



SUMMER 2018

## Join the movement to end cash bail

*By Rick Jones, adapted from a story originally published in the Presbyterian News Service*

Several hundred Presbyterians took to the streets on a hot and humid Tuesday afternoon in downtown St. Louis calling for social, racial and economic justice. Participants — including Co-Moderators Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri and the Rev. Cindy Kohlmann, along with the Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly — joined other advocacy groups for the one-mile walk from America’s Center (St. Louis’ convention center) to the City Justice Center to participate in a “bailout.”

Organizers say the jails are full of people being held on minor offenses, unable to pay cash bail. The marchers, working with local organizations such as the Bail Project and the St. Louis Action Council, took more than \$47,000 — collected at Saturday’s opening worship offering and from online contributions — to provide bail for people who had been pre-screened for release.

Local advocates say the inability to pay bail has been a driving force in the increase in mass incarceration over the past 15 years, resulting in job loss, mounting fines and child custody issues. The Bail Project screens incarcerated individuals and

seeks to help those whose bail is less than \$5,000 so more people can receive assistance.

Nelson challenged the marchers to go back home and find young activists and see what they can do in their own communities.

Gina Torres, a St. Louis resident, lost her son a year ago when he was killed during a police raid. She was marching at the front of the line.

“This march means a lot to me because mass incarceration needs to stop,” she said. “There are people in jails that

don’t have the means of bailing out. I just hope it makes a difference.”

Higgins hopes it sends a strong message to those who have lost hope.

“It is a message for people who are in chains right now that we will be with you. We’ll come into the jails if we have to and we will shout and make demands with you,” she said. “We’re not free until you are.”

For information on next steps and how to get involved, visit [bit.ly/2LoEZzM](http://bit.ly/2LoEZzM).



*Photo: Danny Bolin*



# The Israel Anti-Boycott Act

On June 28, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs unanimously voted in support of the Israel Anti-Boycott Act. This legislation would allow the Trump administration to decide what penalties U.S. companies and individuals that engage in or promote boycotts of Israel or Israeli settlements would face — including through criminal and financial penalties.

While this is a modified version of the initial bill, the American Civil Liberties Union warned that the bill still violates the First Amendment “by unconstitutionally penalizing Americans who participate in political boycotts of companies doing business in Israel and its settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, if those boycotts were called for by international governmental organizations” like the United Nations or European Union.

In addition to legislation before Congress, over 20 states have adopted laws or executive orders aimed at boycotts of Israel and/or Israeli settlements located in occupied Palestinian territory.

Last November leaders representing 17 Christian organizations sent a letter to all members of Congress calling on them to oppose the Israel Anti-Boycott Act, which was introduced in both the House and the Senate in March. The bills (H.R. 1697 and S.720) are part of a larger effort to outlaw or penalize the use of boycotts, divestment and sanctions aimed at unjust Israeli policies.

“As U.S. Christian churches and organizations committed to justice and peace in the Middle East,” the leaders wrote, “we are deeply concerned by the introduction of the Israel Anti-Boycott Act in the Senate (S.720) and in the House (H.R.1697). This legislation, if adopted, would put legal obstacles in the way of nonviolent peaceful action meant to bring about social change, and would legislate against the freedom to make choices in the stewardship of our financial resources. The bills also conflate

Israel and the settlements, erasing the important distinction in between Israel and its illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.”

The leaders explained in the letter that their opposition to the Israel Anti-Boycott Act “is an effort to change unjust Israeli policy toward Palestinians, not to delegitimize the State of Israel, nor to marginalize or isolate our Jewish neighbors, or their enterprises. Our choices to purchase and invest responsibly, and to advocate with corporations or governments, are motivated by our firm commitments to justice and peace for all people, without discrimination or exclusion.”

Urging opposition to the bill, the letter states, “As churches and church-related organizations, we reject any efforts by the state to curtail these rights. We urge you to oppose the proposed legislation, and thus support the rights of individuals and institutions to spend and invest in accordance with their faith, values, and policies.”

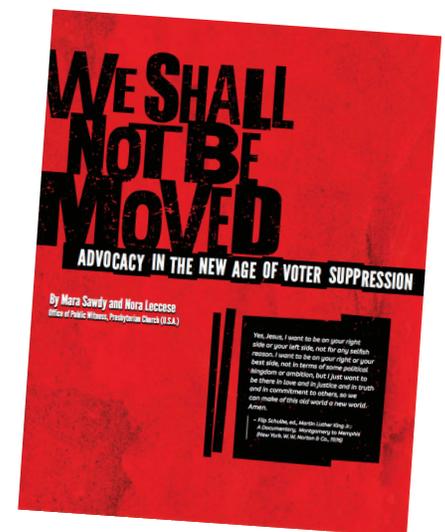
In June, the 223rd General Assembly called on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) “to defend and advocate for the constitutional protection under the First Amendment for all ... that exercise their freedoms of speech, association, and other civil rights to support measures of economic witness to bring those freedoms and rights to Palestinians and other persons living without full citizenship and under occupation.” The Assembly also called on the PC(USA) to oppose specific U.S. legislation to suppress measures of economic witness boycott, divestment, sanctions, or BDS policies and strategies.

Consider bringing this important issue to your congregation and asking members to contact their elected officials. Contact our office for more information and resources.

## Our Faith, Our Vote: Resources for Presbyterians to Engage with the 2018 Midterm Elections

In line with a legacy of affirming the right for all citizens to participate in the democratic process, the 223rd General Assembly passed an overture calling on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to oppose “any efforts to restrict participation in elections, including, but not limited to, voter suppression initiatives and racially based and/or partisan gerrymandering.”

Got to [presbyterianmission.org/opw](http://presbyterianmission.org/opw) to access the “Our Faith, Our Vote” toolkit designed to help congregations and members offer witness to the values and promises of a just and equitable electoral process. In addition to the resources presented, be sure to watch our webinar on engaging congregation members in the upcoming election, which can also be found at [presbyterianmission.org/opw](http://presbyterianmission.org/opw).





## Action Summary of the 223rd General Assembly Peacemaking, Immigration, and International Issues Committee

The committee on peacemaking, immigration, and international issues worked diligently at the 223rd General Assembly to approve overtures for the better good of global peace and human rights. Those passed by the General Assembly included:

- **[09-02] – On Support and Prayer for the Church and People of South Sudan:** Overtures the PC(USA) to call upon the U.S. government to freeze financial assets to leaders of all armed groups who fail to agree to and implement a ceasefire, and promote an inclusive peace process. It also directs the PMA to advocate for public policy that protects the human rights of the people of South Sudan.
- **[09-04] – On Endorsing Affirmations Regarding the Welfare of Our Neighbors in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador:** Overtures the PC(USA) to incorporate Meso-American voices in its immigration and refugee advocacy efforts, and invest in peacemaking in the Northern Triangle to reduce migration.
- **[09-05] – A Resolution to Advocate for the Human Rights of All Citizens of Yemen:** Overtures the PC(USA) to acknowledge the devastation and the U.S. role in Yemen, and directs the PMA to advocate for an immediate end to hostilities, cessation of U.S. military and financial support of Saudi Arabia's Yemeni war, and a just political solution.
- **[09-07] – On Promoting Democracy, Good Governance, Human Rights, and Sustainable Development in Madagascar:** Overtures the PC(USA) to call on U.S. government officials to offer increased financial and technical support for promoting democracy, good governance, human rights and sustainable developments in Madagascar, and directs the PMA to advise on ways to advocate on behalf of democracy and of our sisters and brothers in Madagascar.
- **[09-08] – On Seeking God's Peace Through Nuclear Disarmament in the 21st Century:** Overtures the PC(USA) to take any effective actions possible for a total elimination of nuclear weapons from the earth, and call upon the U.S. government to eliminate funding for programs designed to prolong nuclear danger, and join in the international efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament.
- **[09-09] – Concerning Prayer and Preparation for Peace on the Korean Peninsula:** Overtures the PC(USA) to encourage congregations to pray for North Korean victims of human rights, and remain hopeful that peace and reunification will come to the Korean peninsula.
- **[09-10] – A Study of Socio-Economic and Political Realities of Central America:** Overtures the PC(USA) to direct the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to develop a comprehensive study of the current socioeconomic and political realities in Central America, and to report these findings to the next General Assembly.
- **[09-12] – Commissioners' Resolution: On North Korean Refugees:** Overtures the PC(USA) to designate September 2018 as Korean Mission month to pray for peace and reflect on past Presbyterian mission to Korea. It also directs the PC(USA) to communicate with domestic and international governments and agencies to encourage peaceful resolutions, and encourage national governments to lift sanctions on North Korea, as appropriate, to begin steps toward peace and justice.
- **[09-13] – Commissioners' Resolution: On Prayer for the People of Nicaragua:** Overtures the PC(USA) to invite congregations to pray for peace and an end to violence in Nicaragua, and instruct the PMA to oppose any proposed intervention of the U.S. into the current affairs of Nicaragua, whether it be military, economic or diplomatic.
- **[09-14] – Commissioners' Resolution: Stop the Separation of Families:** Overtures the PC(USA) to direct the federal government to end the zero-tolerance policy and reunite parents and children as soon as possible. It also calls on the PC(USA) to condemn the president's June 20 executive order "Affording Congress an Opportunity to Address Family Separation."
- **[09-15] – Commissioners' Resolution: On Denouncing Violence and Injustice in Nicaragua:** Overtures the PC(USA) and its respective entities to speak out on behalf of the people of Nicaragua in response to escalating violence and repression in the form of a written statement. The PC(USA) shall also create an interagency and interfaith coalition to prioritize these issues.

The Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns said this about one of the overtures, which also beautifully captures the motive behind all approved overtures in this committee, "**The commitment to peace is one of the most urgently needed priorities of the global church, the community, and the world. It is an integral part of our biblical mandate and reformed theology. We live in an age of violence, war, and extremism. Churches committed to being witnesses of peace in such time should be encouraged and supported. Their models of faithful witness to peace and reconciliation will bring glory to God and a fulfillment of Christ's commandment to be peacemakers and healers in a deeply hurt, divided culture.**"



# Just Transition: A pathway to environmental justice?

In response to a question on energy policy during a Democratic town hall in Ohio in 2016, presidential candidate Hillary Clinton said, “We’re going to put a lot of coal miners and coal companies out of business.” Though this response was embedded in a larger answer that recognized the work of coal miners, this soundbite rightfully stung energy industry workers. Historically, these workers have been neglected and scapegoated in our national conversation about transitioning to clean energy sources and new economies. It is imperative that people of faith reject the false choice between supporting the planet and supporting workers and embrace solutions that extend God’s grace to all of creation.

In fact, labor union leaders have built a framework that dates to the 1970s called “just transition,” which offers us a path forward to care for people and creation. It demands that as we make the shift from our current, dominant economy — which hurts people and the planet — to a new economy, we must keep the well-being, safety and livelihood of the workers that participate in exploitative industries at the center of our work. The Book of Genesis tells us that God made humans and put them the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (2:14–16). God tasked us with being faithful stewards, so we must tend to and care for one another as we make shifts in our economies to take care of our planet. We as Presbyterians must study just transition, as it reflects our biblical mandate to care for all of God’s people and creation, not to make a choice between the two. Our movement for environmental justice is stronger when we include everybody, especially those who have labored in difficult and dangerous positions to maintain a high quality of life in Western countries for centuries.

This year, the 223rd General Assembly called on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to renew its commitment to environmental justice and to recognize the people most impacted by ecological devastation, such as those extractive industry workers. In an overture titled On Responding to Environmental Racism and to Promote Environmental

Justice, the General Assembly called on the church to position its approach to environmental issues to include the voices and perspectives of those impacted by environmental racism — in accordance with the Gospel. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, environmental justice refers to “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.” The environmental justice movement was born in the 1960s from the resistance of communities of color to the fact that dirty industries like waste disposal, mining and energy generation were located next to their homes and schools. The conditions they experience can best be described as environmental racism, which refers to the fact that marginalized communities in the United States and global South are disproportionately affected by ecological devastation. Communities of color often do not have access to clean water or clean air and are excluded from decision-making processes around land management and natural resources. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recognizes the importance of uplifting the voices that are most affected by these respective issues. Only community-driven solutions can bring justice to communities.

The history of the just transition movement has a great deal to offer us in terms of understanding how social movements shape demands. Tony Mazzocchi, leader of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW) union, witnessed the false choice workers are asked to make between livelihood and creation care when he attempted to mobilize atomic workers and trade unionists into the peace movement during the 1970s. As he began organizing them, he witnessed their jobs threatened by peace. Seeking an alternative to their displacement, Mazzocchi developed a concept for a program in the 1990s that he called the “Superfund for workers.” The initiative provided financial provisions and higher education opportunities for workers whose jobs were threatened or displaced by environmental



## FROM BANKS AND TANKS TO COOPERATION AND CARING

A Strategic Framework for a Just Transition





## Just Transition *Continued from previous page*

protection policies. He modeled the concept after the GI bill, which allowed him the opportunity to pursue college after his service in the Second World War. His close colleague and executive director of the Labor Institute, Les Leopold, outlined the details of the proposal. Eventually, Leopold and OCAW President Bob Wages joined efforts to facilitate conversations on the topic, which led to the formation of the Just Transition Alliance in 1997. Soon after, the “just transition” concept began to show up in different arenas of the North American labor movement and the global labor movement — and more recently, the ideas have appeared in the environmental justice movement. Pressure from frontline communities has resulted in the concept being adopted by “big green” environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club and the BlueGreen Alliance.

Movement Generation is one of the organizations, led by people on the front lines, that is developing this framework. In a resource titled *Strategic Framework for a Just Transition*, they propose that all economies are based on five pillars: purpose, natural resources, human labor, culture and governance, which is a helpful lens through which to consider our current global economy. The Confessions of 1967 clearly outline our concern as Christians with an economy that does not provide for all. It says we “cannot condone poverty, whether it is the product of unjust social structures, exploitation of the defenseless, lack of national resources, absence of technological understanding or rapid expansion of populations.” This means that while the purpose of our economic system may not be to amass and concentrate wealth and power, that has certainly been the result. Our dominant economy is justified by our culture of consumerism, which relies on participants believing self-worth is tied to our own accumulations of wealth and power. Our system of governance centers militarism, an organized system of violence that seeks new frontiers for the purpose of acquiring exploitable and extractable resources to enclose and amass wealth and power. Our current economy is organized around a principle of scarcity, in which a limited and finite set of resources are produced that regenerate at a much slower rate than the pace at which we extract from it. This means that our dominant economy is unsustainable and the end of an economy that relies on fossil fuels and benefits the few is all but inevitable. It also means that a transition to a new economy is unavoidable. However, like stakeholders in the environmental justice space have warned, a transition that uplifts communities, centers workers and focuses on restoring the environment is not guaranteed.

An example of the way an economic system based in dominance exists today is in our relationship with indigenous people. Indigenous people in the United States have long

been denied their right to sovereignty, self-determination and the implementation of their knowledge. In 2016, the 222nd General Assembly called on the Church to repudiate the doctrine of discovery in an overture titled *On Offering an Apology to Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians*. The overture states: “Our burdens include dishonoring the depths of the struggles of Native American people and the richness of your gifts. Therefore, we confess to you that when our Presbyterian ancestors journeyed to this land within the last few centuries, we did not respect your own indigenous knowledges and epistemologies as valid.” The overture includes language that references a culture of conversion and a governance of coercion intended to increase the power of the colonial settlers. Just transition framework parallels the apology in that it condemns colonization, asks that those wounds be repaired and affirms the rights of indigenous people.

Just transition is more than a visionary demand. There are concrete policy solutions that would bring us closer to an equitable environmental solution for communities and the planet. For instance, Rep. Harold Rogers (R-KY) introduced a bill to the House of Representatives, the “RECLAIM Act of 2017,” that amends the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1997 to highlight the role of communities in the vital restoration process. The act intends to allocate funds to states and indigenous tribes to “promote economic revitalization, diversification and development in economically distressed communities” that were affected by coal mining activity anytime before August 1977. The act permits the members of the communities most affected by coal mining, including miners, to contribute to the ecological and economic restoration of their own communities in ways that are culturally relevant. Other manifestations of the framework as policy have been the expansion of public transportation and the shift from landfills to zero waste.

A just transition would advance environmental and cultural restoration, drive racial and social justice forward, and relocate economic power from corporations to communities to democratize and redistribute wealth to guarantee so that all of God’s creations are treated with dignity and care. For more information on how build a movement for just transition as faithful stewards of God’s creations:

- Read more about just transition from the Indigenous Environmental Network and the Just Transition platform
- Learn your member of Congress’ stance on the RECLAIM act
- Consult the Advisory Committee Social Witness Policy to understand how the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) encourages Presbyterians to join the work against ecological devastation and for a just economy.





– SAVE THE DATE –  
**April 5–8, 2019**

**Ecumenical Advocacy Days**  
*and*  
**Compassion, Peace & Justice Training Day**  
*“Troubling the Waters for the Healing of the World”*  
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Join us April 5 for Compassion Peace & Justice Training Day at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. Gather with your fellow Presbyterians as we look at how our church and our partners are working on the most pressing issues of our time. In plenaries and workshops, we will analyze our current context and offer concrete tools for members and their congregations to address these urgent issues.

After Compassion Peace & Justice Training Day, join the ecumenical community for Ecumenical Advocacy Days, April 5–8. Almost 1,000 Christian advocates join us every year for a weekend of workshops, lectures and concrete actions addressing the ills of our nation. The weekend culminates in Lobby Day on Monday, April 8, when we raise our voices in the halls of power.

## Thank You to our Fellows!



JAMILA CERVANTES



EMILY GREEN

**Jamila Cervantes** is an Emerson National Hunger Fellow at the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness. For the first portion of their fellowship program, Jamila served as the Client Engagement Fellow at Oregon Food Bank in Portland, Oregon. Jamila is a Gates Millennium Scholar and a recent graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, with a combined degree in LGBTQ studies, Latin American studies and sociology. From May 13 to June 23, Jamila served as a social media manager for the national Poor People’s Campaign movement.

**Emily Green** is the Summer Fellow at the Office of Public Witness of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Emily has always been fascinated with the intersection of faith and politics and wanted to further engage in the PC(USA)’s ministry and advocacy on Capitol Hill. During her time here, she has worked on a broad range of international issues, with the main focuses being on Korean peace and justice in Israel/Palestine. Emily is a rising junior at Presbyterian College.



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