
5. Share practical resources with the Assembly, such as the *Gun Violence Prevention Congregational Toolkit* from the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, resources from **The Presbyterian Outlook** or Presbyterian Disaster Assistance or the books by Rev. James Atwood such as *Gundamentalism & Where it is Taking America*. Visit the Peace Fellowship booth 119-121 in the exhibit hall to find bookmarks and prayer cards with “Ten Things your Church Can Do to Prevent Gun Violence” or “Ten Steps America Can Take Right Now to Reduce Gun Violence.”
6. Support students who are now taking action. This overture was written before the Parkland, Florida school shooting in February and its youth-led response since. Committee 11 may want to amend the overture prayer to include the witness of the students. A suggestion:

*Gracious God, whose mercy never ends, whose Spirit brings the Kairos moment for change:*

*We confess our past willingness to abide the deaths of over one million, six hundred thousand souls lost to gun violence since 1968 -- the children, the parents, the distraught, as well as millions more injured, ruined, orphaned, widowed. Help us to comprehend this carnage and not become numb.*

*We commend and give thanks for the long witness of the General Assembly and all Presbyterians who are already engaged in preventing gun violence. We thank you for raising up the students to lead us with their marches, their walk-outs, their passion born of pain.*

*We call upon you, Lord; we have nowhere else to turn. Galvanize all of us, every congregation in the Presbyterian Church. Wake us up in our pews and our lives; do not let Christ find us asleep on this watch. Rather, Lord, grant to our church members, both those of us who own guns and those of us who do not, a unity of purpose to change the national debate on gun violence. Show us the path to education and action.*

*At all the places where you are proclaimed, give us courage to stand against principalities and powers. Grant us the joy of using the gifts that you provide -- energy, intelligence, imagination and love-- to help our communities and our nation heal from this sorrow and tragedy. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.*



To learn more on this issue, see **The Congregational Toolkit**, filled with education and action resources, available at the Peace Fellowship General Assembly booth 119-121 or by mail or as a free download at [www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence/resources](http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence/resources)

## The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Reflects on One GA Plenary Issue: Climate Change

Addressing climate change requires an unprecedented mobilization of human genius, unity, timeliness and love. We support many of the climate-related proposals before GA, including steps to reduce carbon use by individuals, churches and institutions, as well as support for alternative energy loans, employment and investment. Along with 40 presbyteries, we call upon GA to support Overture 08-01, "Overture on Directing the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation to Divest from Fossil Fuels and Actively Invest in Securities that Focus on Renewable Energy."

## Top Five Reasons to Divest from Fossil Fuels Now

**1. Because we believe in God, Creator of heaven and earth.** From the beginning (Genesis 1:28/Genesis 2:15), God calls humanity as stewards of creation, in order to keep the earth a home for all living things. Jesus calls for repentance; when we have gone in a wrong direction, Christ helps us **turn around**. He gives us the courage to act now as the stewards God made us to be.

**2. Because war and violence will be fueled by climate disasters.** Climate change will make food, safe water and habitable land scarcer and costlier, indirectly leading to perpetual violence and war. According to the research of Marshall Burke and Solomon Hsiang, for each half-degree increase in temperature, we can expect a ten to twenty percent increase in armed conflict.<sup>1</sup> With an increase of five degrees, we could see world violence double by the end of this century. The U.S. Department of Defense describes climate change as a "threat multiplier" of poverty, disease, mass displacement, migration and political instability.<sup>2</sup> Climate-caused resource scarcity has already been deadly for the people in Syria, Somalia and other places. In "National Security and the Accelerating Risks of Climate Change," the CNA Advisory Board (retired high-level U.S. military officers) writes: "The extent to which military forces will be used to protect the homeland in response to projected climate change impacts should not be limited by our past history of military deployments or limited by failures of imagination."<sup>3</sup> As peacemakers, we need to act now.

**3. Because time is up to mitigate climate change.** Climate change is coming faster than first predicted. From words now removed from its website under the current EPA administrator, the EPA stated in 2015: "Global temperatures are projected to increase worldwide by 2° F to 11.5°F by 2100."<sup>4</sup> What does this

mean? In a stunning article worth reading by every Presbyterian, David Wallace-Wells organized the scientific literature on what could happen with this increase in heat. His findings go far beyond rising sea levels: "Absent a significant adjustment to how billions of humans conduct their lives, parts of the Earth will likely become close to uninhabitable, and other parts horrifically inhospitable, as soon as the end of this century."<sup>5</sup> There are no "do-overs" with climate change. The fossil fuel industry has known of these dangers since the 1970s and has expended millions of dollars to confuse and deny them. We simply do not have more time to talk with the fossil fuel industry; they must change now.

**4. Because divestment makes the faithful impact.** Divestment, not more corporate engagement, will wake up the oil and gas industry from "business as usual." There are many ways we can fight climate change, but divestment is the most direct action the Presbyterian Church as a whole can take. Divestment aligns all our investments with PCUSA policy against investing in ways that harm people. We are powerful when we join over 800 other faith, academic, and philanthropic institutions, with assets of \$6 trillion, to divest from fossil fuels. We have the support of 40 presbyteries that have voted in favor of this.

**5. Because we need to be at the right table.** The MRTI report calls us to stay at the table of the oil and gas industry. Is that the right table for us? No. We are called to the table of people who are marginalized, to the table of our siblings in frontline communities who already suffer because of fossil fuels. Proponents of shareholder engagement tell us that divestment means we will shame the industry. Yes, we probably will. But until we divest, we betray Christ's call to care for people who are marginalized and God's call to be stewards. Fossil Fuel divestment is now central to living out our faith. All the good actions and writings of our denomination to respond to climate change are for nothing if we continue to fund the industry that is harming creation.

1 Burke, Solomon and Carleton, "Conflict in a Changing Climate," The European Physical Journal, Spring 2016. [www.stanford.edu/~mburke/papers/Carleton\\_Hsiang\\_Burke2016.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/~mburke/papers/Carleton_Hsiang_Burke2016.pdf)

2 U.S. Dept of Defense, "2014 Climate Change Roadmap." [www.acq.osd.mil/EIE/Downloads/CCARprint\\_wForward\\_e.pdf](http://www.acq.osd.mil/EIE/Downloads/CCARprint_wForward_e.pdf)

3 [www.cna.org/cna\\_files/pdf/MAB\\_5-8-14.pdf](http://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/MAB_5-8-14.pdf)

4 [www.epa.gov/climatechange/science/overview](http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/science/overview) (No longer available on-line)

5 David Wallace-Wells, "The Uninhabitable Earth," [www.nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/07/climate-change-earth-too-hot-for-humans-annotated.html](http://www.nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/07/climate-change-earth-too-hot-for-humans-annotated.html)