



Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

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Text GApeace to 33222 to get
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Briefing Paper for GA Committee

12

Middle East

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 for information on all peacemaking issues coming to the 223rd 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

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
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 223rd General Assembly to protect creation by divesting from fossil fuel stocks. **See pcusawalk.org**

To join The Walk for the final day, including the entry into St. Louis, contact 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

Dear Committee 12,

Greetings from the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship (PPF) as you prepare to serve at the 223rd General Assembly. We write to lift up several items before Committee 12 and to share a concern about one GA plenary action.

We strongly support the *Overture On Responding to the Current Syrian Crisis (12-09)*, which recommends four responses: stop the killing; work for reconciliation; alleviate the suffering; and deepen PC(USA) partnership with Syrian Christians. This overture was drafted with the assistance of the Syria Lebanon Partnership Network, which works closely with The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL), and it reflects the perspectives of Christians in the region.

As followers of the Prince of Peace, and out of a long history of mission relationships in the region, the PC(USA) has stayed faithful to the hope for a just peace in Israel-Palestine, even when that hope appears very dim. A significant number of items before your committee focus on Israel-Palestine.

We support two overtures (12-03 and 12-04) asking for a response to an open letter that came from the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine (NCCOP). The letter asks that we strengthen our statements and expand our actions to support them in this time of increasing oppression. Creating a task force will have financial implications, but the pleas of our Christian sisters and brothers must not go unanswered.

We oppose the overture (12-06) on Protection of the Children because it does not reflect what is actually happening to children in the region. It expands on a 2016 GA statement opposing the detention of Palestinian children by the Israeli military and the recruitment of children by Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. We believe the 2016 action was balanced and appropriate and necessary. This new overture implies there is an equivalence of harm, as if the harm now occurring to children on each side were **(cont. over)**

(cont.) in some way the same. It fails to recognize that most of the violence against children is at the hands of the Israeli military. The Israeli military is one of the most powerful militaries in the world. It has detained thousands of impoverished Palestinian children and subjected them to physical and psychological violence, denied them the right to counsel, and used forced confessions to justify long imprisonments.

We urge careful consideration of Item (12-05) on Jewish-Christian Dialogue. There is clearly a need for open, truthful conversations, but Presbyterians should use discernment about the wisdom of confrontational approaches. The overture says to insist that boundaries for discourse are set mutually, but might we sometimes participate even when the context is biased against us?

We support several other items of business before your committee. An **overture (12-07) on RE/MAX** asks the real estate company to stop listing, selling, or renting property in the illegal Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. A **proposed study (12-08) on the status of Jerusalem** would be helpful for responding to recent decisions by the Trump administration regarding that city.

An **overture (12-01) in opposition to Anti-BDS legislation** criticizes laws such as the Israel Anti-Boycott Act, which imposes civil and criminal penalties for participation in Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions actions in response to human rights violations by Israel. This law is now before Congress, and has been called unconstitutional by the ACLU and legal scholars.

An **overture (12-02) on human rights for all citizens of Israel** reminds us that discrimination against Palestinian Muslims and Palestinian Christians is occurring inside Israel as well as in the West Bank and Gaza, and seeks to bring Israel into full compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

How else can you support peace in Israel-Palestine?

As the occupying power, Israel is able to deny Palestinian control over natural resources. Through settlements in the West Bank, blockade of Gaza, and attacks on infrastructure, the Occupation has damaged these natural resources, especially water. Both Israel and Palestine are vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The prospects for peace are threatened when all nations fail to aggressively support climate justice and reduce their use of fossil fuels. Your support of fossil fuel divestment at this GA is the most important action you can take on behalf of peace in the Middle East.

Thank you for serving at GA. We wish you faith, energy and a wonderful experience in St. Louis. If there is anything that the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship can do to be of help, please call on us.

Sincerely,
Rev. Emily Brewer, PPF Executive Director
ga@presbypeacefellowship.org

Through GA Committee 14, all commissioners will consider a proposal to adopt Martin Luther King's 1963 "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" as a Contemporary Statement of Faith. Here is one selection:

I had also hoped that the white moderate would reject the myth concerning time in relation to the struggle for freedom.... the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills....

Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of [people] willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right.

---Martin Luther King. Jr.
"Letter from Birmingham City Jail"

Please see the next page for GA Plenary Information.

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.¹ 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.² 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."³ 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."⁴ 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."⁵ 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

2 U.S. Dept of Defense, "2014 Climate Change Roadmap." www.acq.osd.mil/EIE/Downloads/CCARprint_wForward_e.pdf

3 www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/MAB_5-8-14.pdf

4 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