



WINTER 2018

When the Holy Family seeks asylum

Now after [the wise men] had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-14).

Mary and Joseph knew what it was to flee from violence, in fear for the life of their child. They knew that if they stayed where they were, Herod would find Jesus and kill him in his manger. Maria Nino knew the same fear when she and her three children fled violence in Honduras in search of safety and asylum in the United States.

The “slaughter of the innocents,” as it is known, is one of the darker elements of the Christmas story. The darkness bookends the story. The holy couple first encounters rejection at the inn and the offer of a stable. Then the joy bursts forth—the baby is born! The shepherds come to adore him and the wise men bring him gifts. Joy to the World! And this is where we usually stop reading the Christmas story.

But Mary and Joseph’s flight to Egypt is what takes place in the darkness after all the visitors have left. It’s the fear that comes when they startle awake in the night. “Flee,” the messenger tells Joseph. “The child is in danger.” And so, a young, weary family runs away to a foreign land in search of safety, sanctuary and asylum.

Maria Nino, who left Honduras to find safety for herself and her children, is part of the so-called migrant caravan, the group of people who are traveling thousands of miles in search of safety and asylum.

Will we let them in? Will we offer the same shelter sought by the Holy Family—Mary, Joseph, and little baby Jesus?

Right now, we are sending more soldiers to the border instead of offering safe haven. We are refusing to allow

people who need shelter to enter the United States. We are deliberately slowing down the processing system, so that many fewer people than we can handle are allowed to enter and formally seek asylum. When we do let them in, we detain them indefinitely in prisons euphemistically called detention centers.

The staff from the PC(USA) Office of Immigration Issues recently visited the U.S.–Mexico border. Amanda Craft reported on her walking trip across the Santa Fe Bridge between El Paso, TX, and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

“It is the United States that is creating the crisis at the border crossing between El Paso, TX, and Ciudad Juarez. Asylum seekers wait patiently on the bridge, waiting their turn to be allowed into the United States to ask for protection. The chaos is also affecting life in this bi-national metropolis. People in these two cities have lived between and across the border for generations. However, now this crisis is interrupting that way of life, and we witnessed volunteer fatigue as communities strive to meet the needs of new comers in their cities.”

Indeed, rather than offering the radical hospitality that Jesus calls us to offer in Matthew 25, we are closing the borders to the Holy Family and sending troops to make it very clear that they are not welcome here.

In this season of Advent, as we wait for the birth of the Christ child, what will we do when he gets here?

Jesus is at the border right now. Will we allow fear and hateful rhetoric to keep him out?



Maria Nino with children after sleeping in park in Tecun Uman. Adobe Stock



The crisis in Yemen



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The human-made crisis in Yemen is the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. One of the major causes of this crisis is Saudi Arabia's blockade of Yemen. Currently, 22.2 million people require humanitarian assistance and almost 18 million people require emergency food assistance. Nearly 14 million will be at risk of famine by the end of 2018 and over one million pregnant women and 400,000 children are suffering from severe, acute malnutrition.

Yemenis are unable to access the food and health services they need to survive. A diagnosis of cancer is a death sentence. More than half of Yemen's health care facilities have been destroyed and the Saudi-led coalition is restricting access to ports. All sides have restricted humanitarian organizations from providing lifesaving medicine and clean water, exacerbating the growing cholera epidemic, which has taken over 2,300 lives in the past year.

The United States is the largest arms supplier to Saudi Arabia, with \$8.4 billion worth of sales since 2014. Even though Congress never authorized U.S. involvement in the war in Yemen, by continuing to give military support to the Saudi-led coalition, the United States and we, as

its citizens, are complicit in the unnecessary suffering of the Yemeni people.

The PC(USA) General Assembly (2018) passed a resolution acknowledging, "the U.S. role in the war in Yemen, and by extension, our own complicity through our taxes that fund the U.S. military's role in the conflict... and the devastating effects of the war in Yemen such as:

- Death of innocent civilians, including children, due to direct effects of bombing, disease, and famine;
- The destruction of infrastructure, including sanitation facilities, which has led to an unprecedented cholera epidemic killing many people including children; and
- Famine directly due to the Saudi blockade."

Further, the Assembly called for an immediate halt to the sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia as well as logistical support, including intelligence for selecting targets and air-to-air refueling of Saudi jets.

S.J.Res. 54, the Sanders-Lee-Murphy legislation, would end illegal U.S. participation in the war in Yemen. Please contact your Senators today and ask them to co-sponsor the legislation and to press for its passage.



Threats to Democracy in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has vast reserves of mineral wealth. The Congo is home to 80 percent of the world's coltan reserves, which is used in smart phones, tablets, computers, and other electronic devices. The DRC also produces gold, cobalt, copper, diamonds, and many other highly valuable resources. In fact, the DRC is such a rich country that it suffers from a resource curse. The country is so rich in minerals that it has been for some time a place of extreme conflict, with many parties vying for control of the area.

Since gaining its independence in 1960, the DRC's political history has been conflict-ridden and tumultuous. The most recent war began in the 1990s and included most countries in Central Africa. While the war officially ended in 2003, violence has continued in many parts the country. And with war comes poverty.

War brings poverty in a number of ways. If people cannot tend their crops because they have to move or militia groups have damaged their fields, people go hungry. Militia groups frequently burn schools leaving children without access to education, a key root of poverty. Additionally, militia groups make travel across a country that only has 200 miles of paved roads, even more difficult by setting up blockades and preventing passage. In addition to these disruptions, the DRC is currently home to a massive Ebola outbreak and the state of violence impedes the Congolese government's and the World Health Organization's efforts to combat the Ebola outbreak. Over five million people have died from fighting, disease, and poverty as a result of the warfare.

Why has the violence gotten worse lately? The answer is largely political.



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DRC president Joseph Kabila took office in 2001, following the assassination of his father, Laurent-Désiré Kabila. He subsequently won his 2006 re-election, which was boycotted by the main opposition party, and again in 2010, when local and international observers considered the election seriously flawed. An election scheduled for November 2016, was postponed indefinitely, citing a lack of funds. It thus became clear that Kabila had no intention of leaving office in this Democratic nation. This situation created a constitutional crisis.

Now, elections have been scheduled for December 23, 2018, providing an important opportunity to test the people's political will and begin to rebuild confidence in national democratic institutions. The United States has a responsibility, as a member of a community of nations, to help the

Congolese people regain confidence in their country and see the DRC's first peaceful transition of power. U.S. assistance can help the Congolese people to reclaim a culture of democratic participation through free, fair and credible elections.

In 2016, the United States provided about \$340 million in assistance to the DRC through various USAID initiatives. It will be important to maintain and expand assistance in key areas, particularly with respect to building democratic institutions and addressing developmental and humanitarian challenges exacerbated by corruption, conflict, natural disaster and other factors.

The Congolese people deserve peace and a democratically-elected leader. We must work to ensure that happens.



Prospects for the 116th Congress and the Future of Public Discourse



As the new Congress convenes in January 2019, political watchers are expecting a significant change of policy from the House of Representatives, where Election Day swept a new party into power in the House.

The new Democratic majority in the House of Representatives is expected to promote several policies in its first 100 days, including a restoration of the Voting Rights Act, an increase in the federal minimum wage, an infrastructure package, a permanent solution for young adult DREAMers who immigrated to the U.S. as small children, and a shoring up of key provisions of the Affordable Care Act, such as protection for patients with pre-existing conditions.

It remains to be seen whether the new House majority will be able to garner any bipartisan cooperation, though the makeup of the new caucus, as well as the Senate, where the Republican Party increased its majority, indicates that bipartisanship will be necessary.

At the time of the writing of this article, the Congressional lame duck session (the period after the election, but before the outgoing Congress adjourns) had not yet gotten into full swing. While at this time we cannot predict what may be accomplished, priorities of the PC(USA) General Assembly that might see movement are sentencing reform as part of a larger prison reform package and re-authorization of the Farm Bill, where important food and conservation policies are decided.

Despite these priorities, however, the biggest debate for the lame duck Congress continues to be a final deal on Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 Appropriations bills, for which the current Continuing Resolution (CR) expires on December 21, 2018. The most contentious piece of the appropriations conversation will be the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) funding for immigration enforcement and building the border wall.

Presbyterian advocates, together with our faith-based partners, expect a difficult political debate over the merits of increasing border enforcement, as opposed to a more commonsense approach to immigration policy that includes alternatives to detention. Multiple PC(USA) Assemblies have expressed concern and opposition to building a border wall, not to mention horror at the inhumanity with which immigrants and asylum-seekers are treated in U.S. detention centers and for-profit prisons.

Of course, we don't know... the lame duck Congress could conceivably pass the buck by approving a short-term CR that sustains government funding until early 2019, refusing to

come to a bipartisan agreement on sentencing reform (for which support exists), and failing to agree on a Farm Bill, which used to be a bipartisan issue. Should Congress fail to enact these measures, the funding bills would necessarily bump to the top of the agenda for both chambers of Congress in the New Year, necessarily delaying the Democrats' start on the priorities on which they campaigned.

A short-term solution would be unfortunate, because real people depend on the programs that Congress has yet to fund and will suffer if we, through our government, fail to ensure care and compassion for the most vulnerable people.

But, in a larger sense, the state of gridlock that prevails in Congress today (and has for many years now), is endangering the nation. Key pieces of legislation that used to be bipartisan efforts are now drawn down party lines. The collegiality that members of Congress used to enjoy — where members of different parties could debate vociferously on the House or Senate floor and then share a meal later that evening — seems to be gone.

The nation needs a restoration of civility that goes deeper than simple politeness. Instead, we need a reconciliation that brings people of differing ideological viewpoints together to strive to understand each others' arguments, that we might in good faith debate solutions for shared problems. Only by bridging the gaps and recognizing that all people, even our political opponents, are children of God, can we begin to restore working order to the American experiment.



What got done on Election Day?

The midterm elections are now behind us, and there have been some important takeaways from this year's results. Aside from the obvious shift of power in the U.S. House of Representatives, which brings in an admirably diverse group of freshmen Congresspeople, some notable policy aims were achieved on Election Day through ballot initiatives:

- **Minimum Wage Increases:** Voters in two states approved higher minimum wages for workers in their states (Arkansas and Missouri), while voters in Flagstaff, AZ, rejected an effort to roll back a previously enacted minimum wage increase.

- **Medicaid Expansion:** Voters in three states approved an expansion of Medicaid to cover adults under the age of 65, living at or below 138 percent of the poverty level (Idaho, Nebraska, and Utah).
- **Preventing Gerrymandering:** Voters in three states chose to put a stop to gerrymandering by setting up independent commissions for redistricting (Colorado, Michigan, and Utah).
- **Voting Rights:** In mixed news for voting rights restoration, two states instituted further barriers to voting by imposing a Voter ID law,

(Arkansas and North Carolina) while voters in three other states chose to reduce the barriers to voting, including automatic voter registration in Nevada, same-day voter registration in Maryland, and the restoration of voting rights to over one million formerly incarcerated felons in Florida (with some exceptions) who have paid their debt and re-entered their communities.

Overall, it was not a bad night for policies for which the PC(USA) General Assembly has expressed support.

The OPW welcomes Deb Rookey



Deb Rookey is the 2018-19 Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) for the Office of Public Witness. The YAV program is a faith-based year of service with a focus on community building. Deb has always been interested in social justice and advocacy work and was engaged in such work on-campus while at Washington University, where she graduated last May. For Deb's YAV year, she is working with Catherine Gordon on several international issues, with a focus on Congo and the Middle East. She is also working to establish community partners and mission projects at Northminster Presbyterian Church. Deb hopes to take the skills that she cultivates at OPW to inform her work as she enters law school next August.



Register now!

2019 Advocacy Training Weekend

April 5–8 in Washington, D.C.

Join us April 5, for Compassion Peace & Justice Training Day at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC. 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.

The history of engaging in **#GoodTrouble** is embedded in our faith tradition and our history as a nation and in the world. In the Bible, we read stories of the midwives who resisted Pharaoh and preserved the lives of Hebrew baby boys. We see Moses challenging the authority of Pharaoh, and Jesus overturning tables run by money changers. Throughout our U.S. history, Native peoples resisted land theft and cultural assimilation by European settlers through many forms of resistance. Colonists resisted England’s imperial overreach and

enslaved Africans resisted captivity both physically and spiritually. That spiritual resistance was especially pronounced in spirituals sung by those dehumanized by slavery. “Wade in the Water,” and other spirituals were messages of lament, hope and courage. They also included instructions on how to get to freedom. Years later, leaders such as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and John Lewis drew on these same spirituals for inspiration as they stirred up **#GoodTrouble** in their time.

Today, we are deeply troubled by what we see in the world. The 2019

Ecumenical Advocacy Days Conference will draw on **#GoodTrouble** pioneers from the Civil Rights era, as well as inspiration from young leaders to learn from the past, share best practices, and encourage one another for the work ahead. Through worship, educational and training workshops, and advocacy, we will beckon the Spirit to “Trouble the Waters” as depicted in John 5:1-9, calling on God to bring healing to our nation and world. Join us as we envision and train for new ways to stir up **#GoodTrouble** for the healing of all God’s children.

Register for CPJ Training Day at pcusa.org/advocacytraining

Register for Ecumenical Advocacy Days at advocacydays.org

‘Troubling the Waters’

for the Healing of the World



**David LaMotte,
CPJ Training Day
keynote speaker**



David LaMotte is an award-winning songwriter, speaker and writer. He has performed over 3,000 concerts and released twelve full-length CDs of primarily original music, touring in all of the fifty states, as well as five of the seven continents.

His dense speaking and workshop calendar has included presenting at the PC(USA) Mission to the United Nations, keynoting peace conferences

in Berlin and at the Scottish Parliament, as well as offering the baccalaureate for 2016 graduates of Columbia Seminary. As a keynote speaker, and then Critical Conversations Coordinator, he has facilitated conversations about race, privilege, and positive change for thousands of college students at the Montreat College Conference. His TEDx talk on what music can teach us about peacemaking was published in 2018.

David has published three books, including two illustrated children's books and in 2004, he and his wife Deanna founded PEG Partners, a non-profit organization that supports

literacy, critical thought, and artistic expression in Guatemala. He continues to serve as the President of PEG. He is also a consultant on Peace and Justice for the North Carolina Council of Churches, and served as Clerk the AFSC Nobel Peace Prize Nominating Task Group.

As a result of his work with schools in Guatemala, he was named a "Madison World Changer" by his undergraduate alma mater, James Madison University. David makes his home in Black Mountain, North Carolina, with his wife Deanna and son Mason. He is currently touring extensively, speaking and performing.

**The Rev.
Jimmie Hawkins,
Preacher, CPJ
Training Day**



The Rev. Jimmie Ray Hawkins serves as the Director of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness in Washington, DC.

For twenty years before coming to Washington, he served as the pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Durham, NC, 1996–2016. During that time God blessed the congregation to construct a new facility, maintain ministries for youth people, provide meeting space for non-profits and community groups and experienced church growth. Between 1992–1996, he served as the senior pastor of Grace Presbyterian, Holmes Memorial and

Trinity Presbyterian churches in western Virginia (Peaks Presbytery).

The Reverend Hawkins served as Treasurer on the Church World Service global board and as a board member of the National Council of Churches. He is a board trustee with Union Presbyterian Seminary. He has chaired several interfaith / ecumenical and non-profit boards: Durham Congregations in Action, the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, the Religious Coalition for a Non-Violent Durham, Housing for New Hope (homeless advocacy), End Poverty Now, and others.

His community ministry includes being a leader for the Moral Monday Movement since its onset in 2013. He has participated in three actions of civil disobedience protesting the actions of the NC General Assembly to

curtail voting rights, refusal to expand Medicaid, HB2 and other draconian legislation. He served as a member of the NC NAACP Executive Committee and has been active in justice advocacy throughout his ministry.

The Reverend Hawkins earned a Bachelor of Arts in Social Studies from North Carolina Central University (Durham, NC); a Master of Arts in Christian Education from the Presbyterian School of Christian Education (Richmond, VA); and a Master of Divinity from the Interdenominational Theological Center/Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary (Atlanta, GA).

He is the son of Elsie L. and the late James P. Hawkins. He is married to Sheinita Hampton Hawkins and they have two children: Kaela Renee and James Hampton.

#GoodTrouble



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