**RISKING PEACE IN A VIOLENT WORLD: FIVE NEW PEACEMAKING AFFIRMATIONS**

[Note: This text is posted online at: <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/committee/575/business> . The first two pages in bold type are policy; the rationale (with original wording of the affirmations) is advisory). A modified text is available as the study book, *Five Risks Presbyterians Must Take For Peace* (Louisville: Westminster/JohnKnox, 2017).]

**Convinced, despite years of war, that peacemaking is still the “believers’ calling,” drawing on the advisory votes and discussions of 34 presbyteries, and in fulfillment of the directions of the 219th,220th, and 221st General Assemblies, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):**

**1. approve the five affirmations below (at 10.) as guidance for new directions in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s peacemaking witness in congregations, presbyteries, synods, and the Peacemaking Program of the Presbyterian Mission Agency;**

**2. receive the five-part explanatory rationale, Risking Peace in a Violent World, with its concise summary and supplemental resources, to be posted on-line in downloadable form for individual and group study, with accompanying interpretation and availability at reasonable cost of print versions, as individuals and groups may prefer;**

**3. thank all those congregations and presbyteries that participated in the Peace Discernment process since its inception in 2010, including the Peacemaking and International Affairs Committees of the General Assemblies in 2012 and 2014. Those committees tested and strongly approved the discernment study material, which after full Assembly approval was sent out to the church and which, shaped by the responses received (from congregations in 2013 and presbyteries in 2015), became the basis of the current report;**

**4. commend the presbyteries, congregations, and individuals who have affirmed the “Commitment to Peacemaking” and faithfully supported the Peacemaking Offering for as long as 35 years, sustaining both the Peacemaking Program and countless creative congregational and presbytery practices and initiatives;**

**5. invite all presbyteries, congregations, and members to consider for themselves a new version of the “Commitment to Peacemaking” that includes the five affirmations from the Peace Discernment process (see 11 below), and encourage congregations in particular to organize forums to engage with the five affirmations (see the Church of Reconciliation website: http://www.churchrec.org/content.cfm?id=9037) as they discern their own peacemaking callings;**

**6. urge the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board to maintain a clear distribution of Peacemaking and Global Witness offering monies for peacemaking programmatic activities, including coordination with congregations engaged in peacemaking practices addressing matters such as gun violence, human rights and international law advocacy, moral injury and other veterans’ concerns, racial violence in law enforcement and criminal justice, nonviolent accompaniment of persons and groups in danger zones, truth and reconciliation initiatives, nuclear disarmament, economic conversion of industries dependent on war fighting and preparation, and sharing or creating resources and opportunities for education and formation of youth and adults based in Christian social teaching and General Assembly action;**

**7. direct the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to develop other interactive processes of policy development using the on-line journal *Unbound* (**[**www.justiceUnbound.org**](http://www.justiceUnbound.org)**) as a platform for focused interaction with presbyteries and congregations, to consult with other denominations, to work with several presbyteries and synods in diverse regions to develop best methods and timelines for testing, receiving responses, and providing resources for study, and to report to the 223rd General Assembly (2018) with recommendations for updating processes of social witness engagement in light of the changed infrastructure and program capacity of the church;**

**8. direct the Peacemaking Program (a) to examine and report on best methods for working with international peacemakers and ecumenical partners from countries and churches in crisis, in cooperation with mission networks and World Mission ministries, (b) to consult with ACSWP and other ministries of Compassion, Peace, and Justice on effective means of witness for reconciliation, self-determination, and prevention of war, and (c) to work with congregations and other bodies of the church to develop new Commitments to Peacemaking in the 21st Century, such as are outlined below; and**

**9. affirm the work and moral force of peacemaking to be an intrinsic part of the identity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and part of the mission work plan and broader vision of the Presbyterian Mission Agency. As part of this overall commitment to peace with justice, the church continues its pastoral support for our sisters and brothers who serve in the U.S. military, veterans, and their families, as well as for those who in conscience are compelled to seek release from that service. We are particularly called to advocate for veterans who suffer injury in body, mind, or spirit, and we are called to remember those combatants and civilians in other nations who have also suffered grievously;**

**10. The 222nd General Assembly (2016), therefore, adopts the following affirmations to guide the peacemaking witness of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):**

**1.     We affirm that peacemaking is essential to our faith in God’s reconciling work in Jesus Christ, whose love and justice challenge evil and hatred, and whose call gives our church a mission to present alternatives to violence.**

**"2.     We confess that we have sinned by participating in acts of violence, both structural and physical, or by our failure to respond to acts and threats of violence with ministries of justice, healing, and reconciliation.**

**"3.     We follow Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace and Reconciler, and reclaim the power of nonviolent love evident in his life and teaching, his healings and reversals of evil, his cross and resurrection.**

**"4.     Learning from nonviolent struggles and counting the costs of war, we draw upon the traditions of Just War, Christian pacifism, and Just Peacemaking to cultivate moral imagination and discern God’s redemptive work in history.**

**We commit ourselves to studying and practicing nonviolent means of conflict resolution, nonviolent methods for social change, and nonviolent opposition to war. Even as we actively engage in a peace discernment process, we commit ourselves to continuing the long tradition of support by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for our sisters and brothers who serve in the United States military, veterans, and their families. We promise to support materially and socially veterans of war who suffer injury in body, mind, or spirit, even as we work toward the day when they will need to fight no more.** [Military and veterans also treated in recommendations 6 &9 above.]

**"5.     We place our faith, hope, and trust in God alone. We renounce violence as a means to further selfish national interests, to procure wealth, or to dominate others. We will practice boldly the things that make for peace and look for the day when 'they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”**

**11. Based upon these affirmations, the General Assembly encourages congregations, presbyteries, and other bodies of the church to consider adopting or renewing public commitments to peacemaking. The original Commitment to Peacemaking developed in response to Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling (1980) came to include: (a) worship to let God open our hearts to the deepest experiences of peace, (b) spiritual disciplines, (c) teaching and training, (d) ecumenical and interfaith work for racial and economic justice, (e) international partnerships for human rights and reconciliation, (f) study and support for cooperative security approaches, (g) lifestyle changes to connect peace and care for God’s creation, and (h) contributing to the Peacemaking Offering and other means of material aid.**

**Building on these, a Peacemaking Commitment for the 21st Century would include continuing the work of discerning the chief challenges to peace and security facing each body (the “signs of the times”), a call to repentance and rededication, deeper study of Jesus and nonviolence in the early church and since, exercises of moral imagination to address moral injuries sustained in war (both personal and collective), and then identifying specific risks the congregation or body would be willing to take for peace. These might include acts of solidarity across still-tragic racial divides, hospitality to homeless veterans or asylum seekers, opposition to specific wars, questioning needs for additional surveillance, and other actions based in the Love that drives out fear.**

***RATIONALE: RISKING PEACE IN A VIOLENT WORLD***

Contents of this Study Paper:

Introduction: Title, Framework of ‘Risking Peace in a Violent World’ (often: ‘Risking Peace’)

Peace Discernment Process and Development of the Five Affirmations

Background on Presbyterian Peace Witness and Peacemaking

The Five Affirmations (a section for each of Biblical, theological, and current application)

Appendix A: Tabulation of Presbytery Responses to the Five Affirmations with Notes

Appendix B: Summary Of Risking Peace Rationale Sent To Presbyteries

Appendix C: Analysis of the Presbytery Responses

Appendix D: Summary of Congregational Discernment Responses behind the Five Affirmations

Appendix E: Brief Summary of Christian Approaches to War Prior to 1980, And Concluding Concern

Appendix F: Definitions

Appendix G: Several Examples of Methods of Violence Reduction

**Introduction**

*In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage*

*to pray without ceasing,*

*to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,*

*to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,*

*to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,*

*and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.*

A Brief Statement of Faith (1983)

**Title and Purpose**

The commitment of the church to peace and reconciliation has a central role in Christian vocation. For Presbyterians it is a matter of creedal standing, briefly yet powerfully set forth in the *Brief Statement of Faith* (1991) cited above*,* and outlined at greater length in *The Confession of 1967*. Wording from both confessions is echoed in the title of this report. We acknowledge not only a “fearful” but a violent world, even as we hear God’s call in our time to take new risks to challenge our country’s over-reliance on military might and under-investment in “the things that make for peace.” Thus the title invokes *The Confession of 1967*’s prophetic phrase: “This search (for peace) requires that the nations pursue fresh and responsible relations across every line of conflict, even at the risk to national security, to reduce areas of strife and to broaden international understanding.”

**Introduction: The Peace Discernment Process, and development of the Five Affirmations:**

In 2010, on the 30th anniversary of *Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling* and the formation of the Peacemaking Program, the 219th General Assembly authorized a six-year discernment process to take a fresh look at peacemaking in the church’s life. The Assembly’s action combined overtures seeking to review and strengthen the church’s policy and program after almost a decade of war, and to examine particularly the nonviolent understanding of Jesus’ call to discipleship. A steering committee was appointed to devise innovative opportunities for the broad membership of the church to explore both the effectiveness of the church’s peacemaking work and three-fold offering, and the nature of the Gospel’s overall mandate for peacemaking in the current time.

In 2012, the 220th General Assembly authorized study materials to be distributed (after testing in committee) and approved a two-stage process of face-to-face discussions in both congregations and councils, and then of presenting a set of concise affirmations to the presbyteries. Appendix D to this report provides a summary of the responses from the congregations and presbyteries in that first stage that was presented to the 2014 General Assembly. Those responses helped shape what became the Five Affirmations. The Five were meant to build upon each other, and to be voted upon separately to show degrees of support.

In 2014, the 221st General Assembly received the Five Affirmations, made several changes, and approved them. Although they had received unanimous support in Committee, in plenary they were removed from the consent agenda and received a very clear majority hand vote. The Stated Clerk sent out two letters to presbyteries encouraging consideration of the Affirmations, and the Office of the General Assembly also developed an on-line response form and posted summaries of the sections of *Risking Peace* supporting each Affirmation. The Advisory Committee and the Peacemaking Program were grateful to receive the strongly positive votes of those presbyteries which responded, but do **not** claim that the 33 presbyteries were taking a vote such as on amendments to the Book of Order. By the use of the word, “advisory,” the Assembly was clear that the presbyteries were being asked to respond as they wished to a second stage in a policy development process. What those presbyteries contributed was an innovative kind of testing and confirmation received by few other statements of social witness.

We believe the engagement of 33 presbyteries is substantial and list them in Appendix A. The support of almost all for the Five is important confirmation of this approach, but the critiques and alternatives provided are also important and respected. Many comments, as in the case with congregations, are also personal. They show how much many of us have been tested or touched by war and violence and how that experience affects our faith. We also summarize conversations with leaders of presbyteries that did not respond due to other pressing matters, rather than opposition to the Five Affirmations. Recommendation 7 proposes ways to strengthen the conversation and education dynamic around ethical issues and social teaching. That recommendation calls us to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of our internal systems, and to recognize as well that a solid majority of Presbyterian members as well as ministers support the church’s commitments to peace, justice, and compassion.

The results from the presbyteries were reviewed by the Peacemaking Program and ACSWP, as well as by an independent academic consultant whose review is Appendix C. The guidelines for social policy formation in *Why and How the Church Makes a Social Witness* mandate the circulation of an initial study document in the cases of large scale policy development, and this was fulfilled in the first stage of Peace Discernment. The use of a discussion and voting format for presbytery response was a new method, modeled on peace-related votes described later in this introduction. Most social witness statements by the Assembly are resolutions based on short term studies and guided by principles established in larger past policy statements, or overtures from presbyteries whose adoption does not require longer study. *Risking Peace* is a larger policy to guide the church in considering future, more specific programs and statements. It also shows how the affirmations are based on Reformed biblical and theological interpretation and how they respond to both violent and hopeful realities in the world today.

Most of the presbyteries responding supported all five of the affirmations, though in several cases after extensive and generally supportive discussion, the presbyteries declined to take an actual vote (New Castle and Elizabeth would be examples of this). In several other presbyteries, the desire to provide an informed response led to the delegation of the Five Affirmations to a specific study team (Denver and National Capital would be examples, one strongly positive, one more critical). More analysis is provided in the appendices. Overall, however, the impact of the presbytery responses was to simplify the wording. The key elements of renewed commitment, confession of complicity, more attention to Christ’s nonviolence, more understanding of nonviolent strategy and Just Peacemaking, and the need to take risks for peace—to these five, the presbyteries said, yes.

**Background on Presbyterian Peace Witness and Peacemaking:**

We include a short survey of Christian and Presbyterian approaches to peacemaking prior to 1980 in a brief appendix (E), and definitions of Just War, Just Peacemaking, and active nonviolence principles (F).

A key understanding from the later twentieth century is that peacemaking has come to be seen as central to Christian witness and as a large enough concept to unite both those tending toward nonviolence or pacifism and those operating within the Just War or justifiable war tradition. Most Presbyterians, in fact, are not absolutists and hold values from both main Christian approaches to war and physical violence. Peacemaking emphasizes common ground. Former Chief of Chaplains, Kermit Johnson believes that both Just War and pacifism are “rooted in the commandment: ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ It is a presumption against violence, ‘the presumption in favor of peace and against war.’”[[1]](#endnote-1) He then went on to consider whether there could be cases of “tragic necessity” when nuclear war could be considered a “lesser evil” and meet the Just War criteria.

This is the kind of prayerful thinking that is not always easy, but that thousands of thoughtful Presbyterians have engaged in through the Peacemaking Program and now most recently in the Peace Discernment process. Our church has been gifted with theological ethicists of the first order helping shape public responses to war within and well beyond the church itself. Other Presbyterians in the military and military contractors—and probably all Christians at one time or another—have also grieved the impact of war and simply asked God, “why?” and “for what?” For us as peacemakers, though, that is not the end of it. We believe God answers and calls us to love our enemies and—in whatever our situation—to live for that Peaceable Kingdom where all the tears are wiped away.

Presbyterian Church thinking about peace not only considers the impacts of major wars in which Presbyterians have fought, but notes the tolerance that has grown since the 1940s for conscientious objection to all war (pacifism) and to specific wars perceived to violate Just War and other criteria. This acceptance may have at first recalled the votes in 1936 and 1938 when majorities of the presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. voted to remove just war language from the *Westminster Confession*, which was then the church’s only confessional standard. Those votes did not reach the supermajorities needed for constitutional change. Then World War II received strong support from the churches, but the Cold War, the nuclear threat, the Civil Rights movement, and Vietnam led to a new wave of individual conscientious objectors and more understanding of Eisenhower’s “military-industrial complex.” It was in that context that the church adopted *The Confession of 1967* with its inclusion of strong social ethics concerns for economic and racial justice, family life, and peace:

God’s reconciliation in Jesus Christ is the ground of the peace, justice, and freedom among nations which all powers of government are called to serve and defend. The church, in its own life, is called to practice the forgiveness of enemies and to commend to the nations as practical politics the search for cooperation and peace. *This search requires that the nations pursue fresh and responsible relations across every line of conflict, even at risk to national security, to reduce areas of strife and to broaden international understanding.* Reconciliation among nations becomes particularly urgent as countries develop nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, diverting their [hu]manpower and resources from constructive uses and risking the annihilation of [hu]mankind. Although nations may serve God’s purposes in history, the church which identifies the sovereignty of any one nation or any one way of life with the cause of God denies the Lordship of Christ and betrays its calling (*The Book of Confessions,* Section 9.45; our italics).

That bold declaration grounded the idea of a shared church calling that was developed in *Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling.* That document offered a broad biblical, theological, and ethical basis for Christian peacemaking but also identified specific directions for that mission: efforts to reverse the worldwide arms race; “conversion of the economy from military to civilian production”; and continuing attention to how justice relates to peace. Because we are asking presbyteries to affirm the church’s work of Peacemaking in the first affirmation, we note key developments in that peace witness in the first of the five rationales.

**Five Affirmations for 21st Century Christian Peacemaking**

**Affirmation #1: We affirm that peacemaking is essential to our faith in God’s reconciling work in Jesus Christ, whose love and justice challenge evil and hatred, and who calls the church to present alternatives to violence, fear, and misused power.**

In 1980, the 192nd General Assembly adopted *Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling,* the denomination’s most comprehensive policy on matters of international violence and war. It declared that:

* The church is faithful to Christ when it is engaged in peacemaking.
* The church is obedient to Christ when it nurtures and equips God’s people as peacemakers.
* The church bears witness to Christ when it nourishes the moral life of the nation for the sake of peace in our world.

*Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling* broadened the concern for individual conscience to affirm that peacemaking was the calling of all believers, particularly in the face of nuclear and other Cold War dangers. Invoking Isaiah’s vision, it emphasized our global interdependence and international connection. With New Testament themes, it presented a holistic understanding of peace and encouraged a wide range of church engagement. It affirmed that “peacemaking is an indispensable ingredient of the church's mission. It is not peripheral or secondary but essential to the church's faithfulness to Christ in our time.” Since that time, peacemaking has become broadly accepted, integral to our prayers and hymns, and evident in our preaching, teaching, and public witness.

*Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling* led to the creation of the influential Presbyterian Peacemaking Program and established a special offering to provide funding for it. The Peacemaking Offering, traditionally received on World Communion Sunday, until recently raised at least $2 million each year, providing support for the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program and part of the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations, as well as peacemaking ministries in local congregations, presbyteries, and synods. The innovation of having the offering go to three levels of the church speaks to the wisdom of developing institutional capacity not only in what is now the Presbyterian Mission Agency, but also bringing together resources for intentional creativity at the regional and community levels.

For more than thirty years, the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program has provided a variety of opportunities and resources to the church, including holding annual peacemaking conferences, publishing curricula for all ages, itinerating International Peacemakers around the denomination, organizing international study tours, and supporting UN seminars. Over this period, approximately 50 percent of Presbyterian congregations have affirmed the Commitment to Peacemaking. A majority of Presbyterian congregations have received the Peacemaking Offering at some time, with approximately 20 percent providing a steady funding base.

**Engaging Church, Society, and the World as Peacemakers**

Presbyterians engage in peacemaking in a variety of ways. Through worship, prayer, and Bible study, they point to the reality of God’s peace-giving, nurture the spiritual life of their communities, and equip people to share the gospel message of peace throughout the world. Presbyterian peacemakers foster respectful communication using resources such as “Seeking to Be Faithful Together: Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement.” They fight for affordable housing, better schools, and funding for social services through faith-based community organizing campaigns. They work to reduce gun violence in the United States. They join with ecumenical and interfaith partners in struggles for human rights and economic justice in countries around the world. Presbyterian peacemakers risk nonviolent accompaniment, walking alongside church leaders threatened with political violence in Colombia. They seek to make peace with the earth by living more sustainably themselves, and challenging legislators to resist the pressures of special interest lobbies and instead support forward-looking policies that reflect wise stewardship of the planet. Countless additional examples of faithful peacemaking could be cited. We have much good peacemaking work to celebrate in our church!

**Presbyterian Peacemaking Witness and Just Peace**

Since 1980, careful studies and prophetic statements have addressed the nuclear danger, particular military interventions and their rationale, and the relation of religion, violence, and terrorism. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), since 1988, has held a virtual “nuclear pacifist” position, opposing first use and retaliation and calling repeatedly for disarmament. That policy statement, *Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age*, suggests that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a kind of “just peace” church, with its images drawn primarily from the Old Testament:

The church in the nuclear age must shift its energies from considerations of just war to the urgent and primary task of defining and serving a just peace. A nuclear stalemate or even the elimination of all nuclear arms is still far from God’s shalom. Shalom is the intended state of the entire human race. It involves the well-being of the whole person in all relationships, personal, social, and cosmic. Shalom means life in a community of compassionate order marked by social and economic justice. Peace without justice is no peace; that is why the Bible so often reflects God’s special concern for the poor and powerless.

The great biblical visions of global peace—swords into plowshares, every family under its own vine and fig tree—are fundamental to thinking about just peace. Such a peace is ultimately God’s gift; we need to avoid the proud illusion that we can create it by human effort alone. But Christian obedience demands that we move toward that peace in all possible ways: by extending the rule of law, advocating universal human rights, strengthening the organs of international order, working for common security and economic justice, converting industry to peaceful production, increasing understanding of and reconciliation with those we identify as enemies, developing peacemaking skills, constructing concrete manifestations of just peace across barriers of conflict and injustice, and other means. (*Minutes,* 1988, Part I, p. 450)

In 1998, the Assembly approved a resolution on Just Peacemaking, which embodies the tension involved in endorsing military intervention as a method to prevent such things as genocide and seeks to move the church’s thinking beyond the traditional categories of just war, crusade, and pacifism. Along with a realism that has been characteristic of much Reformed ethics (and some liberation theologies), that resolution affirms a preference for strong peacemaking initiatives, noting of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

• “It has called for greater emphases on the use of non-violent means for conflict resolution and social change, and for the promotion of training toward this goal.

• It has stressed the importance of human rights, religious liberty, and the importance of democracy as a foundation for just peace. …

• It has called for the abolition of nuclear weapons, limitations on the development of weapons, and restrictions on the sale or transfer of instruments of destruction. It has supported these restrictions on the understanding that traffic in arms raises the likelihood of conflict and raises the level of violence should conflict break out…

• It has recognized the critical importance of racial and gender justice in the achievement of social harmony and prosperity.

• It has called for independent and unilateral initiatives to reduce risks of conflict and to stimulate change. It has affirmed the importance of reconciliation even in the face of great risk…

• It has acknowledged the responsibility for international cooperation and leadership, and understands that the power and wealth of the United States require it to be part of international efforts to seek peace. At the same time it has recognized that the United States has and can abuse that power and wealth.

• It has supported international efforts, through the United Nations, at peacemaking and peacekeeping…

These church positions, together with background papers that support them, provide a complex legacy of important ideas. The Presbyterian Church has not only made statements but has also encouraged participation in the ongoing tasks of peacemaking. Its peacemaking program has devised many strategies for helping to transform political and economic affairs in ways that promote just peace policies, whether in the domestic affairs of our own nation or in the world-at-large, whether through the use of civil authority or, if needed, resistance to it. . . .”

In keeping with these principles and policies, General Assemblies have also called for responsible withdrawals by the United States from Iraq (2004) and Afghanistan (2010); the 2004 General Assembly prophetically and controversially termed the Iraq war “unwise, illegal, and immoral.” The resolution on “Religion, Violence, and Terrorism” (also 2004) endorsed a “policing” approach to terrorism and responds to the charge sometimes made that religion engenders violence. And in 2008, the General Assembly “commended for study” a careful ethical assessment of the Iraq war entitled “To Repent, To Restore, To Rebuild, and To Reconcile,” which includes the concepts of public forgiveness and “honest patriotism” as developed by Donald W. Shriver.

One of the key questions wrestled with by Peace Discernment participants was whether the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) could consider becoming a “peace church” on the model of the Mennonites or Quakers, who have long held pacifism to be a key expression of Christian love and part of the nature of the church itself. A variant of this question was whether an individual congregation could declare itself a “peace church,” going beyond the Commitment to Peacemaking. Some recent theological discussion has proposed nonviolence for the majority of Christians as well, deliberately challenging the compromises seen to accompany public responsibility.[[2]](#endnote-2)

The wording of this first affirmation does not propose that nonviolence necessarily be an essential mark of the Presbyterian Church as it is for the traditional peace churches. Rather, it proposes that we have: “a mission to present alternatives to violence, fear, and misused power.” Edward Long, a leader in Presbyterian peace thinking, notes how today’s pervasive acceptance of war’s inevitability often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.[[3]](#endnote-3) How does the church resist being transformed by that world of nations that is in constant overt and covert military struggle? This is where our Peacemaking approach must go beyond words and engage in transformative worship and action, creating needed alternatives for our society as well as ourselves.

An updated Reformed approach was explored by a large number of congregations in the mid-1980s using the study guide, “Presbyterians & Peacemaking: Are We Now Called to Resistance?” by Ronald Stone and Dana Wilbanks. That congregational process (and a parallel conversation among scholars virtually unique among denominations) generated some of the thinking about resisting violence that went into *Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age (1988)*.[[4]](#endnote-4) In the case of the Peace Discernment participants, some held to fully nonviolent positions while a larger number argued that responding to injustice sometimes requires actions on the spectrum of force that include physical violence. The overall consensus was to choose nonviolent alternatives whenever possible without making nonviolence an absolute position.

The Peace Discernment steering team (as noted below) thought it important to consider nonviolence in relation to the example of Jesus and the witness of much of the earliest, pre-Constantine church. This is not to deny our traditional Presbyterian appreciation of how justice and love, like Old Testament and New, must always go together. Biblical scholars Donald Gowan and Ulrich Mauser address this relationship of love and justice:

In view of the fact that Jewish thought and practice alike reserved the incorporation of all nations into God’s world of peace for the world to come in which idolatry has ceased and one law of one God is universally acknowledged, there can hardly be any doubt that the Pauline mission… regarded the powers of the eschaton as driving forces which call forth historical realization. The prince of peace is in the Pauline mission not only the historically identifiable person Jesus of Nazareth, nor only the meta-historical redeemer, but also the continuous presence of God’s ultimate peace in the stream of time.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Given this rich history of peacemaking and the vital ongoing work of making peace, it seems only fitting that we re-affirm the centrality of peacemaking, and renew our dedication to this central calling as followers of Jesus Christ. At the same time, as an integral part of honest and authentic peacemaking, we must confess our complicity in the violence of our world.

**Affirmation #2.  We confess our complicity in the world’s violence and our failures to stand with those who suffer, even as we pray for the Spirit’s courage to unmask idolatries, speak truth about war and oppression, and respond with ministries of justice, healing, and reconciliation.**

**Confessing Our Complicity in Violence**

Making peace means engaging the critical issues of our times. Yet, as those who are deeply immersed in peacemaking know so well, faithful peacemaking must be spiritually rooted and sustained by the Holy Spirit. The heart and mind of the peacemaker must be liberated from conformity to culture and renewed in the mind of Christ (Rom. 12). This transformation is itself peacemaking work. John Calvin reminds us that the human heart is “a factory of idols.” Therefore, healing the violence in our lives—not only the violence we do and the violence that is done to us, but our sinful capacity to countenance violence and to accept it as normal—must be integrated into a holistic theology of peacemaking. The peacemaker must even confess the kind of complicity that comes from failing to avert violence even after great effort, a feeling shared by many who opposed the second Iraq war. Such awareness that we are all responsible for some measure of violence is an important admission of imperfection.

In this section we move from an overview that looks at violence in our culture and its structures to a closer look at the factors at work in the Iraq and Afghan wars in particular. The inclusion of structural violence gives violence an admittedly broad definition. A strict definition of violence, for example, is suggested by Mark Douglas: “a forceful action that intends to cause unwanted injury to another.”[[6]](#endnote-6) The adjective, “structural,” would modify this definition to “the operation of institutions and social structures that causes injury or deprivation to others.”

The commitment to peace that stands at the heart of Christian obedience requires that Christians take an honest look at the extent to which they are complicit in the violence that characterizes the society of which they are a part. This complicity is present despite good intentions to avoid it and worthy efforts to live by the ideal of peace. Identifying and confessing this complicity is difficult and painful work—one that is often side-stepped or ignored. This complicity has not necessarily come about through deliberate malice, but inheres in the very course of living in an imperfect and fallen world, a world in which the human condition is marked by sin. No matter how much we as Americans can be proud of our ideals, if we fail to acknowledge our shortcomings we only increase the probability we will perpetuate them.

As the church engages in its discernment process, it must look honestly at our society and its history. It is hard to admit that violence has characterized much of our history and continues to dominate much of our current behavior. The land in which we live was frequently taken from native peoples by force. The independence we value so proudly was achieved by a violent revolutionary war. Our national wealth was advanced with the brutality of the slave system that was abolished only with a civil war. We have profited from violence used to subdue workers and to control access to natural resources.

We are addicted to violence for purposes of entertainment. Bullying is common in our schools, and violence in video games. The most popular sports often inflict injury, concussions, and trauma. Over 30,000 people are killed each year by guns, many of them suicides. In the U.S., one in every four women experience domestic violence during their lifetime. We have stationed armed forces throughout the world on a quasi-permanent basis and defend ourselves with weapons that are used in the places where others live—often striking the innocent in the effort to destroy the guilty. A large segment of our economy involves the production and sales of armaments. And for many in politics, to apologize is blasphemy or betrayal.

Much of the hurt that is experienced in our society is produced by what is termed “structural violence,” what the second affirmation calls “oppression.” Our social and economic systems seem to condemn a growing number of people to lives of poverty or fear–-even when public investment and other measures could boost unemployment and raise wages. Concentration of ownership and regressive taxes have enabled 1 percent of Americans to reap almost a quarter of our nation’s income every year and to control over 40 percent of our nation’s wealth. Workers overseas are paid much less and often endure far worse conditions to keep our prices low and top salaries high. An economy dependent on the burning of carbon fuels threatens, not only our future, but that of others. The purchasing of influence by corporate power undercuts our democratic system. Physical assaults may not be involved or necessary in these processes, but they are nevertheless forms of violence.

It is not this report’s purpose to make a complete inventory of the extent to which we are complicit in violence. This is a task of ongoing prophetic scholarship, educational thoroughness, and moral inquiry to which the discernment being commended by this report must address itself. The task must be ongoing; subtle forms of coercion will always emerge, carried by “sanctioned ignorance,” “false polarization,” and the confusion of “virtual” reality with actuality.[[7]](#endnote-7) Most of all, as we know through our prayers of confession, this kind of disciplined self-searching requires the capacity of the Church and its members to transcend our own confining self-interest. Yet it is an essential aspect of being redeemed, of being transformed by grace. Society tends to honor the team player, the person who with excitement and verve cheers on whatever is being done. When we affirm the need for confessing our complicity we may prompt denial and hostility. To counter that normal human tendency is a vocation to heroic and prophetic humility without which the culture around us will never be healed.

It is not easy to unmask the powers. We all wear masks to some extent and therefore need others to help us take them off. Those who embrace idolatries usually believe they are defending the truth. They—and we—need to dialogue with those who differ from us—listening to them and hearing even the unspoken challenges to our views and unconscious ideologies. Discernment means prophetic criticism even of our so-called prophetic criticism. Yet confession and apology and repentance can unlock the enormous powers of truth and love.

With regard to that unconscious complicity, theologian Walter Wink believes we have embraced “the Myth of Redemptive Violence,” the widespread belief that violence saves, that war brings peace, that might makes right. “The belief that violence ‘saves’ is so successful because it doesn’t seem to be mythic in the least,” Wink writes. “Violence simply appears to be the nature of things. It’s what works. It seems inevitable, the last and, often, the first resort in conflicts. If a god is what you turn to when all else fails, violence certainly functions as a god. What people overlook, then, is the religious character of violence . . . .”[[8]](#endnote-8)

From this perspective, violence is an idol, a false god. Violence does not save us from evil, sin, and death. It only adds to evil, sin, and death. As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., put it: “The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. . . . Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive our hate: only love can do that.”[[9]](#endnote-9)

To the extent that we have put our faith in violence instead of God, we must repent of our idolatry, for we cannot serve two masters. As Christians we confess that Jesus is our Lord and Savior, no other. Our security does not rest in violence, but in God. On a deep level, anthropologist Rene Girard argues that the saving power of Jesus’ life comes from his unmasking the way that spirals of violence create and condemn victims who are in fact innocent.[[10]](#endnote-10) Our discipleship, instead, commits us to an upward spiral that weakens the powers of domination.

**Structural Violence**

The descending spiral of violence to which King referred often begins with “structural violence” —the social and economic structures that oppress and impoverish people, preventing them from meeting their basic needs and realizing their full potential. The structural violence of injustice and oppression can lead to the violence of revolt and rebellion that then leads to the retaliatory violence of government repression, which then only compounds the structural violence of injustice and oppression and leads to further revolt followed by yet more repression.[[11]](#endnote-11) This is not to say that all violent crime in poor areas is a form of revolt, but to say that those neighborhoods themselves are a form of crime against their inhabitants.

While direct physical violence is more visible and attracts more media attention (“If it bleeds, it leads”), structural violence is far more widespread and arguably does much more harm over time. We see it manifest in hunger and homelessness, poverty and disease. The processes of oppression noted above include patterns of inequality and exclusion called the “isms” of racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and ethnocentrism. These patterns operate at interlocking levels —institutional (policies and practices), interpersonal (group and individual) and cultural (social norms and valuing). Most Americans know that the “isms” exist, but the common discourse in our country narrowly addresses discrimination that happens at the interpersonal level—when someone makes a blatantly derogatory comment or is accused of doing so. But even when a white police officer shoots an unarmed black teen, it is partly the conditioning of white privilege that heightens suspicion and pulls the trigger. Most Americans may be unfamiliar with how the isms operate on this more insidious social level and unaware of their exacting toll. Yet, millions of “lives of quiet desperation” are reflections of coercive inequality. We dehumanize ourselves and degrade others by unconsciously supporting patterns that pin our opportunities for well-being on our neighbors’ marginalization. Structural violence militates against our Christian calling to be in authentic loving relationship with our neighbors, near and far.

**Violence Against the Earth**

We are also doing violence to the earth and its creatures. The globalized economy is built on the untrammeled extraction of finite resources, the exploitation of cheap labor, and a no-limits-to-growth ideology, resulting in dangerously compounding climate change. We are destroying ecosystems, depleting precious natural resources, melting glaciers, raising sea levels, and causing a massive extinction of species as our greenhouse gases alter the ecology of the entire planet. Severe weather fluctuations are already causing tragic increases in hunger. In *Tropic of Chaos* (2011), Christian Parenti warns that climate change is creating desperate refugees and the potential for serious violence in many regions.

**The Global Context for the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars**

To confess our complicity in general without grieving for the two significant wars of the last fifteen years would be fairly painless. Yet to confess without addressing the underlying dynamics is too sentimental. Here we look briefly at the context for the Afghan and Iraq wars, which is partly international structural violence, and then address the somewhat differing tragedies they involve. We return to the issues of U.S. superpower status in discussion of the fifth affirmation.

From a global perspective, we who live in the U.S. are among the richest 20 percent of the world’s population. (Consider that 40 percent of the world’s people attempt to live on less than two dollars a day.) The world’s income distribution resembles the shape of a champagne glass, with the top 20 percent of the world’s people who live in the world’s wealthiest countries receiving 83 percent of the world’s income. The next 20 percent receive 10 percent of the world’s income. The remaining 60 percent of the world’s people share the remaining 7 percent of world income.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Global economic inequality is nothing new. As far back as1948, George Kennan, head of the U.S. State Department planning staff, wrote in a secret policy planning study: “We have about 50 percent of the world’s wealth, but only 6.3 percent of its population. . . . In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity. . . . To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming; and our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national objectives. . . . We should cease to talk about vague and . . . unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better.”[[13]](#endnote-13)

How do we “maintain this position of disparity”? What does it mean to “deal in straight power concepts”? Thomas L. Friedman, the foreign affairs columnist for the *New York Times,* explains it this way: “The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist—McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the builder of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies is called the United States Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.”[[14]](#endnote-14)

Though there were multiple sources of our country’s original wealth, our privileged economic position is preserved through U.S. military power, as well as through military aid and weapons sales to governments around the world. Even though it is a violation of U.S. law, the weapons we sell to foreign governments are sometimes used by their militaries against their own people in order to maintain a stable environment for corporate investments. Militarization makes corporate-led globalization possible. Whether militarization itself is finally profitable is one of the questions that Afghanistan and Iraq raise.

**The Iraq and Afghanistan Wars (This section also supports Affirmation 4’s “counting the costs of war”**

Since the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, involving four hijacked civilian airplanes and approximately 3,000 civilian casualties, the United States has been engaged in two significant wars and a limited intervention in Libya. The war in Afghanistan has been a joint operation with NATO member armies, as was the military intervention in Libya. The war in Iraq was initiated without United Nations authorization and involved a “coalition of the willing,” with Great Britain most notable among the U.S. allies. The General Assembly’s calling the Iraq War “unwise, immoral, and illegal” clearly invoked Just War teaching: preemptive war was seen as antithetical to last resort; nonexistent weapons and regime change were not seen as just cause; unilateral action spurned the legitimate authority of the UN; and while military success was assured, a military occupation seemed unlikely to create democratization or a just peace.

The Iraq and Afghanistan Wars have been extremely costly in both human and economic terms. The numbers of Afghans, Iraqis, and Pakistanis who have died in the fighting are estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands. Our repentance must include the long refusal of our occupation forces to count those deaths. Their survivors face many of the same issues that U.S. war veterans do, but without the medical and social support. War refugees and internally displaced persons number 7.8 million. More than 6,100 U.S. soldiers have been killed and more than 46,000 have been injured. Multiple deployments have put enormous stress on U.S. soldiers and their families, whose lives have been changed forever by the experience of war. Even after soldiers return home, war continues to take its toll through unemployment, domestic conflict, depression, alcohol and drug addiction, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), moral injury, and/or suicide.

The Iraq and Afghanistan Wars will cost the United States alone an estimated $3-$4 trillion when current and future veterans’ costs are added up; the costs of reconstruction, rehabilitation, and military activity by other countries involved is estimated to be another $3 trillion. Most Americans now question whether these military interventions have been worth the enormous cost in lives, national treasure, and reputation, particularly as it is not at all clear what they have achieved. This adds to an “increasing sense of the impotence of military might” (p. 11) and the belief that “the main problems of the world will not yield to military solutions,” as *Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling* (p. 15) put it.

A case can be made that disproportionate militarization is bankrupting the U.S. economy and creating additional structural violence or oppression. While weapons manufacturers continue to post record profits during a deep recession, our nation’s cities and states are in a state of fiscal crisis, public services and welfare programs, especially for our more vulnerable citizens, are being slashed, and the federal debt due to war remains high.

The money we use each year to prosecute the war in Afghanistan could fund the Head Start program for the next fifteen years, but instead many children will grow up with an inferior education. With the money we spend in Afghanistan, we could provide health coverage to every American, thereby, according to a Harvard study, saving 45,000 American lives in one year. The budgets for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan could fill the budget gaps in all the states, preventing deep cuts in programs to the poor, the sick, and the uneducated. Furthermore, by some reckonings, the number one source of our nation’s debt, about which we hear so much these days, is military related. Joshua Holland writes, “It’s a tragic irony that so much of the discussion surrounding the public debt centers on ‘entitlements’ like Social Security (which hasn't added a penny to the national debt) when we’re still paying for Korea and Vietnam and Grenada and Panama and the first Gulf War and Somalia and the Balkans and on and on.”[[15]](#endnote-15)

Choices between the ability to kill militants and civilians on the other side of the globe and the ability to provide for the health and education of our children, choices to spend $700 billion over the last decade on new weapons (which by the Secretary of Defense’s own admission have been marginal in enhancing military capabilities) instead of spending that money on green energy or infrastructure—these are moral choices, and we are arguably making the wrong ones. The U.S. is in danger of what Paul Kennedy, author of *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers,* calls “imperial overstretch” —when a nation commits so many resources overseas to maintain its empire that the nation implodes from within.

In the 2010 General Assembly debate over the resolution to call for withdrawal from Afghanistan, six years after the church had called for an end to the Iraq war, it was claimed that the strategic goals for the 2001 invasion had been met with the dispersal or death of Al Qaeda leaders and downgraded military capacity of the Taliban. To stay longer was to accumulate enemies and support a corrupt government without adding much to regional or global security. Those judgments may be criticized, but they accepted a stronger initial justification for war than was the case in Iraq. Yet our moral accountability as a nation in both countries has to do not only with the invasion and occupation but the final cease fire and the future prospects for those nations. If Iraq is any indication, those prospects are not good. While our preeminent military role in the world does not make us accountable for all world problems, these two wars will be very hard to defend before the bar of history and history’s Judge.

To approve this affirmation is to acknowledge the interlocking web of violence in our lives, our society, and the world, and to call the church to confession. War and oppression are closely intertwined. Engaging violence in ourselves and in the structures of our society and our world is essential to the integrity of our faith, yet daunting, complex, even overwhelming. With a spirit of repentance, then, we turn back to the heart of our faith.

**Affirmation #3. We follow Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace and Reconciler, and reclaim the power of nonviolent love evident in his life and teaching, his healings and reversals of evil, his cross and resurrection.**

**The Life and Teachings of Jesus**

Since *Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling* was adopted in 1980, there has been another kind of explosion: in historical scholarship about Jesus of Nazareth. While this scholarship is enormously varied, and involves a wide range of early Christian texts, it offers the church much rich reflection on the interaction of Jesus, the peasant population, the Jerusalem authorities, and the Roman army. Many of the participants in the discernment process were familiar with works by Marcus Borg, N.T. Wright, Walter Wink, Elizabeth Schlusser Fiorenza, Elaine Pagels, John Crossan, John Meier, Richard Horsley, to name some of the best known. Jewish and Muslim scholars have added their volumes to this mix. It is safe to say that most of the discernment participants—like our steering team members—see a clear predilection for nonviolence in the example and teaching of Jesus. Scholarly opinion is more divided, but even those who emphasize Jesus’ engagement in confrontation and conflict rarely link him to violent revolution.

In this section we will look first at recent interpretations of Jesus, and then propose ways that new emphases and learnings may be considered in future Presbyterian peacemaking theology and formation. We use the word “reclaim” because, along with greater emphasis on Jesus’ nonviolent movement and methods, comes the example of the early church. Whether or not we are in its persecuted and socially marginal position, we need to be a lot clearer about who we are and what weapons we fight with.

Let us first heed Luke Timothy Johnson, however, who warns that our faith is not in the result of any scholar’s historical-critical reconstruction.[[16]](#endnote-16) Johnson insists that for the church the canonical collection of literary texts called the New Testament is united in witnessing to the meaning of the Jesus story, and that meaning is found in a pattern consistent with the cross and resurrection. For him: “Jesus’ existence as one of radical obedience toward God and self-disposing service toward others forms a pattern for all humanity that can be written in the heart by the Holy Spirit. It is this pattern that Paul designates as the *nomos Christou* (‘the law of Christ,’ or, better, ‘pattern of the Messiah’).” [[17]](#endnote-17) The first question, then, is whether peacemaking or nonviolence is part of that basic pattern.

Without attempting a survey, we choose very different scholarly positions from which to look at Jesus and violence, beginning with the work of Richard B. Hays in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (1996):[[18]](#endnote-18)

“Our exegetical investigation of Matthew 5: 38-48 has led to the conclusion that the passage teaches a norm of nonviolent love of enemies. …Do the other texts (than Matthew) in the canon reinforce the Sermon on the Mount’s teaching on nonviolence, or do they provide other options that might allow or require Christians to take up the sword? When the question is posed this way, the immediate result—as Barth observed—is to underscore how impressively univocal is the testimony of the New Testament writers on this point. The evangelists are unanimous in portraying Jesus as a Messiah who subverts all prior expectations by assuming the vocation of suffering rather than conquering Israel’s enemies . . . .”

When Hays turns to Paul, he lifts up Romans 12, noting “though the governing authority bears the sword to execute God’s wrath (13:4), that is not the role of believers.” As Paul’s military metaphors make clear, “the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly” (2 Cor. 10:4). Hays carries through a review of the New Testament and considers Revelation as a counsel to endurance. He considers texts that are cited to allow for violent or military action, seeing in the Temple cleansing a prophetic confrontation, and the references to soldiers “dramatize the power of the Word of God to reach even the unlikeliest people” (like tax collectors). His summary: “from Matthew to Revelation we find a consistent witness against violence and a calling to the community to follow the example of Jesus in accepting suffering rather than inflicting it.” The challenge for Hays is the disjunction between this interpretation of nonviolence in the New Testament and the witness of the Old Testament, which he sees providing the only possible scriptural bases for the Just War and Holy War traditions.

For contrast, we turn to a biblical scholar with a sociological starting point, who sees Jesus more focused on achieving justice than peace, per se, and leading a social movement that challenged the social order as much as it sought to reform Israel’s religious life. Nonetheless, Richard Horsley states:

Jesus, while not necessarily a pacifist, actively opposed violence, both oppressive and repressive, both political-economic and spiritual. He consistently criticized and resisted the oppressive established political-economic-religious order of his own society. Moreover, he aggressively intervened to mitigate or undo the effects of institutionalized violence, whether in particular acts of forgiveness and exorcism or in the general opening of the kingdom of God to the poor.[[19]](#endnote-19)

Analytically, Horsley considers injustice to be a form of structural violence and sees, particularly in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus’ nonviolent resistance to a host of malevolent powers. He considers his own work, including *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence* (1987), to provide a broader basis for nonviolence than selected quotations from Jesus and Paul, as he sees a first-century cultural context where religious and political allegiances are deeply entwined.[[20]](#endnote-20) Horsley’s Jesus is primarily a prophet out to renew a religious and social covenant; his interpretation, like many recent readings of Jesus, does not emphasize eschatological or apocalyptic themes, but does stress the dramatic importance of the crucifixion.

Walter Wink sees in Jesus “a third way” that resists evil through nonviolent means, an approach that outflanks and subverts aggression, sometimes by choosing to suffer. From this perspective, turning the other cheek, offering more clothing than a coat, and going the second mile are examples of the “weaker” party taking the moral initiative and humanizing the opponent, “forcing” him or her to recognize one's own humanity without resorting to violence. This is a strategy with social and cultural implications, potentially breaking cycles of subjugation and humiliation, exposing injustice in power dynamics, and neutralizing and undermining the threat of violence.[[21]](#endnote-21)

Wink’s interpretation is a way of accounting for a prophetic and nonviolent life that posed a clear alternative to the domination systems of his time. It does not deny the violent imagery in some of Jesus’ parables, though Margaret Aymer has shown how deep those images go.[[22]](#endnote-22) It presents a Jesus of inner power who, when a Samaritan village refused to host him, refuses his disciples’ idea “to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them.” Jesus rebukes them, saying, “You do not know what spirit you are of, for the Son of Man has not come to destroy the lives of human beings but to save them” (Lk. 9:51-62). Similarly, images of Jesus’ exorcizing evil can also be seen as his engaging with violent forces, but in peace scholar Andrea Bartoli’s words, they are not so much nonviolent as “de-violencing.” That kind of healing can involve spiritual convulsion, as it undoes or disarms the violent spirits from those possessed. This suggests that Jesus may not fit a specific “nonviolent” definition, but maintains that his willingness to face conflict was never a choice for violence.

Of Jesus’ death on the cross, Martin Luther King, Jr., said: “Jesus eloquently affirmed from the cross a higher law. He knew that the old eye-for-an-eye philosophy would leave everyone blind. He did not seek to overcome evil with evil. He overcame evil with good.”[[23]](#endnote-23) “Those who want to save their life will lose it,” Jesus says, “and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it” (Mk. 8:35). Following Christ involves sacrifice. It leads to the cross. But it also holds out the promise of resurrection and new life.

**The example of the Early Church**

Following on from the life and example of Jesus Christ is the witness of the early church. While most Christians embraced nonviolence, there is some diversity of witness[[24]](#endnote-24), Most early Christians in Rome refused to engage in violence, trusting that their love for fellow citizens would point people to the new day dawning in Jesus Christ. Some, like Tertullian, seemed to have more trouble with the fact that soldiers were required to participate in the Emperor cult than with violence itself. Others, like Clement of Alexandria, noted that when soldiers converted to Christianity they did not ask them to change their profession. Still the early church largely made a nonviolent witness and suffered frequent martyrdom.

Those early Christian theologians who made a strong non-violent witness, read the Hebrew Scriptures through the lens of Christian faith, took with utter seriousness the prophecies of Micah and Isaiah, asserting that the Messiah had indeed come, and that the time had come to enact their prophecies of beating their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. They did not interpret the violence in their Scriptures (our Old Testament) as giving them license to kill. Indeed, there is no affirmation of killing or war in the writings of the early Church, nor is there the idea that Christians making war would make the world a better or safer place. Thus we find prohibitions against killing of any sort, some of which even denied the Eucharist to persons who engaged in such acts. The early Christians would not watch killings, either by viewing legal executions or by attending gladiatorial games. In sum, then, while there is some scholarly debate over why the early Christians avoided violence and whether it reflected their marginal social location, and some Christian soldiers’ graves from that period have been identified, the general witness is clear.

In the fourth century, the church’s relationship to the Roman Empire and to violence changed. The Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 312 CE and began promoting the faith instead of persecuting it. By 380 CE, Christianity had become the state religion. During this period, Christians started to take up arms. The change was such that while in 303 CE it was generally forbidden for Christians to serve in the military, by 416 CE only Christians were allowed to serve.

During this period Christian reflection on the wars of the Roman Empire contributed to the creation of the Just War doctrine, which was initially articulated by Bishop Augustine of Hippo based on ideas from Bishop Ambrose of Milan and Cicero. The Just War theory established the ground rules under which a Christian might be understood to be acting morally—out of love and hence sorrowfully—even when killing other human beings. Ronald Stone sees Augustine’s motivation to protect civilian populations in a time when the Roman Empire was falling into disorder as contributing to the tradition’s emphasis on defensive war and on what is often lost, right intention. “Peace as the harmony among people is the theme of Augustine’s great philosophy of history in the *City of God*…,” and order more than power is what is desired from the Empire or its representatives.[[25]](#endnote-25) Later Just War theories, such as that of Thomas Aquinas, are based more on reason and justice concepts such as “natural law” and, for good or ill, can function apart from Christian faith.

**Implications of Jesus and Early Christian nonviolence**

It makes a difference whether one sees Jesus as nonviolent or not, but does not automatically imply that our discipleship should or could be the same as his calling, nor that we should seek martyrdom or withdrawal following a model from the earliest centuries of our faith. This is because some see Jesus as laying down an absolute rule and others see him upholding an ideal. To approve the third affirmation is to say that it is important for faithful Christians to wrestle with or discern personally where they stand on nonviolence in relation to Jesus Christ. The witness of the first Christian centuries is important as well, both to help interpret Jesus Christ and illuminate our current context.

The Old Testament is the larger guide to our understanding Jesus and, indeed, to our reading human history. Drawing on hundreds of years of Hebraic experience with God, it develops a moral vision that shaped the Rabbi Jesus and many of the New Testament writers. For the Christians of post-Constantine centuries, the Old Testament’s depiction of the exercise of power in families, tribes, nations, and empires lays the foundation for what philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff calls “world-formative Christianity.” For Reformed Christians, in fact, his early book, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (1983), has been seen as a counterpoint to John Howard Yoder’s, *The Politics of Jesus* (1972), a ground-breaking Mennonite case for the relevance of a pacifist Jesus and a pacifist church to the world. The difference in focus and scope of argument illustrates the difference in approaches. In Wolterstorff’s words:

If the Bible were to be a comprehensive guide for our social activities, it was essential that the Calvinist take the Old Testament seriously. Appeals to the Old Testament in Calvinism have a function similar to appeals to nature in Thomist Catholicism (and in Lutheranism). It is fascinating to observe, in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, that as Bonhoeffer moves toward world-formative Christianity and away from a formative version of Christianity based on inwardness and religious practices, he also begins to emphasize the importance of the Old Testament. He saw, as did the Calvinists, that the New Testament in isolation gives insufficient guidance for the new praxis.[[26]](#endnote-26)

With the Old Testament comes the need to interpret the violence attributed to God and that attributed to human beings, and to do that in relation to newer views of Jesus. Those views, as we have seen, show him avoiding violence but not conflict, seeking reconciliation with justice, and resisting evil by yielding to God in such a way that Albert Curry Winn called him the original “reverse fighter.”[[27]](#endnote-27) The third affirmation proposes new thinking for the church, such as Jerome F.D. Creach’s *Violence in Scripture* (2013), which wrestles with the bloodiest texts about conquest, holy war, vengeance, hell, and judgment, and does so in response to portrayals of Jesus like that of Richard Hays’ above.[[28]](#endnote-28) The challenge for those of us influenced by Christian Realism is not to use the Old Testament only to confirm Reinhold Niebuhr’s famous quip, “original sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith.” This is untrue to the Old Testament, which gives us visions of shalom, rules to restrain evil, and prophets of a new covenant, and unfair to Niebuhr, whose senses of paradox and irony always helped him move “beyond tragedy.”[[29]](#endnote-29)

Much of the traditional Reformed reading of pacifism was that it was impossibly perfectionist and entailed renunciation of power (as in priestly vows) or withdrawal from the world (in monasteries or in sectarian communities like those of the Anabaptists). It may have worked for the early church, so that thinking went, but they were not powerless and on the margins by choice. Jesus’ teachings were sometimes considered impossible ideals, or to be a short-term ethic in anticipation of an imminent end of the world. Here we have suggested that better argued interpretations of Jesus’ mission and his “reversals of evil” can help renew our peacemaking witness.

At the same time, it is clear that faithful resistance has a force to it, and thus that nonviolence itself can be a form of coercion. Daniel Ott states this explicitly in his argument for “A Realistic, Public, Christian Pacifism,” arguing that “A realistic pacifism must be a pragmatic pacifism that acknowledges that even physical coercion may in a few instances be necessary as a result of our ‘responsibility to protect.’” Yet for Ott, even in policing, “nonviolent strategies are morally superior . . . through the ability of nonviolence to engage in conflict while honoring the moral primacy of human life.”[[30]](#endnote-30) This is to anticipate the next affirmation and its supporting background rationale.

Two final observations may help us in reclaiming or renewing our understanding of Jesus the Peacemaker. The first has to do with the context for most of the Old Testament and for the early church. That context was empire. The Hebrew people were first enslaved by and then liberated from the Egyptian empire. The nation of Israel was conquered first by the Assyrian empire, and later by the Babylonian empire. Eventually, the Judeans living in exile in Babylon were allowed to return to Jerusalem as a result of the expansion of the Persian empire. And the entire New Testament takes place in the context of a Roman empire supported by conquest and slavery. Both John the Baptist, for us the last of the great Hebrew prophets, and Jesus of Nazareth, the One to whom he pointed, called for repentance, proclaiming the Reign of God. They spoke of the Reign of God as an alternative social order based on a rival set of values to those of the Roman empire. Here is the choice put before the early Christians, imagined in contemporary preaching style:

For all its monumental cultural achievements, the Roman Empire was a system of domination; the Reign of God on the other hand, is a domination-free order. The Roman Empire was based on economic exploitation; the Reign of God is based on economic justice. The Roman Empire was based on violent pride; the Reign of God on nonviolent love. The Roman Empire projected a matrix of iron-fisted control; the Reign of God sings the songs of freedom. The Roman Empire was built on layers of oppression; the Reign of God is founded on the hope of liberation. The Roman Empire’s brutality struck fear in its subjects; the Reign of God offers the balm of healing. The Roman Empire promised peace through victory; the Reign of God promises peace through justice.[[31]](#endnote-31)

The fact is, the Roman empire continued in several forms after its “fall,” and empire continued as a sometimes aspirational category in Europe even after the Treaty of Westphalia 1648 began to formalize nation-state sovereignty.[[32]](#endnote-32) More will be said about “empire” as a tendency or temptation in the final background section.

The second observation has to do with the social and cultural location of the mainline Protestant church today. In comparison with past levels and positions of influence for ecumenical Protestant leaders in the culture, many see a trend toward “marginalization.” Another word used is “dis-establishment.” Our numbers are smaller, and although many office-holders—including President Obama—are practicing mainline Christians, secularization consigns religious institutions to the private sphere of values. Thus the church’s public voice is taken less seriously, and is distinctly unwelcome in some quarters, including much of the academy. This is not to argue that religion or Christianity is without influence in what is still a highly religious country, but it suggests that we are in a pluralistic situation somewhat closer to that of the early Christians.

While our relative minority situation may well be cause for lament and deep concern, it may, paradoxically, free the church from the burden of straddling two worlds and serving two masters. From this standpoint, for centuries the church has spoken in a “Constantinian dialect,” that is, speaking both as followers of Jesus Christ grounded in his message and values and as stewards of the social order caring for the interests of the nation or empire. This is an opportunity—still in service to the common good—to make sure we witness to God’s “uncommon good,” which we see in “the power of nonviolent love” in the Christ story.

The early Christians, if Paul and the Pauline communities can be taken as guides, focused on the distinctive practices and values of their faith first, but with a genuine concern for their larger communities. As interpreted by New Testament professor, Victor Paul Furnish, Paul wanted people “not conformed to this world, but transformed,” yet still to behave “honorably in the sight of all.”[[33]](#endnote-33) The world was passing away—an apocalyptic element is there in Paul’s letters, and Christians are already citizens of a “heavenly commonwealth.” But they are not “transients” or “resident aliens,” not in Paul’s language. The early churches are not concerned about institutions, per se, but they are to discern what is moral in the places they are set and “work for the good of all” (Galatians 6:10) and “live peaceably with all” (Rom 12:18).

The challenge, then, is not to be compromised in maintaining structures that perpetuate violence, as can happen when we imagine more influence than we have. Our call is not to preserve privileges, but in the area of peacemaking, to resist pressures that would make the church a junior partner to nationalism. In fact, the mainline churches have been influential when they have taken prophetic positions. The charge that ecumenical Protestantism is “irrelevant,” in fact, often reflects an effort to weaken its voice when we argue that patriotism does not mean automatic approval of military ventures.

**Affirmation #4. Learning from nonviolent struggles and counting the costs of war, we draw upon the traditions of Just War, Christian pacifism, and Just Peacemaking to cultivate moral imagination and discern God’s redemptive work in history.**

Along with new insights from Jesus scholarship, Reformed Christian thinking about peacemaking must take into account the series of substantially peaceful transitions that have occurred since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. These include other transitions in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union itself, a cessation of terrorism alongside the implementation of power sharing in Northern Ireland, the massive demonstrations that led to the end of the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines (after the killing of Benigno Aquino), the still-surprising end of apartheid in South Africa, including the Truth and Reconciliation process, and the initial successes of the Arab Awakening in Tunisia and Egypt, where dictatorships collapsed with great speed. As continuing developments in Egypt underline, in no case does justice or democracy simply fall from heaven. Indeed, one can ask whether the Egyptian people had developed the habits of the heart and thought, as well as the mediating institutions to enable a democracy to succeed. Yet these notable cases are part of a larger picture presented by scholars in which nonviolent regime change is approximately twice as successful as violent government overthrow.

The counter examples of Syria, and weakened or collapsed states such as Somalia, Mali, and parts of Congo, illustrate the combined powers of disorder, sheer repression, climate change impacts (all around the Sahara desert) and cross-border extremism, sometimes funded by neighbors more interested in proxy wars than collective security. Certainly the pictures of tortured bodies and videos of beheadings show the depth of evil and dehumanization. The continued violence in Iraq and Afghanistan reflects, in part, the failure of military intervention to ensure either democratic institutions or equitable development. In Syria, the 2013 decision of the United States and other Western powers to pull back from airstrikes on the regime in exchange for chemical weapons disposal and peace talks was initially claimed as a triumph both for threatening intervention and for multi-lateral negotiation. Russia’s intervention in 2015, partly to protect the Christian minority in Syria, and the so-called Islamic State’s threat to dictatorships and democracies alike, point to the need for peace negotiations with all nations involved, across ideological and sectarian divides. Such negotiation in relation to Iran’s nuclear program bore fruit in a well-structured agreement in 2015, allowing Iran to participate in efforts for a Syrian peace agreement.[[34]](#endnote-34)

The point of these illustrations is that international relations are complex and that the churches, to offer credible witness, need to have capacity for analysis as well as passion for peacemaking. In this section we present first emerging nonviolent strategies which are clearly preferable to continued dictatorships protected by short-sighted alliances, commercial interests, and massive weapons sales. We note the contributions made by Just War and Just Peacemaking categories, and their limitations. (See Appendix E for brief listings of Just War, Just Peacemaking and nonviolence principles). This section concludes with the claim that the church’s capacity to “nourish(es) the moral life of the nation” (to quote *The Believers’ Calling*) depends on its ability to nurture a moral imagination willing to take risks for peace and envision new relationships.

**Nonviolent Direct Action and Nonviolent Ethos**

Nonviolent direct action, best known from the work of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., has proven to be an effective means of wielding power in a variety of conflicts. It’s the source behind the earlier examples: the nonviolent “people power” that freed the Philippines; the pro-democracy movements in Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia that ousted communist regimes in 1989; the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, supported by international economic pressure, that brought an end to white minority rule. Lesser known cases are the nonviolent student movement in Serbia that ousted a weakened Slobodan Milosevic in the year 2000 and the peace achieved in Mozambique with the assistance of Roman Catholic mediators.[[35]](#endnote-35) Christians participated in these movements for social change, using methods of nonviolent action reminiscent of the civil rights movement that changed the United States.

Nonviolent direct action—the use of protest marches, strikes, boycotts, sit-ins, and more—is a means of wielding power, a technique for waging conflict, just as guerrilla warfare, conventional warfare, and terrorism are also means of waging conflict. Nonviolent direct action is distinct from some methods of conflict resolution in that it seeks to surface, escalate, or intensify conflict. It does not require its practitioners to be committed to a philosophy or ethic of nonviolence, so long as they follow the methods and stay united. Indeed, people often choose nonviolent action for pragmatic reasons rather than religious, moral, or ethical ones. In this way, strategic nonviolence counters one argument sometimes made against religious nonviolence or Christian pacifism, that it fosters a non-engagement or withdrawal, a search for uncompromising purity, in the manner of Amish communities, Jehovah’s Witnesses, certain Catholic orders, or some forms of Buddhism or Jainism. Strategic nonviolence may call for withdrawal, but on a scale that can immobilize cities; its witness is not for purity’s sake, but to show how injustice is always unstable.

Nonviolent people power movements have shown themselves capable of overthrowing dictators, thwarting coups d’état, defending against invasions and occupations, challenging unjust systems, promoting human rights, and resisting genocide. A recent study, “Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict,” by Maria J. Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, compared the effectiveness of violent and nonviolent resistance campaigns in conflicts between non-state and state actors between 1900 and 2006.[[36]](#endnote-36) The study found that “major nonviolent campaigns have achieved success 53 percent of the time, compared with 26 percent for violent resistance campaigns.” Jesus’ third way of nonviolent action may not work in all circumstances, but the historical record shows that its contemporary analogues are a powerful means of engaging in conflict and can be used successfully in struggles for justice, human rights, and self-determination.

The work of nonviolence theorist Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, was widely used as a manual during the Arab Awakening. Widely translated and reprinted, it contains practical guidance for assessing the weak points of repressive governments and building movements, along with a list of 198 nonviolent methods.[[37]](#endnote-37) Sharp’s strategy would suggest, for example, that though the Syrian protesters were right to try nonviolent means at first, they had not prepared enough of the population for the regime’s response and the influx of extremists pursuing a proxy war. Though Sharp (himself a minister’s son) stresses the pragmatic applicability of nonviolent strategies to struggles anywhere, we are particularly interested, as Christians, in relating them to our “world-transformative” ethos and motivating hope.

Nonviolence may be thought of as both an end and a means. It is an end insofar as it refers to the future world we long for—a world free from violence and war, free from hunger and poverty, free from injustice and oppression, and full of God’s love, justice, and healing. We may understand it as Jesus’ “kingdom of God’ or Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “beloved community,” or Walter Wink’s “domination-free order.” Leo Tolstoy’s reading of Jesus in the Gospels influenced Gandhi in finding the *satyagraha* (truthforce) in his religious tradition. Henry David Thoreau’s civil disobedience is an example of nonviolence as an ethic or applied philosophy of life. As an ethic it has often been disparaged as a form of withdrawal or an attempt to escape complicity in life’s power struggles. Certainly parts of the Mennonite tradition reflect that withdrawal, while Quakers often represent deep and tenacious engagement, even with powers they oppose. Yet the paradigmatic Mennonite story of Dirk Willems— escaping imprisonment for his faith, yet turning back to rescue a persecutor from drowning, and then being burnt at the stake—is not about withdrawal. It is about being willing to suffer out of love.[[38]](#endnote-38)

These alternative visions and actions can contribute to the church’s embodied witness by helping it become a “contrast model” to more violent, hierarchical, or competitive social relations. Nonviolence and pacifism need not be based solely on a personal ethic of imitating Jesus. A nonviolent communal ecclesiology can involve clear beliefs about every member sharing in the gifts of the Spirit which include peace. This grounds peaceful resistance to evil both in God’s interaction within individual human conscience and within dedicated, worshiping communities. Personal and collective forms of nonviolent action are described later in the report under the heading of “things that make for peace,” but they are ideally rooted in the life of the church.

Thus we wonder and ask the church to wonder with us: What would it look like if the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reoriented more of its common life around the Prince of Peace and re-emphasized the nonviolent example of his life and witness in our preaching and teaching, our spiritual formation and worship, and our public witness in our violent world?

Many Presbyterians have rarely given serious attention and reflection to questions of violence and nonviolence, war and peace. They have not heard these subjects addressed in sermons, nor have they talked about them in Christian education classes. We heard from many participants that the Peace Discernment process was their first introduction to the ideas of Christian nonviolence, and Presbyterian Panel survey data bear that out. At the same time, many were also unfamiliar with the actual content of the Just War and Just Peacemaking approaches. As a denomination, we need to do a much better job of teaching peace to people in the pews.

**Just War Principles and Just Peacemaking Initiatives**

These background sections have mentioned the just war tradition at various points, starting with the quote from Chaplain Kermit Johnson, who applied its categories of ethical decision to nuclear war. He concluded that even various “tactical” nuclear war scenarios could not be justified.[[39]](#endnote-39) In light of Augustine’s insistence on right intention, Ronald Stone argued that the threat of “mutually assured destruction” could not be justified, even though the Roman Catholic bishops’ pastoral letter, “The Challenge of Peace,” accepted deterrence conditionally, saying it was not “adequate as a long term basis for peace.” That was in 1983. The General Assembly’s opposition to nuclear war in *Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age* (1988) is also based partly on Just War criteria, as was its stand on the Iraq war (2004). The clear implication of the church’s stand against the Iraq “war of choice” is to rule out the purported doctrine of pre-emptive war practiced by the second Bush administration in the absence of a real or imminent threat. Indeed, if the discernment discussions revealed any consensus on a specific policy, it was to oppose pre-emptive war.

The Just War tradition is intended to serve as a constraint on the use of military force—to minimize the violence used in achieving a particular objective. *All* five criteria must be satisfied if military action (*jus ad bello*) is to be considered morally justifiable: just cause, right intention, proper authority, last resort, reasonable hope of success. Once a nation has committed to military action, that conduct (*jus in bello*) must adhere to two additional criteria—proportionality and discrimination (avoiding noncombatants).

Though we have seen the utility of Just War criteria as a means of assessment, their flexibility is often exploited by those seeking war or defending the necessity of certain war practices. Critics question the practical value of Just War criteria if they do not give clear direction to decision makers about which course of action is more moral. Some in the Christian Realist camp challenge the “natural law” bases of Just War (such as the right to self-defense) and doubt that war can ever be a rational or fully rule-governed activity.

A case in point: World War II, the so-called “Good War,” is widely considered to have been a “just war.” However, it did not meet all of the criteria of a just war. U.S. involvement in the war was certainly prompted by just causes—responding to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and countering the aggression of Nazi Germany in Europe. But the conduct of the war devolved into “total war” with both sides bombing cities indiscriminately, killing hundreds of thousands of non-combatants, culminating in the U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in pursuit of unconditional surrender and possibly to signal Russia. The 158th General Assembly (1946) responded: “Christians know that war is evil. The use of the atomic bomb means that war reaches a degree of destruction which multiplies this evil beyond human concept.” The Assembly went on to call for “. . . immediate cessation of the manufacture of atomic bombs.”[[40]](#endnote-40)

Despite the elasticity of just war criteria, as long as U.S. military actions are presented as morally justifiable based on those criteria (whether or not there is a declaration of war), it is important that Presbyterians be well-versed in this tradition so that they can participate intelligently in the public debate and not be deceived by national leaders bent on using military force. The 1988 *Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age* statement recognized that most acceptance of war is based not on Just War thinking, but on unthinking obedience to the state and political forces; hence various means of resistance were seen as consistent with Reformed teaching.

The most important approach to the Just War tradition that has evolved in post-World War II ethical thinking is to emphasize how the presupposition or grounded preference for nonviolence can orient the Just War criteria. This understanding is augmented in the Just Peacemaking preventive measures that build on the principle that war is a last resort. Resort to violence in war, as many in the military know as well as civilian victims, is inevitably tragic and frequently means suspending moral criteria in the name of survival. Christopher Hedges, a former war correspondent, has also illuminated the virtually addictive thrill of combat violence.[[41]](#endnote-41) This is far from the right intention enjoined by Just War proponents.

The ten Just Peacemaking practices were put together by an ecumenical team of ethicists coordinated by Professor Glen Stassen of Fuller Theological Seminary.[[42]](#endnote-42) Based on many lessons from peacemaking involvements and perceived limits of Just War thinking, these practices focus most on how conflicts can be avoided—not least by taking what are called independent initiatives to reduce tensions and thus avoid overt hostilities. (See Appendix G for examples of methods used to reduce violence.) An interfaith application of the principles has been published as well.[[43]](#endnote-43) The Just Peacemaking practices do not presume a pacifist basis, and hence are not an alternative to Just War principles, even though they seek to “abolish war.” They underline how much war often results from specific failures of leadership and diplomacy, and from predictable weaknesses of international institutions. Just Peacemaking criteria suggest that international institutions like the United Nations lose legitimacy when any single superpower can frustrate moral consensus, though getting Security Council members to give up their vetoes may seem utopian. The concern for human rights that is part of Just Peacemaking also shows how the international justice system is kept weak, partly by a United States that refuses jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court and stands outside of basic treaties, and partly by low membership standards for nations that abuse their citizens.

Just Peacemaking, like active nonviolence, thus illuminates how much the Just War approach is tied to nation states and their sovereignty. Citizenship in nation states is a basis for grounding much of human rights law, but human rights law also points beyond and within states, which typically resent interference. A searching critique of the Just Peacemaking construct by one of its ethicist participants points both to its antecedents in the “Six Pillars of Peace” of the Federal Council of Churches and the limitations of putting too much weight on alternatives to national policies: “Until just peacemaking incorporates more attention to power, national definitions of purpose, diplomacy, and biblical realism derived from the prophets, it will remain too idealistic.”[[44]](#endnote-44)

What Just Peacemaking does well is to introduce a whole new body of practical measures for conflict resolution and reconciliation forged in some very difficult circumstances, often with strong Christian inspiration. We look more at “the things that make for peace” in the next section, but they include things like Just Peacemaking practice 4: “Acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustice and seek repentance and forgiveness.” This partly reflects Donald W. Shriver’s *An Ethic for Enemies* (1995), which applied forgiveness in political and social situations. Among the groups explicitly focusing on forgiveness are Fr. Leonel Narvaez’s Schools of Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America, seeking to help heal the effects of “dirty wars,” and the work of Donna Hicks on ways to restore dignity to victims of violence and humiliation.[[45]](#endnote-45)

What the Presbyterian Church and other U.S. Christian bodies have not done fully or effectively is to provide a moral analysis of certain major developments in war-making. These would include what is close to the abdication by Congress of its power to declare war; the movement of many combat functions to private contractors and voluntary enlistees which has the effect of making it more and more a profit making enterprise (often financed by borrowed money); and the development of incredibly sophisticated weaponry in robotics, nanotechnology, drones, and more. (The 2014 General Assembly resolution, “Drones, War, and Surveillance,” addresses some of this.)

**The Church and the Military**

As long as Presbyterians continue to serve in the U.S. military, the Presbyterian Church has a responsibility to care for active duty soldiers, veterans, and their families. Our denomination does this by providing chaplains to the military through the Presbyterians Caring for Chaplains and Military Personnel (PCCMP). An influential essay by a current chaplain, Captain Mel Baars, discusses her ministry in Afghanistan as of September 11, 2012: The mission of these ministers is “to provide military personnel with a visible reminder of the HOLY in the midst of combat and chaos.”[[46]](#endnote-46) Chaplains serve as noncombatants; they are prohibited from carrying firearms. They offer worship, prayer, and Bible study, and spend much of their time providing pastoral care and counseling to the soldiers in their units. Chaplains also may serve as a moral voice on the battlefield, where life and death decisions are being made on a daily basis. Chaplains are often the only ones in the chain of command who can hear and hold the terror of young soldiers facing death, and hear and hold the remorse in taking the life of another human being. Chaplains themselves carry a large burden in being present in war as enemies also made in the image of God are objectified and killing becomes routinized. This last task is especially critical given the decades-long decline in mainline participation in the military chaplaincy, especially since many who have been drawn to military chaplaincy have been influenced by syncretistic theologies that combine God and American exceptionalism. Indeed, military training is designed to break down the innate reluctance to take the lives of our fellow human beings, to make killing, even under limited circumstances, normative, and necessary. Furthermore, war doesn't end when the deployment is over; its lingering effects continue long after veterans return home.

Our congregations also have a role to play in supporting military families while their loved ones are deployed overseas and after they return home. Multiple deployments put enormous stress on soldiers and on the spouses and children they leave behind. Even when soldiers return physically unscathed, parts of the soul can remain on the battlefield. This can mean depression, suicidal thoughts, post traumatic stress disorder, sometimes augmented by serious doubts or lack of support for the wars. Veterans need the love and care of congregations who will welcome them home and listen to them with wisdom. The Church has a special responsibility to help heal the moral and spiritual wounds of its sons and daughters who have been scarred by war. For instance, in the Greek Orthodox tradition there is a ritual cleansing from the spiritual defilement of violence. A new approach to the “moral injury” of war has been pioneered by Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini, working with retired Army Chaplain Herman Keizer.[[47]](#endnote-47)

The PC(USA) also has a responsibility to our youth and young adults to help them examine their own consciences and to work through the ethical arguments for serving in the military versus declaring oneself a conscientious objector to war. Young people are presented with these important decisions early in their lives. We fail them if we do not equip them to make these decisions faithfully and wisely. The 1969 General Assembly report on *War, Peace, & Conscience* is still relevant here, even though there is no current military conscription. The major report *Ministry To Persons in the Armed Forces*, adopted by the General Assembly in 1975, contains valuable analysis of both chaplaincy work and short-term programs like the Emergency Ministry on Conscience and War of the late 1960s.[[48]](#endnote-48)

**Inviting in the Moral Imagination**

In our peace discernment process, we were inspired by the writings and the grassroots peacemaking work of John Paul Lederach, a Mennonite veteran of “peace-building” who has mediated conflicts for the last thirty years. Others, like Andrea Bartoli in the Roman Catholic tradition, and the emerging “forgiveness school,” also introduce imagination in cultivated ways. Lederach identifies the moral imagination as the capacity to imagine and design processes within the real-life challenges of violence without being caught up in destructive patterns. Lederach maintains:

If we are to survive as a global community, we must understand the imperative nature of giving birth and space to the moral imagination in human affairs. We must face the fact that much of our current system for responding to deadly local and international conflict is incapable of overcoming cycles of violent patterns because our imagination has been corralled and shackled by the very parameters and sources that create and perpetuate violence.[[49]](#endnote-49)

The moral imagination is activated when “politics as usual” fails to deliver. The moral imagination requires the capacity to risk a new world. This risk is embedded in three related capacities: to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships in which all parties are knit together, to embrace the complexity of every conflict, and to act creatively, especially given the risks it takes to imagine peace. Peace-building requires that people be able to envision their interconnectedness and mutuality. Daniel Ott, in his adaptation of Christian Realism, emphasizes how peacemakers must see that real change is possible and not be stuck in fatalism or determinism. Without the inner strength of hope, Christians would not have led in the struggles to abolish slavery, honor women’s equality, pay workers fairly, protect the rights of children, or fight global warming today.

Moral imagination also involves the capacity to rise above polarities of “us and them” and divisions of “with us or against us” and reach beyond accepted meanings. “Paradoxical curiosity” is the gift of respecting complexity, searching beyond the visible and discovering unexpected potential. To risk is to step into the unknown without guarantee of success or safety. For many people caught in conflict, violence is known, and peace is a mystery. Because peace-building typically requires people to move toward a new, mysterious, and unexpected future, it is a difficult journey. And yet, Christ clearly calls us to join him in risking peace and transforming conflicts by boldly practicing the things that make for peace.

**Affirmation #5: We commit ourselves to practice the things that make for peace in our daily lives, families, and communities, to risk calling our nation back from the practices of empire to the highest ideals of our heritage, and to take part in social movements for a domination-free order.**

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to seek first the kingdom of God. Peacemaking is part of our seeking that reign or commonwealth where God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Until that day, prophetic discipleship involves risk, and we hope this affirmation is faithful to the risk involved. This section begins with our Christian vision of “things that make for peace,” then outlines the scale of those “practices of empire,” and concludes with ideas for scaling up our peace practices.

This affirmation does not seek to put our country’s national security is at risk, but to enable the Church to challenge the way our nation has extended its understanding of national security into all its relations with the rest of the world. Over 15 years of wars (since the relative peace of the 1990’s), there has been a regression from real leadership in creating world order. Between the reptilian social brain of empire thinking and idea of a “domination-free” order modeled on the kingdom, there is a distance that communities of faith must help our country navigate. When fears of the Other are stoked, when national glory is seen primarily in power, when terrorism is magnified, when presidential candidates compete in threatening war crimes, then the church (like the prophets) must call the nation-state “back,” in our case to liberty and justice for all, and hopes that America would be an exception to old world *machtpolitik* (power politics). Even though the church itself will never become that “domination-free order,” that remains our vision for measuring all the orders in which we live.

To practice the things that make for peace first in our daily lives is, for most of us, a matter of love, consideration, and respect for others and the laws that keep our communities peaceful. We count on the disciplines of faith: prayer, worship, and self-awareness in relation to Christ’s Spirit present with us. There are disciplines of personal and communal life that we learn above all in the church, from not letting the sun go down on our anger to understanding that we all have different gifts to use for the common good. All of us at times argue and face conflicts, with violence is a very distant last resort, yet our previous affirmations propose a consistency between the character of our families and communities and the nature of our citizenship and international relations. Certainly when we recognize complicity and structural violence, we recognize that nations do not behave as individuals, and that we are beneficiaries of past inequality and continuing privilege. Yet one of our deepest hopes is peace, with justice, and our dispositions and our disciplines can be much strengthened in this direction.

Our confirmation and adult education classes can teach forgiveness, reconciliation, and conflict resolution as practical strategies, and our public witness can look more wisely and critically at the national interests we are called to fund or defend. To support this recommendation is not only to seek to be nonviolent in our own lives, but to seek to reorient our society away from the lure of empire and its structures of domination toward the promotion of a sustainable global community in which basic human needs are met and security assured. That goal is not utopian; in environmental terms, it may be beyond time to end the waste of war.

It is clear, after more than fourteen years of war, that a majority of Presbyterians are deeply concerned about the enormous human and economic costs of war—the hundreds of thousands killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, the millions of people displaced by the violence, the thousands of U.S. soldiers killed or injured, the trillions of dollars spent, and the damage done to our economy. This report has noted that a majority of Presbyterians are also deeply worried about the pervasive violence in U.S. culture—in gun violence, sports, entertainment, and in our tolerance for hunger, poverty, abuse, and neglect. Just as we seek to be just and loving in our own lives and in our congregations, so as Reformed Christians we believe the church is called to invite the nations of the world into new understandings of how to respond to violence in our time. To many, the church is called by the scriptures to be a counter-cultural community, as it was in its first three centuries of growth, pointing the world to God’s coming reign in Jesus Christ. The times cry out for the church to bring forward the Spirit’s healing and transformational gifts in new ways.

In this section we look at the concept of empire, opposed by some in the presbyteries that responded to an earlier version of this affirmation[[50]](#endnote-50). We understand that definitions of empire differ, that the U.S. is not the only empire, and that empires come in several kinds. For some, empire is another word for “hegemon.” For others empire is a pejorative term for “Babylon” which in Revelation bears “the mark of the beast,” that is the stain of evil. It names the misuse of power, the use of other people and nations for our benefit more than theirs. Others, such as John Ikenberry, maintain that America does not generally relate to the world as an empire (that is, a sole power with client states), but when it does (as in the recent Iraq war) and it acts outside of international institutions, it loses moral legitimacy. For still others, empire is not a pejorative term. This is because humans require some system of international order or the world will devolve into a global failed state. Rather than immediately considering empires are evil, they believe empires should be judged by their approximation of Christian and human values. Consider the Roman Empire, for example. For all its faults, after the Roman Empire fell literacy virtually disappeared and it would be another 1000 years before one could freely travel from Great Britain to Egypt.

In this affirmation, we use empire to address the purposes of power and the differences between national or homeland security and human security (both safety and sustainability of life provided through cooperative action to meet human needs). We propose that our peacemaking calling means helping our nation change its orientation to the world, from superpower to something less grandiose. No one sees the U.S. losing its military preeminence any time soon or can yet articulate a realistic alternative ordering of international security, but true national strength would have our country be “number one” again in some other measures of national achievement than military strength.

Thus this affirmation lifts up a vision of God’s Reign of justice and peace as an alternative to power relations predicated *primarily* on force. The United States does not stand above the inevitable competition among nations seeking their own interests. China, Russia, and other major powers maintain empires through trade, alliances, and force. Ethnically different sections of some countries may be controlled by majorities and even internally colonized. Our role remains dominant, however, despite the tragedies of Iraq and Afghanistan, and the interests for which we sustain our massive military presence around the world remain largely unquestioned. On one level, it is honest patriotism to challenge U.S. foreign and military policies that seek to dominate the rest of the world in order to maintain our “American Way of Life” at the expense of others. But it is also a matter of Christian discipleship to minister to those who are dominated by any power, and this requires us always to be clear who “we” are: Christians and citizens who do not confuse the cross with the flag.

**Colonialism, Empire, and Post-Colonial Empire**

The early church stood largely in opposition to the Roman Empire, though they could also be grateful for the way Roman Roads and free travel allowed evangelists to carry to the gospel to distant locales. But then, beginning in the fourth century, the church and Roman Empire arguably began a long symbiotic relationship.

The Peace of Westphalia, which followed the repeated breakup of would-be successors to the Roman Empire, created a system of nation states that recognized one another’s sovereignty. These European states later expanded into global empires and colonized other lands. They often did this with the blessing of the Church. Explorers and conquistadors conquered lands and peoples with Christian missionaries in their wake. This was true of the Spanish, the Portuguese, and the French, with some variation for the reconfigured Protestant monarchies of the British and the Dutch, shown in the range of New World settlements starting in the Sixteenth Century. Elsewhere in the world, powerful nations, such as the Ottomans, exercised their power to control the land and resources of others in a variety of ways, often settling regions, dispossessing native inhabitants, imposing new languages, cultures, and religions. Following the disruptions of World Wars I and II, newly independent colonies sought to join the Westphalian community of nations as instituted in the United Nations. Even after independence, though, many nations maintained relationships of dependency with the former colonizers.

In the case of the United States, original hopes of being a New Israel took new forms on the frontier, and manifest destiny led to wars of conquest, however rationalized. Following World War II, the United States led the way in creating numerous international institutions such a the United Nations, Nato, the World Bank, and the Bretton Woods Agreement. These institutions were to follow the rule of international law and enhance human rights. The high ideals of these institutions were soon over taken by a Cold War that pitted the forces of Global Communism against the Free world under the leadership of the United States. In this bi-polar world, the U.S. dominated countries indirectly by supporting military dictators, such as Marcos in the Philippines, the Somozas in Nicaragua, and the Shah in Iran. We extended our influence and leverage by providing governments with military and economic aid. With military equipment came training and enduring relationships with foreign militaries, whatever their human rights records. Where there has been resistance to U.S. hegemony—whether it be the Cuban Revolution, or the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, the Iranian Revolution in some respects—the U.S. has reacted with military and economic force.

The collapse of the bi-polar world created by the Cold War, left a uni-polar world with America possessing the strongest military and largest economy, unchallenged anywhere in the world. Shortly after the collapse of communism, America, working on concert with NATO, helped to bring peace to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Then, working apart from international institutions, in violation of international law, and ignoring the counsel of many allies, America invaded Iraq, a move that greatly undercut America’s moral legitimacy even among those who supported us. Although we have recently faced limits in the projection of American power, not only by our inability to influence the direction of countries we invaded, but by the rise of regional powers (China, Russia, or the region-wide influence of Islamic extremism, as in the so-called, Islamic State) that challenge America’s position as the sole global hegemon, it is fair to say that Pax Romana has become Pax Americana.

Difficult as it may be for Christians living in the U.S. today, it is incumbent upon us to recognize that we live in what many consider the heart of empire (in the pejorative sense). Even in our own faith community, the World Communion of Reformed Churches issued a declaration containing a careful definition of empire that challenges us, even if it is also subject to debate.The Accra Assembly (2004) said: “In using the term ‘empire’ we mean the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests.”[[51]](#endnote-51) The Accra declaration (often called, Confession) criticized the unregulated or “neoliberal” market system in ways that were prophetic in light of the credit crash of 2008, but its larger claim was that economic globalization was strengthening inequality among and within nations, to the benefit of those at the top of a hegemonic order. We may not think easily about “hegemony,” but that’s part of the point. As Americans, we don’t think twice about the U.S. maintaining approximately 750 overseas military bases in 130 countries. But imagine some other country wanting to operate a military base on U.S. soil!

Given the freedom and prosperity most Presbyterians experience inside the U.S., we don’t often challenge the status quo. If we raise our voices in opposition to U.S. empire, we may not speak very loudly. But like Jesus, John the Baptist, and the Hebrew prophets before them, the Church today has a prophetic calling. As the Body of Christ, the church continues the work of Christ in the world. We have a responsibility to speak truth to power, to challenge the status quo, to be a voice of conscience to our nation and to the world.

**Aspects of “Empire” in U.S. Policy Today**

Three crucial statements of U.S. foreign and military policy have been made since 1980: the Carter Doctrine, the Powell Doctrine, and the Bush Doctrine. The Carter Doctrine says that the U.S. government reserves the right to use military power to guarantee access to Middle East oil. The Powell Doctrine expressed the U.S. aspiration to “full spectrum dominance,” that is, the ability of the U.S. military to bring dominating military force to bear on any situation anywhere on the planet. The Bush Doctrine of “preventive war” claims that the U.S. government has the right to “defend” itself against putative or imagined threats by striking adversaries preemptively. All three of these foreign policy strategies rely on a military role and can be termed “militarism,” though the Obama administration has criticized the Bush doctrine and not stated a doctrine for its own increasing reliance on drones and special operations forces.

It is important for us to recognize how far these developments depart from the Constitution’s opposition to a standing army and from historical practice where the size of the U.S. military corresponded to the immediate threat or task to which it was directed. After the end of the Cold War, the size and capability of our military has taken on a life of its own, independent of any specific threats. Americans had grown to see it as their right and responsibility to police the world, and powerful interests benefited. Then the terror attack of 9/11 occurred, prompting a virtual doubling of military and surveillance expenditure even independent of the two wars, which were funded by debt.

Today our nation’s ability to project armed force beyond our borders is second to none. We have the best-trained and equipped armed forces in the world, and we spend more on our military than do the countries with the next ten highest military budgets combined. The United States is by far the largest arms dealer in the world. U.S. foreign military sales surged in 2014 to a record high of $36.2 billion, accounting for over 50% of the global arms market.[[52]](#endnote-52) The U.S. military budget is larger than all other federal programs except Social Security. The U.S. retains a web of military bases around the world from which to project force, carry on surveillance, and protect oil and other resources. U.S. military intervention had become relatively normal since the end of the Cold War—in Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, the Persian Gulf, and then Afghanistan and Iraq II opened new horizons, including Pakistan, Yemen, Libya, and various military assistance operations in the western hemisphere. Hardly a year or two has passed without a significant military action. Living in a state of war has become the rule rather than the exception.[[53]](#endnote-53)

National Security has become the overarching interest with which the United States approaches the world. Since “the war on terror” began, covert operations, surveillance, and drone missiles have taken on a central role. The growth in the U.S. intelligence community has been staggering. According to a July 2011 series in *The Washington Post,* some 1,271 government organizations and 1,931 private companies then worked on programs related to counter-terrorism, homeland security, and intelligence, with an estimated 854,000 people holding top-secret security clearances. The threat of terror is not to be dismissed, but that label may conceal the way that globalization creates cross-border networks of grievance and covert operations kept secret to us (such as providing arms, training, surveillance data) that de-stabilize traditional societies.[[54]](#endnote-54)

Perhaps more importantly, the entire spectrum of our nation’s engagement with the world is becoming more militarized. U.S. military forces are increasingly being used to do things that have not usually been considered part of their job—things like nation building, which had been handled by international diplomacy and the State Department. The extent to which our nation’s priorities have been skewed toward the military is illustrated by the resources we invest in it compared to what we spend on diplomacy and development. The base funding of the Department of Defense is more than ten times that of the State Department and USAID. Rather than a once hoped for “peace dividend,” our military planning is still guided by the goal of “full spectrum dominance” and remains predicated on maintaining overwhelming superiority.

There are voices for change within the military itself. One of the more comprehensive comes from Captain Wayne Porter, USN, and Colonel Mark Mykleby, USMC, whose proposal for a new “National Strategic Narrative” was endorsed and summarized by Anne-Marie Slaughter, a professor of international affairs and briefly director of Policy Planning in the State Department. Their proposal is for five shifts in approach:

1. from a dominant position of control to credible influence in a more open geopolitical system;

2. from “containment to sustainment,” based on domestic redevelopment and better modeling of the behavior we seek in other nations;

3. from “deterrence and defense to civilian engagement and competition,” which would reemphasize trade and diplomacy, while still modernizing “a security complex that includes all domestic and foreign policy assets”;

4. from “zero sum to positive sum global politics/economics,” preferring interdependence and universal values to isolation and exclusion of other nations;

5. from “national security to national prosperity and security,” a shift that would involve a new National Prosperity and Security Act to replace the 1947 National Security Act.

In Slaughter’s summary, she sees the officers adjusting the balance between exceptionalism and universalism toward the latter value, still seeking to be “leader of the free world,” but in a healthier and less military way.[[55]](#endnote-55)

**Economic Drivers or National Purposes**

President Eisenhower’s prophetic warning about the unwarranted influence of the military-industrial complex from 1961 has become more relevant than ever.[[56]](#endnote-56) More accurately called the military-industrial-congressional complex, or “the iron triangle,” it is an interlocking system of mutually reinforcing interests with very little outside oversight. Supported by “political engineering” that distributes military contracts across many congressional districts, the complex creates and sustains its own bureaucratic momentum. The question is simply: How much are private interests dictating national interests, and have we come to confuse such interests with national purposes? Nonviolence seeks to put a moral bottom line under foreign policy, while peacemaking works more broadly to see that our purposes remain larger than our interests.[[57]](#endnote-57)

The United States’ vast military and intelligence establishments go far beyond the intent or imagination of our nation’s founders, whose views could loosely be called isolationist, opposed to ‘foreign entanglements’ in John Adams’s words. George Washington himself counseled against a significant standing army: “Overgrown military establishments are under any form of government inauspicious to liberty, and are to be regarded as particularly hostile to Republican liberty” (Farewell Address, September 17, 1796). And James Madison wrote: “Of all enemies to public liberty, war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded, because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes; and armies, and debts, and taxes are the known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few.”

By contrasting the practices of empire with “the highest ideals of our heritage,” we affirm that our country should have a significant role in the world and one of benefit to all. It is a key role of the church to help inspire our culture to see new possibilities, and it is not isolationist to be opposed to much military intervention. At times the use of power is justified and may serve those high ideals of democracy and world community; the dangers are that the momentum of our enormous arsenal calls to be used, and that this mindset may confuse power and responsibility. Finally, following John Ikenberry, we note that when America goes on foreign adventures, as we did in Iraq, working outside of international institutions and in violation of international law, which we helped create following World War II, we severely damage our moral legitimacy.[[58]](#endnote-58)While some American nationalists would consider working through international institutions unrealistic and constraining, we call people to a deeper realism that recognizes the importance of moral legitimacy to international leadership. This lawful, cooperative and moral approach has characterized the “highest ideals of our heritage.”

**Challenges in Pulling the United States Back from “Empire” Practices**

Professor Andrew Bacevich, a career military officer now a professor of political science and incisive commentator on American military policy, analyzes a phenomenon he terms “Washington rules.”[[59]](#endnote-59) These rules consist of the “American credo,” which is the assumption that the United States is “exceptional” or “indispensable”—that it alone has the duty and the calling to “lead, save, liberate, and ultimately transform the world.” Complementing the belief in American exceptionalism is a consensus across the spectrum of the American political elite regardless of political party. This consensus insists that international peace and order require the U.S. to project military power anywhere across the globe and that the U.S. follow a policy of global interventionism. The twin pillars of “Washington rules”—American exceptionalism and the global police role—have a strangle-hold on American foreign and military policy, according to Bacevich. Voices that question this consensus, as the church has done on numerous occasions, are regarded as outliers, too radical, or naïve and unrealistic. The result is a self-reinforcing system of decision-making that discounts the calls for moral restraint or efforts to see the other nation’s point of view.

Therefore, the church must be realistic about the nature of its influence. In light of the “Iron Triangle” noted above, three main factors influence military spending: 1) powerful multi-national corporations have a vested interest in perpetuating the machinery of war and seeing it as a necessity. Weapons must be used and new orders placed for profits to be maintained over time; 2) political careers must be continued and economic benefits from the military-industrial complex deliver the goods to constituencies back home, even if other forms of public investment would create more jobs; and 3) the dramatic rise in the power of the Pentagon and the massive “defense” establishment over the past seventy years has created a huge and dominant sector of government with ever-increasing demands. These three extremely powerful factors in the decision-making process regarding war form a political “micro-climate” largely impervious to outside influence. In fact, the phrase “micro-climate” is deceptive, for it is an enormous part of our country’s life, too often underestimated by churches and other reforming groups.

The Reformed tradition has long affirmed that the state can indeed be an instrument of God’s purposes in history (Rom. 13). But it is also true that the Word of God warns us that the state can also be an instrument of the Beast (Rev. 13). These texts pose the basic question of whether the United States functions more as an empire pursuing its own interests than as a faithful instrument of God’s will. In these historical circumstances, nonviolence represents a counter-logic, a sharper contrast, and a counter-weight to the machinery of permanent war and seemingly perpetual cycles of violence. The Reformed tradition makes careful provision for responsible resistance to government overreach, based on its covenantal vision of national purposes, and this more constructive vision is the core of the alternatives to misused power that the church seeks to present. That covenantal vision, in fact, was expressed in Puritan John Winthrop’s first use of Jesus’s metaphor of a “city set on a hill” for the new settlement they were building. Nowadays we are clearer than Winthrop was that human rights and respect for international law are essential building blocks in any such construction, but he was clear enough that for the community to last “we must be willing to abridge our selves of our superfluities for the supply of others’ necessities.”[[60]](#endnote-60)

**The Things that Make for Peace**

We Presbyterians are looking for direction and guidance about how we, as individuals and congregations, can take faithful and effective action to reduce violence and war, to further justice and peace. In this vein, there is broad interest in learning concrete peacemaking skills that we can use in our daily lives. Indeed, if we are to be effective peacemakers, able to actually reduce violence and injustice in our various contexts, we need to receive education and training in the “things that make for peace.” We need to study and practice nonviolent means of conflict resolution (such as nonviolent communication, negotiation, and mediation) and nonviolent methods for social change (such as faith-based community organizing and nonviolent direct action) to help bring about a more just and peaceful world. (See Appendix G for brief descriptions of these approaches). We also need to become more familiar with just peacemaking initiatives, which can help prevent war, and just war principles, which are intended to limit war, so that we can be more effective advocates for justice and peace in the public square. Jesus’ own statement, “would that you knew this day the things that make for peace,” was addressed to the whole of Jerusalem, and was followed shortly by his “cleansing of the Temple”(Lk. 19:42-46).[[61]](#endnote-61)

**Interfaith Understanding**

Among the most important peacemaking approaches for Christians today are practices of inter-religious understanding that build mutual respect and the ability to hear what is most important to the other, without vetoes or mischaracterization. Religions are often blamed for being the cause of conflict and violence in the world. Religious identity is impossible to separate from other dimensions of personal identity, yet those who blame religion isolate it as the primary causal factor. In reality, political, ethnic, and economic factors bear much more responsibility for creating the underlying conditions that lead to violent conflict. Nonetheless, religions have within them a storehouse of resources to promote peace and reconciliation, and Presbyterians should be quite familiar with the Christian basics, starting with the Golden Rule, “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Lk. 6:31), which is found in some form in all of the world’s major religions. In many cases cited in *Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution*, edited by David Little, public dialogue between religious leaders from opposing groups can help create breakthroughs for reconciliation.[[62]](#endnote-62) Prophetic religious leaders are often among the few social actors who can and will take initiative in blocked situations.

Little also sees religious peacemakers playing four key roles: in “enforcement, peacekeeping, institution-and-capacity building, and agreement-making.”[[63]](#endnote-63) The work is less in the first area, which can involve coercion to end violence (as in Bosnia and Kosovo), and the second, which can be diplomatic language for outside military monitoring or stabilization forces. The third and fourth roles, however, are sometimes considered part of a “Track Two” or unofficial citizen diplomacy. They frequently involve religious peacemakers in developing organizations and even rituals for social harmony and thus creating positive contexts for Track One, or formal peace negotiations. Such efforts built empathic understanding in South Sudan and Northern Ireland, for example, although the relationships built can remain fragile.

**Truth and Reconciliation Commissions**

Under the fourth affirmation we noted ways that public forgiveness and apology were included within the Just Peacemaking framework. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions are also ways of bringing perpetrators to acknowledge, if not actually confess, the truth of their actions before their victims or the survivors of their victims. The Rev. Allan Boesak, a leader of the nonviolent United Democratic Front that played a major role in South Africa’s transition, has analyzed ambiguities in the quasi-judicial reconciliation commission approach. There is a danger that a collective evil, like apartheid, be reduced to the actions of individuals who are then blamed on behalf of a larger group that wants to “move on” and minimize shared complicity. Yet Boesak also affirms that victims can regain their voices and dignity through publicly recognized and respected grief.[[64]](#endnote-64) Naturally, the work of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions must follow the actual achievement of cease-fires. The presence of outside observers (like a Jimmy Carter) and religious leaders (like a Desmond Tutu) can be extremely helpful. The key thing, though, is that such commissions are moral inventions and they can lead to more healing and more creativity. We need more arenas where longer term hostilities can be defused, young people inspired, and new leaders born. Could we even address structural violence this way, and recognize more veterans of social conflict who carry moral injuries?

**Accompaniment and Nonviolent Third-Party Intervention**

Nonviolent direct action is usually engaged in by the “weaker” party in a conflict. In the past few decades, however, there has been growing experience with third parties, who are not part of a conflict, intervening nonviolently in the hopes of deterring violent attacks and human rights violations. The Presbyterian Church (USA) has played a part in this through its support for Witness for Peace, a body that brought accompaniers to Nicaragua during the Contra War against the Sandinista government of Nicaragua, from 1983 to 1988. Since 2005, the Colombia Accompaniment Program, started by the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship with support from the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, has brought over ninety trained accompaniers to stand in solidarity with the Iglesia Presbiteriana de Colombia whose leaders had been killed and members intimidated for resisting land grabs by the powerful. The World Council of Churches has co-sponsored an accompaniment program in Palestine to protect Palestinian school-children and others from settler and Israeli army violence. The goal in such efforts is “to see and be seen.” At a less-intense level, court watchers and election monitors do variants of this work.

**Teaching Peace in the Church**

The more personal dimensions and disciplines of active nonviolence and peacemaking are already being practiced in many churches where strangers are welcomed, prisoners are visited, veterans brought in, and perhaps “international peacemakers” hosted and interfaith dialogues sponsored. Some mission trips also seek to cross once-hostile boundaries, or to help build new friendships. Suspicion of “the Russians” still exists, racism still poisons our cities, Islamophobia is manipulated to prevent empathic understanding: all are addressed in some congregations. Some also teach children nonviolence and ways to prevent bullying, and increasing numbers are speaking up about the constant menace of gun violence. We believe these life-giving practices are of God and offer life to the church and witness to the world.

Peacemaking is a faith commitment; it is a calling rather than a conclusion. It constitutes the lens by which reality is brought into focus. It is the value system by which the meaning and significance of threats are determined. With humility, we recognize that just as the nationalistic exceptionalism of empire distorts, so a concern for universal human rights may not be the full key to the healing of the nations. If the U.S. were to reduce its footprint, would benign forces take the place of our military? Would the churches push for constructive multilateral ways to fill power vacuums and help create order through collective security—or are we simply weary of war? We have spoken of citizen diplomacy; could we see ourselves assisting others with citizen-based defense? At the core of all these risks in seeking peace is the choice to resist violence, and it is not just a personal choice.

The word “making,” in peacemaking, is *poesis* in Greek. The Gospel of Peace is Christ, who is our peace, who gives to us ministries of reconciliation, who makes us ambassadors of God’s commonwealth and reign. But perhaps God also calls us to be poets of peace, composers, crafters, creators, hearers and doers of peace.[[65]](#endnote-65) We end with three true stories.

***Three Examples of Risking Peace***

* The French village of Le Chambon risked peace in sheltering 5,000 Jews fleeing the Nazis during World War II. The driving force behind the rescue effort was Andre Trocme, the Huguenot (French Reformed) pastor of the village. Deeply committed to Christian nonviolence, on Sunday mornings he would preach the Sermon on the Mount, love of God and love of neighbor, reverence for life, and the necessity of resisting evil with good. The people of Le Chambon hid Jews in their homes and farmhouses and arranged for them to reach the safe haven of neutral Switzerland. In doing so, they risked their lives. Occasionally, the Gestapo raided the town. Leaders were arrested and imprisoned, and some were later killed. But despite the repression, the resistance in Le Chambon continued to the end of the war.

In the last months of German occupation, the Tartar Legion commanded by SS Colonel Metzger was poised to destroy the village and its inhabitants. But a second German officer, Major Schmehling, commandant of the German Army post in Le Puy, dissuaded Metzger from attacking. Years after the war, Schmehling told Trocme of the fateful conversation: “Colonel Metzger was a hard one, and he kept insisting that we move in on Le Chambon. But I kept telling him to wait . . . I told Metzger that this kind of resistance has nothing to do with violence, nothing to do with anything we could destroy with violence. With all my personal and military power I opposed sending his legion into Le Chambon.”[[66]](#endnote-66)

* More recently, on August 20, 2013, a school bookkeeper, Antoinette Tuff, risked peace when a gunman walked into her school. Twenty-year-old Michael Brandon Hill entered the Ronald E. McNair Discovery Learning Academy near Atlanta with an AK-47 and 500 rounds of ammunition, intending to shoot and kill as many people as he could. Ms. Tuff was scared but remained calm. She had received training in how to respond to dangerous situations like this one. And she found courage and strength in her Christian faith. She recalled her pastor's teachings about “anchoring and how you anchor yourself in the Lord.” She was able to talk Hill down and convince him to surrender to police, thereby averting another mass shooting. “It was all God,” she said. “I was just praying.”
* The U.S. risked peace in September 2013, when it opted not to launch air strikes against Syria in response to an August 21 chemical weapons attack against civilians, but instead negotiated an international agreement to disarm the Syrian government of its chemical weapons. President Obama threatened a military response as a consequence for violating international norms. Military intervention seemed imminent. Then U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry made an off-the-cuff remark that air strikes could be averted if Syria turned over all its chemical weapons to the international community, but Syria “isn't about to do it and it can't be done.” This rhetorical suggestion was taken up as a serious proposal by Russia and received a positive response from Syria. Where once military intervention was being touted as the only option for responding to the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the U.S. stumbled into a diplomatic alternative that had not been seriously considered. It is another question whether the countries involved in that grinding proxy war—including the US and Russia more directly-- have begun a serious peace process in early 2016.

God is always doing a new thing. It is the nature of God to gather up all the occasions of the past, and with immense healing power, weave transforming possibilities into the emerging moment. The future is constantly arriving, a future whose radical and redemptive newness it owes to the creative work of the Poet of the World, the Lover of Souls, the Lord of the Church, who declares, “Behold I make all things new.” Let us welcome the new thing that God is doing, risk peace and transform conflict by boldly practicing the things that make for peace. [End]

**APPENDIX A: Tabulation of Presbytery Responses to the Five Affirmations with Notes**

*In most of the presbyteries listed, one or two persons led discussions before or during presbytery meetings and others (stated clerks usually) tabulated the votes, though in some presbyteries voice or hand votes reflected general consensus. We thank those leaders and presbytery councils who scheduled consideration of the affirmations. Peacemaking staff were present in several cases; Newton Presbytery’s discussion with Alonzo Johnson is posted online:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IT4xK318pDQ>  *In addition to the voting, which may be done by any presbytery up to the General Assembly, all comments and proposed wording changes will be read, though they cannot of course affect the revision and streamlining of the affirmations that has been done. Those who did serious re-writing are also to be commended.*

Overall Strong Support Different Position

Albany Nevada (re-wrote the 5)

Baltimore Yukon (adopted 1, re-wrote the rest)

Beaver-Butler\* Elizabeth and New Castle

Blackhawk (good discussion but no vote)

Chicago Utica (lectio divina approach, good comments on all, no vote)

Cimarron

East Iowa N. New York (call for simpler

Great Rivers language, more time)

Holston

Hudson River

Long Island De Cristo (yes on 1, no on rest)

Mission

New Hope

Newton

Northeast Georgia

Pittsburgh

Sacramento

San Jose (adds a #6 for peace congregations)[[67]](#endnote-67)

Santa Fe

Susquehana Valley

Tampa Bay\*

Western Reserve

(\*strong but declining #’s moving 1-5)

By designated committees:

Denver National Capital (3/2 yes to no)

Ohio Valley

Transylvania

Declined to Consider:

Peacemaking Program staff spoke with or tried to reach staff or leaders in approximately 70 presbyteries that had not responded to the invitation to take the advisory vote by September, 2015. In one case, Northumberland, a clear refusal to consider the Five Affirmations had been received. In many others, the pressures of presbytery business, limited staff, and limited numbers of presbytery meetings led to an apology, often accompanied by a sense that the affirmations, “looked OK,” or were non-controversial, but would require educational as well as discussion time. In other words, they were voluntary and if the Assembly passed them without change, most presbyters would understand if not agree that they were appropriate peacemaking concerns. In numerous cases, presbyteries have moved away from having “program” committees, such as “mission,” “social concerns,” or “peacemaking,” leaving only constitutionally-mandated functions to be managed a more limited set of committees. Also, in many presbyteries there had been administrative turnover and approximately 40 have been without even “transitional” staff at any given point over the 2014-2015 period.

Among the top items of “extra” business on presbytery dockets (again, from conversational reports):

Voting on inclusive marriage and other changes to the Book of Order; not “advisory” votes.

Discussions and processes of “gracious dismissal” with and about congregations leaving the denomination, reports of administrative commissions, along with procedures and policies regarding property and ministerial standing.

Voting on the Belhar Confession, often accompanied by educational programs and discussions.

Communication considerations:

The Stated Clerk wrote all presbytery leadership staff the Assembly’s request that they consider and take an advisory vote on the Peacemaking Affirmations at the end of 2014 and in mid 2015, extending the deadline for responses twice. The Stated Clerk’s staff is to be commended for developing a website with materials on Peace Discernment and an electronic response form. Most of the Peace Discernment process, in fact, has been carried on via the internet for cost reasons, with all material downloadable at no cost. Printed study materials were only sent to presbyteries in the first stage of discernment, though with notice via Presbyterian News Service and other communication by the Peacemaking Program, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, and the Compassion, Peace, and Justice Ministry unit. The Peacemaking Program has also maintained a site with the Peace Discernment resources and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship and Presbyterian Voices for Justice have also publicized the Peace Discernment studies and affirmations. As Professor Daniel Ott notes in his analysis of the responses in Appendix C, *UNBOUND* ([www.justiceUnbound.org](http://www.justiceUnbound.org), the online justice journal of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy) also featured consideration of the Peace Discernment process and efforts were made to involve Presbyterian Church-related colleges, universities, and seminaries, a number of whose faculty provided input to the process.

Educational Considerations:

The effectiveness of churchwide educational efforts that do not have enough “footprint” that includes print resources may be questioned, whether or not mid-councils have the forums and capacity to relay and interpret the online materials or to display and share downloaded samples of resources. Consultation with publishing house staff suggests that many adult education groups and congregational programs prefer print resources organized for effective discussion, often in a single clear voice. Professor Ott’s recommendation of a more focused Reformed argument for nonviolence should be noted. The Peace Discernment Steering Team felt—coming out of the congregational discernment reports—that many Presbyterians would want more information about the chief positions of Just War, Christian pacifism, and Just Peacemaking, and the 2014 General Assembly Peacemaking and International Affairs Committee agreed with this. In some cases, uncertainty about these basic positions led to reluctance to vote on the Five Affirmations, raising concern about the adequacy of Presbyterian formation on matters of war and peace.

**APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF RISKING PEACE RATIONALE SENT TO PRESBYTERIES**

*The following layout of the Five Affirmations and the five sections of Risking Peace in a Violent World was provided on 2 back-to-back pages to make the report more accessible, along with a one-page response form.*

**FIVE PEACEMAKING AFFIRMATIONS FOR PRESBYTERY DELIBERATION**

As part of the process of peace discernment begun by the General Assembly in 2010, then following 9 years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the 221st General Assembly (2014) approved five affirmations for discussion, debate, and voting in the presbyteries. These affirmations were derived from work by 65 presbytery and congregational study groups and two consultations, one with seminary ethicists and one with Presbyterian college and university faculty, campus ministers and chaplains, and students.

This brief document contains the key action of the General Assembly and summarizes the background rationales for each of the five affirmations. The goal is to make this process as inviting as possible for presbytery discussion and voting. For those interested, the full set of study material is posted online: https://www.pc-biz.org/PC- Biz.WebApp\_deploy/%28S%28xjl1wbkkr5lfzvuydpivwjq3%29%29/IOBView.aspx?m=r o&id=4795 and is also available from the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program. Presbyteries may wish to schedule information sessions on the affirmations before they vote, or may simply distribute this resource and announce the voting in advance.

Here is the action of the Assembly:

**"Process of Discernment for Presbyteries: As the next stage in a six-year process of discernment, the 221st General Assembly (2014) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) directs the Stated Clerk to send to each presbytery, electronically and in print, the following five affirmations and supporting rationale with the request that they discuss and take an advisory vote on each affirmation and send the results of those votes, along with a summary of the floor discussion, back to the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy by July 1, 2015, to help guide the preparation of a report on peacemaking directions for the 222nd General Assembly (2016).**

**"The affirmations for churchwide discussion and advisory vote:**

**"1. We affirm that peacemaking is essential to our faith in God’s reconciling work in Jesus Christ, whose love and justice challenge hatred and conflict, and whose call gives our church a mission to present alternatives to violence, fear, and misused power.**

**"2. We confess our complicity in the world’s violence even as we pray for the Spirit’s courage to “unmask idolatries,” to speak truth about war and oppression, to stand with those who suffer, and to respond to acts and threats of violence with ministries of justice, healing, and reconciliation.**

**"3. We reclaim the power and authority of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace and Reconciler, who proclaims God’s reign, who inspires the prophetic church, [by] forgiving, healing, and undoing violence, and who overcomes evil through the cross and resurrection.**

**"4. We seek to understand the nonviolent revolutions and armed struggles of our time by drawing on the traditions of Christian pacifism, just war, just peacemaking and active nonviolence, and by cultivating moral imagination through prayer, study, and engagement with friends and enemies. Even as we actively engage in a peace discernment process, we affirm our responsibility of continuing the long tradition of support by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for our sisters and brothers who serve in the U.S. military, veterans, and their families.**

**"5. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we commit ourselves earnestly to seek and promote loving, nonviolent responses to conflict in our daily lives, in our communities, and in our world, to risk calling our nation back from the practices of empire to the highest ideals of our heritage, and to practice boldly the things that make for peace."**

**THEOLOGICAL BASIS**: The title of the full General Assembly report is “Risking Peace in a Violent World.” It invokes both the Brief Statement of Faith, acknowledging not only a “broken and fearful world,” but a violent one, and the Confession of 1967’s prophetic phrase, “This search [for peace] requires that the nations pursue fresh and responsible relations across every line of conflict, even at the risk to national security, to reduce areas of strife and to broaden international understanding” (*Book of Confessions*, 9.45). Each explanatory section includes Biblical, ethical, and historical analysis.

“Peace discernment” is the name given to a 6-yr. process of updating the peacemaking vision of the Presbyterian Church (USA). The process was initiated by seven presbytery overtures on the 30th anniversary of *Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling* (1980). A Steering Team was charged with a twofold mandate to “seek clarity as to God’s call to the church regarding nonviolence as our fundamental response to the challenges of violence, terror, and war,” and to examine “ministries of peacemaking and justice- seeking that honor the Gospel, the history of the church, and the movement of the Holy Spirit...” to develop recommendations for new policy and action (*Minutes*, 2010, p. 69). The study document, *Encountering the Gospel of Peace Anew,* contained questions to explore not simply the effectiveness of the church’s peacemaking work and its threefold offering, but the basic nature and scope of the Gospel’s mandate for peacemaking. (http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/peace-discernment/ )

**STATUS OF THE AFFIRMATIONS AND POSSIBLE MODIFICATIONS**: The affirmations clearly build on each other, but presbyteries can decide whether to consider the five as a set or vote on them individually to assess the degree to which they may, or may not, represent that presbytery’s views. The five proposed affirmations honor the range of viewpoints within the church while testing new directions; *they are not statements of policy but propositions for serious debate*. We respectfully ask presbyteries to make time on their busy dockets to consider the affirmations.

Our Presbyterian process values differences of opinion as efforts to speak the truth in love under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Voting is part of the work of the body to build consensus over time, and Presbyterians do not usually see unanimity or total agreement as necessary for decision. We take corporate stands, believing that the church as a body should not be silent, *and* at the same time we affirm that “God alone is Lord of the conscience...,” making space for dissent. It is for those reasons we would like to see the vote tallies, but it is up to each presbytery to determine how to report, and some may wish to approve their own affirmations or amend the ones presented here. If a presbytery develops one or more affirmations of its own, we would appreciate a brief statement of rationale to explain the position or amendment. For example, if a presbytery thinks that “Christian pacifism” conflicts with the line about supporting the military—both added by the General Assembly—it could add, subtract, or move its own viewpoint.

The wording of this summary background piece draws freely on the language of the full report and all sources quoted are documented in the online footnotes. Leaders of presbytery discussions are urged to be familiar with the cases made in each section.

**1. Summary of Rationale for First Affirmation:**

This affirmation would support the understanding in *Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling* that working for peace is not only an individual matter (such as conscientious objection) but a call of the whole Christian community, including those opposed to all war and violence and those who use categories of the “Just War” or justifiable war tradition. Former chief of chaplains, Kermit Johnson, in opposing nuclear warfare, writes, “Like pacifism, it [Just War] is rooted in the commandment: ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ It is a presumption against violence, ‘the presumption in favor of peace and against war.” Thus faithful Presbyterians may differ on whether there can be justified force, whether war is inevitable, and what the range from policing to maintain social peace to organized military campaigns may be. The point is: it is our responsibility to deal with these questions. Further, it is not enough to repeat old answers, but it is important to know what they have been. For example, strong majorities of the PCUSA presbyteries in 1936 and 1938 voted to remove Just War language from the Westminster Confession, though not attaining the supermajority necessary for constitutional change. This voting process recalls those votes prior to the adoption of *The Book of Confessions*. The full rationale section itself summarizes alternatives to violence and war in General Assembly social witness policy, particularly since WWII, and notes the support of more than 50% of PCUSA congregations for The Commitment to Peacemaking and the Peacemaking Offering at some point since 1980.

**2. Summary of Rationale for Second Affirmation:**

This affirmation asks us to be “honest patriots,” owning our responsibility for the horrific consequences of the Afghan and Iraq wars, while recognizing the ways that structural and cultural violence permeate our society and those of others. The emphasis here is on honestly counting the costs of what we have done, and in the spirit of the Brief Statement of Faith, to consider whether we have succumbed to idolatries in our efforts for security and justice. The final clause of this affirmation, which speaks of how to respond to violence, was added by the General Assembly and is given support in the background to affirmations four and five. The word, “complicity,” has both conscious and unconscious dimensions, and recognizes how embedded we all are in social structures that include unjust relationships. Prophetic self-criticism, apology, and repentance are basic parts of Christian life. This affirmation applies those principles not only to the large scale and deliberate violence of war, but to the roots of war. Members of presbyteries may want to look at the definitions of violence and of “structural violence,” or forms of oppression that can prompt violence or self-destructiveness. As a church in the United States, how do we stand before not only the peoples of the countries that have suffered so much more than we, but before the Lord of history? Does this affirmation help us so stand?

**3. Summary of Rationale for Third Affirmation:**

This affirmation focuses on Jesus Christ in relation to war and violence and proposes a new emphasis for Reformed Christians, without denying our traditional linkage of the New Testament witness with Old (and some New) Testament justifications of force. This affirmation says it is essential to look at how the words and example of Jesus cohere with the rest of the “Gospel of Peace,” and suggests more attention to the earliest centuries of the church when Christians had no public power and largely chose nonviolence. Stating clearly that our faith is not based on scholarly reconstructions of Jesus’ life—of which there are many—nonetheless the preponderance of scholarship supporting a nonviolent interpretation of Jesus’ ministry bears attention. This affirmation does not answer the specific question of how much peace or nonviolence were the goal or method of Jesus’ ministry, and does not try to fit Jesus into a programmatic script. Yet it would urge the church not to get too far away from his example, lest we be coopted too easily into war for reasons of state or economic interest.

**4. Summary of Rationale for Fourth Affirmation:**

This affirmation proposes that our church’s social and ethical teaching give more attention to the nonviolent techniques of social change that have been more productive than violence in a surprising number of cases. That list would include the fall of the Berlin wall and other nonviolent transitions in Eastern Europe, the nonviolent revolution in the Philippines, the painstaking achievement of peace in Northern Ireland, the dramatic transformation of South Africa, and the initial successes of the Arab Awakening. In these cases many non-pacifists chose nonviolent tactics for their effectiveness in mobilizing people. Clearly there have also been incredibly savage wars and instigated religious/ ethnic tensions, with some countries funding forces in other countries as “proxies” for their interests. These point to the weakness of international diplomatic structures and dif- ficulties of protecting minorities within countries, many of whom have become refugees. The General Assembly added a sentence that could apply to all five affirmations, expressing concern for those in the military and veterans, and also added the category of “Christian pacifism” as well as nonviolence as a force for social change. The import of this affirmation is to diversify further the alternatives to force available for the church.

**5. Summary of Rationale for Fifth Affirmation:**

As amended by the General Assembly, this affirmation emphasizes that nonviolent methods should be chosen first in our personal and corporate efforts to resolve or transform conflict, and that on the national level our country should pursue international relations based less on military superiority and unilateral force. The background rationale here looks at the differences between national interests and principles (such as respect for universal human rights); it challenges the practices of “empire” on practical and even “realist” grounds, emphasizing the “soft power” of ideals and example, particularly in facing new kinds of global crisis (such as environmental disaster). The rationale also provides a range of “things that make for peace:” truth and reconciliation commissions, interfaith cooperation, accompaniment and nonviolent intervention, increased teaching of peacemaking. Three illustrative examples are given in conclusion: the Reformed village of Le Chambon sheltering Jews during WWII, a personal witness that prevented a mass shooting, and an international agreement to remove chemical weapons from Syria in 2013. This affirmation, then, would seek alternatives to military violence at every level.

**APPENDIX C**: Analysis Of Presbytery Responses To Five Affirmations

*In addition to the members and staff of the Steering Team appointed in 2010 to oversee the Peace Discernment process; Rev. J. Mark Davidson, Chair; Dr. Kathryn Poethig, ACSWP representative; Ms. Shaya Gregory Poku; Ms. Shaheen Amjad-Ali; Rev. Jessica Hawkinson; Rev. Craig L. Hunter; the Rev. Roger Powers, consultant, and the Revs. Carl Horton, Alonzo Johnson, and Christian Iosso, staff, the Advisory Committee and the Peacemaking Program thought it would wise to have a review of the responses by an informed person who was not directly involved in the writing of the discernment materials, including the Five Affirmations. Hence this report by the Rev. Daniel Ott.*

**“Analysis of Presbytery Responses to the Five Affirmations for Peace Discernment”**

**Rev. Daniel Ott, Ph.D., Associate Professor ofReligious Studies and**

**Director of the Peace, Ethics, and Social Justice Program*,***

**Monmouth College, Monmouth, Illinois**

The Peace Discernment Steering Team, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, and the Peacemaking Program are to be commended for their work throughout the Peace Discernment process. The process has been deliberate, inclusive, insightful, and fruitful. I am glad that the past three General Assemblies have been overwhelmingly supportive of the proposals and reports put forward.

**Observation of the Discernment Process**:

I have intersected with this process at several points and reviewed and used the materials produced. First, I attended the January, 2013, gathering for Presbyterian-related Colleges and Universities. The program was impressive including figures in peace studies, biblical studies, theology, and public policy. Attendees received an outstanding overview and introduction to peace studies from leaders in the field including Andrea Bartoli, Margaret Aymer, Richard Horsley and Allan Boesak. Colleges and universities were encouraged to make use of *Encountering the Gospel of Peace Anew* before and/or after the event in order to foster discussion on campuses. I found these materials very helpful and the discussions on our campus were instrumental to launching a program and minor in peace, ethics, and social justice.

Secondly, I was honored that my article “Toward a Realistic, Public, Christian Pacifism” was used and cited in the document “Risking Peace in a Violent World.” This is a rich document that works hard at balancing Christian pacifist traditions with the more publicly engaged and “realistic” Calvinist traditions, a balance I try to strike in my own work. I was invited by *Unbound: An Interactive Journal of Christian Social Justice* to offer a guest opinion response to Risking Peace as a part of a series. I titled that short piece “Let’s Focus on Nonviolence” and the sentiment expressed there prefigured to some extent the analysis I offer here (<http://justiceunbound.org/carousel/lets-focus-on-nonviolence/> ).

**Analysis of Initial 29 Responses**:

I have been asked to offer an analysis of presbytery responses to the Five Affirmations for Peace Discernment. Let me begin again by commending the work done to date. I was not able to attend the meeting of the Presbytery of Great Rivers when the affirmations were discussed, but had I been in attendance they would have received my full support. In fact, a strong majority of presbyteries responding approved of the affirmations by strong margins. The affirmations are a concise statement of several key issues and could well move the church forward in a positive direction as currently articulated. I will have to leave it to others more schooled in social analysis and/or ecclesial politics to account for the low number of presbytery responses (29 of 171 presbyteries available, October, 2015). Both the question of statistical significance of the small response and the question of local reception could be important, but, again, I am ill-equipped to address these concerns.

The responses received can still be instructive, though, despite the low number. Clear trends emerge in comments from the presbyteries and could lead to helpful revisions. My analysis will focus on some common critiques articulated in the comments from presbyteries. These should be heard in the context of overwhelming support, but they may also represent problems that would be ongoing in the reception of the affirmations if not heeded. It should also be stated at the outset that most if not all of these concerns might have been mitigated had commissioners been able and/or willing to engage with the full text of “Risking Peace.” The sources and rationales for the phrases that caused alarm are in that text, but it is of course probably asking too much that commissioners engage those thirty-three pages. The briefer rationales provided to Presbyteries also address some of the concerns and in an accessible format, but may be too brief as to be persuasive.

I will proceed first with a couple of comments that were general in nature, then to a treatment of each affirmation, and finally offer a suggestion with regard to an accompanying statement of some sort. I will intermingle analysis of comments in presbytery responses with my own ideas about the affirmations, but try to remain clear about which is which. I have offered my own rewriting of the affirmations as a way to frame this analysis. I am not necessarily asserting that my language is better or could be substituted facilely, but hope that this is a helpful way to think through the issues at hand.

**General comments:**

Several presbyters asked for the affirmations to be simpler (Beaver-Butler, Northern New York, Susquehanna Valley) and more practical (Cimarron, Great Rivers, Northeast Georgia, Tampa Bay).[[68]](#footnote-1) Commenters advocated that the “affirmations should be worded in a much simpler manner,” and suggested that “Each one of these proposals holds too much.” Several called for various affirmations to be shorter and there were quite a few comments about dividing Affirmation #4 into two. Some of the complexity of these affirmations is almost certainly due to their extensive revisions. Affirmation #4 provides the example of the extended comment about those who serve in the United States military being added in committee at General Assembly. But even in their original form, the affirmations may try to do too much. Several important concepts are summarized in a phrase, which often requires background knowledge for a full understanding. I will point out several of these below. It may also be the case that the affirmations are simply a bit too diffuse. I suggest a clearer focus in order to draw the affirmations together and make them simpler.

Given that the original articulation of the discernment process included a call “to examine particularly the nonviolent understanding of Jesus’ call to discipleship,”[[69]](#footnote-2) I would suggest a revision of the affirmations that would highlight nonviolence. It seems to me that the articulation of a nonviolent stance is what is new and most helpful in the discernment process. Such a focus helps us to avoid several pitfalls. First, traditional “peace church” stances are rooted in sectarianisms that cannot be affirmed from within the Reformed tradition. Our commitments to a public witness to social righteousness demand that we take our place in the public sphere and fully participate in public service and discourse. Peace churches have been important witnesses to peace as they stand outside and prophesy against violent and corrupt structures. But our position has traditionally been one of reforming these structures even as we participate in them. Nonviolence rather than a sectarian Christian pacifism, allows us to take a stand against violence while remaining full participants in the public struggle.

Second, nonviolence can help us to move beyond a traditional just war stance. As several commenters noted (see below), the category of just war is breaking down. Notions of proportionality are all but moribund after Dresden and Hiroshima and categories like competent authority and just means seem almost archaic in an age of terrorism and drones. Nonviolence has the potential to offer a consistent philosophy and theology that can move us a step further in our commitments to peacemaking. “Risking Peace” already adequately articulates the strengths of nonviolence and how it can fit within the Reformed tradition. Of course, much more can be learned and said about this relationship, but those could be steps that follow the discernment process.

The call for more practical language in the affirmations could also be heeded by more focus on nonviolence. Presbyters several times suggested, “Add language that speaks to peacemaking action in our daily lives and communities,” or asked “can we make this practical and specific?” Again, “Risking Peace” contains careful analysis of the ways in which violence impinges on our daily lives and communities and how action that can be (and is) taken to address that violence. But it may be that the complexities of the affirmations as articulated leave some readers wondering about their practical applications. Focusing on nonviolent approaches to conflict resolution, social change and opposition to war, might allay some of these fears of abstraction.

The affirmations may well be strengthened by better focus, more concise articulation, and less evocative and complex language. I will now address each affirmation in turn. Sections begin with my suggested revision of the affirmation.

**1. Affirmation as presented to presbyteries:**

**We affirm that peacemaking is essential to our faith in God’s reconciling work in Jesus Christ, whose love and justice challenge hatred and conflict, and whose call gives our church a mission to present alternatives to violence, fear, and misused power.**

**Ott revision:**

**We affirm that peacemaking is essential to our faith in God’s reconciling work in Jesus Christ, whose love and justice challenge hatred and conflict, and whose call gives our church a mission to present alternatives to violence.**

Affirmation #1 received resounding support from responding presbyteries. The Presbytery of De Cristo approved of this affirmation even as they voted against all subsequent affirmations. Several presbyteries saw growing minorities of “no” votes as they moved through affirmations #s 2-5, but very few dissenting votes here. The Presbytery of Nevada offered alternative language (as they did in every case) but their very concise affirmation is consistent with the spirit of the original, “We affirm that peacemaking in the name of Jesus Christ is important work for the Church.”

My revision is very modest, just removing the last four words. This only serves to highlight the term “alternatives to violence” and set up the focus on nonviolence that I am advocating throughout.

**2. Affirmation as presented to presbyteries:**

**We confess our complicity in the world’s violence even as we pray for the Spirit’s courage to “unmask idolatries,” to speak truth about war and oppression, to stand with those who suffer, and to respond to acts and threats of violence with ministries of justice, healing, and reconciliation.**

**Ott revision:**

**We confess that we have sinned, by participating in acts of violence, both structural and physical, or by our failure to respond to acts and threats of violence with ministries of justice, healing, and reconciliation.**

“Risking Peace” accurately predicted that articulating a need to confess our complicity in violence “may prompt denial and hostility.”[[70]](#footnote-3) Quite a few commenters (Baltimore, Tampa Bay, Yukon) took exception to the word “complicity” in the original. Some seemed merely to wonder about the definition of the term, while others wondered whether they personally or the church as such could be said to be complicit. My language attempts to be both clearer and more traditional. The affirmation is clearly intended to be a confessional element, so I have made it more explicitly so adding the word “sinned” and defining complicity in terms of acts of commission or omission. The “or” might also be helpful so that those who don’t see themselves or the church as actively complicit (though they probably are as “Risking Peace” argues well) can at least find themselves in the omission of ministries of justice, healing, and reconciliation, since more can always be done.

Objections to the phrase “unmask idolatries” (Beaver-Butler, De Cristo, National Capitol, Redstone, Yukon) may lead one to wonder about the reception of *A Brief Statement of Faith.* Some commenters seem to wonder where the phrase itself comes from, while others ask helpful questions about what exactly it stands for in this context. “Risking Peace” draws on this Calvinistic moment in *A Brief Statement of Faith* to articulate all of the ways in which our participation in violence is masked – masked by idols of national security, masked by cultures that find violence entertaining, etc. Nonetheless, the phrase does seem to stand for a lot in the affirmation and could be unpacked. I took at least one of the important concepts implied by the phrase to be structural violence. This term may not have immediate resonance with some readers either, but it does more directly and concisely articulate the problem of our participations in systems that propagate violence.

I have also taken the liberty here of merely shortening the affirmation. The phrases “to speak truth about war and oppression, to stand with those who suffer” seemed to move from confession to action and to at least be implied by later affirmations. Mostly, though, their omission is in further attempt to shorten and simplify.

**3. Affirmation as presented to presbyteries:**

**We reclaim the power and authority of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace and Reconciler, who proclaims God’s reign, who inspires the prophetic church, [by] forgiving, healing, and undoing violence, and who overcomes evil through the cross and resurrection.**

**Ott revision:**

**We look to the teaching and example of Jesus and the early church to learn how to reclaim a Christian commitment to nonviolence.**

Affirmations #s 3-5 contain more thorough revision. In each case I will first address concerns of commenters and then justify the nature and extent of the revision. These affirmations still received strong support from the presbyteries responding, but the support declined in #s 3-5.

One of the more consistent comments seen in the responses (Baltimore, Beaver-Butler, Chicago, De Cristo, Great Rivers, National Capitol, Susquehanna Valley, Yukon) had to do with the phrase “We reclaim the power and authority of Jesus Christ.” Some commenters found the phrase triumphalist and wondered whether Christ’s authority is ours to claim. To others, the phrase seemed ambiguous and they wondered whether the power and authority had to be reclaimed from someone who had usurped it or whether it implied that the church had once claimed it but no longer did. I confess that I side a bit with those who find the language triumphalist. It also seems to be somewhat theologically paradoxical to have such strong language about power, authority and reign in a statement that ostensibly wants to affirm nonviolence, healing and forgiveness.

A few commenters (Susquehanna Valley, Yukon) wondered about the phrase “undoing violence.” Perhaps the authors had in mind Jesus’ examples of undoing structural violence, but I too find the phrase somewhat ambiguous. At its worst, the phrase has the potential to undercut the finality of violence. Violence can be avoided, forgiven, transcended, but once committed it cannot technically be undone. Lives taken cannot be regained. Bodies, minds and spirits broken are often irreparable.

It seems to me that Affirmation #3 is the best example of the complex language of the affirmation getting in the way of the intent. The rationale following Affirmation #3 in “Risking Peace”[[71]](#footnote-4) deals with the life and teachings of Jesus and the example and teachings of the early church as resources for nonviolence. This is wholly in keeping with the original charge from the 219th General Assembly. The rationale takes care to note that there are always problems with claims to the historical Jesus and that the scripture does not speak univocally about violence and nonviolence. But perhaps these caveats weighed too heavily in the language of the affirmation. They do not negate the ability of Christians to look to Jesus, scripture, and the early church to learn about nonviolence because nonviolent commitments and action can certainly be found there. It seems to me a humble and simple claim to want to look again at these nonviolent resources is wholly justifiable and very much in keeping with the charge, the discernment process, and Reformed theology.

Simplifying this affirmation also has the strength of making it a clear action item. Churches, peacemaking committees, scholars, and pastors can take immediate steps to begin to learn about nonviolence from these resources.

**4. Affirmation as presented to presbyteries:**

**We seek to understand the nonviolent revolutions and armed struggles of our time by drawing on the traditions of Christian pacifism, just war, just peacemaking and active nonviolence, and by cultivating moral imagination through prayer, study, and engagement with friends and enemies. Even as we actively engage in a peace discernment process, we affirm our responsibility of continuing the long tradition of support by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for our sisters and brothers who serve in the U.S. military, veterans, and their families.**

**Ott revision:**

**We commit ourselves to studying and practicing nonviolent means of conflict resolution, nonviolent methods for social change, and nonviolent opposition to war.**

The simple and practical language in my revision is taken almost verbatim from page twenty-six of “Risking Peace.” Affirmation #4 was clearly trying to do too much. Several commenters asked for it to be divided and/or simplified. A few comments noted that the second sentence about the United States military felt added on (as it was in GA Committee—ed.) and may in fact undermine the sentiment it intended by seeming token. The rationale in “Risking Peace” constitutes the center of that document’s argument that nonviolence can work within a Reformed framework and need not totally usurp other ways of thinking about peace (Just War, Just Peacemaking, Christian Realism, Christian Pacifism) that are operative in the church. Such an argument is much too big to capture in a sentence, though.

Interestingly, another of the most pervasive comments (Albany, Chicago, De Cristo, Denver, Mission, Santa Fe, Tampa Bay) from presbyters was an objection to “just war.” Several commenters rejected the term altogether suggesting that the only just war “is one where no one showed to fight.” Other commenters wondered about the varied uses and abuses of the term. I wondered about the fruitfulness of listing the various ways to understand issues of violence and nonviolence. Certainly Christian pacifism, just war, just peacemaking, and active nonviolence are all justifiable Christian positions and much can be learned by studying each. But to list them avoids taking any sort of position. These approaches cannot be wholly harmonized and affirming them all offers no real direction.

A few commenters (Great Rivers, Tampa Bay) also raised questions about the term “moral imagination.” Again, “Risking Peace” explains the term and concept well, and interested parties would do themselves a great service by reading John Paul Lederach’s book of the same title, but I see how the term could be ambiguous to those who have not been introduced to it.

I have offered a simple, concise and practical statement about nonviolence. Building on Affirmation #3, this affirmation would move to the continued learning and practice of nonviolence as applied to three key areas: conflict resolution, social action, and opposition to war. These areas open out almost endlessly at multiple levels of society. Conflict resolution can be practiced in families, schools, communities, places of work, and internationally. Nonviolent social action can be used to address all kinds of injustice and violence: racism, environmental degradation, economic exploitation, etc. And nonviolent opposition to war can take the shape of diplomacy and development, or protest, boycott, accompaniment, etc. These are whole realms of practice about which the church can learn much.

I also deleted the second sentence about support for the United States military. See my rationale under “What is left out” below

**5. Affirmation as presented to presbyteries:**

**As disciples of Jesus Christ, we commit ourselves earnestly to seek and promote loving, nonviolent responses to conflict in our daily lives, in our communities, and in our world, to risk calling our nation back from the practices of empire to the highest ideals of our heritage, and to practice boldly the things that make for peace.**

**Ott revision:**

**We place our faith, hope, and trust in God alone. We renounce violence as a means to further selfish national interests, to procure wealth, or to dominate others. We will practice boldly the things that make for peace and look for the day when “they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”**

The centrality of the term and concept “empire” to Affirmation #5 may pose the most difficult problem to reception if the presbytery responses are indicative of what can be expected. No less than ten presbytery responses (Baltimore, Beaver-Butler, Chicago, Cimarron, De Cristo, Mission, Northeast Georgia, Redstone, Tampa Bay, Yukon) included comments that reacted negatively to the term, several quite vehemently. The rationale in “Risking Peace” makes empire central to the argument. The rationale ties the problematic of empire to the original move away from nonviolence in the early church, to the history of colonialism, and to current United States policy. I myself find these arguments mostly persuasive, but the term is clearly a red flag for many who read the affirmations. Several of the responses merely called the term empire “loaded” or “political.” But a comment from the Presbytery of Cimarron might be instructive, “While ‘empire’ is a powerful concept that is biblically, historically, and theologically relevant and is explored in the full rationale, it may be easier for people in the pews to engage in discussion of this deep structural threat to peace using contemporary language.” My revision tries to spell out succinctly the actual practices of empire and their ties to violence. For better or worse it leaves the reader free to judge whether U.S. policy engages in these practices. I would imagine that most sober assessments would admit that it does so at least to some extent.

A few commenters (Beaver-Butler, National Capitol, Tampa Bay, Yukon) questioned the phrase, “to risk calling our nation back … to the highest ideals of our heritage.” Some found the phrase ambiguous and wanted clarity about which ideals are being invoked. A couple of comments asked if it might be better to evoke Christian ideals rather than national ideals. I myself wondered about such a brief and ambiguous appeal as well. Our nation is to some extent rooted in practices of colonialism, slavery, and violence. Of course, ideals like democracy and equality are also deeply rooted in our heritage, but always intermixed with oligarchy and injustice. Little treatment is given even in the extended rationale in “Risking Peace” to what national ideals are helpful, how we marry them to our theological ideals, and how we might uproot them from their connections to unjust practices. I think such a discussion can and should be had, but I don’t think that work has been done here. I would strongly advocate deleting this phrase.

I agree that closing with an appeal to Christian ideals and Christian hope might be a powerful way to conclude the affirmations. I have juxtaposed a Barmen-like confession of faith in God alone with a renunciation of the practices of empire and closed with Isaiah of Jerusalem’s beautiful vision.

**What is left out in these revisions:**

Perhaps the most important omission in my revision of the affirmations is the mention (a full discussion in “Risking Peace”) of the several ways in which Christians can justifiably think about violence and war. If the affirmations were to focus on nonviolence, some might see them as a departure from the just war, just peacemaking and Christian pacifist dialogues that have marked our church’s commitment to peacemaking. I think it is absolutely imperative that these discussions continue, because we are not near a consensus on these matters. However, as I said above, to merely mention various ways of thinking about these matters really doesn’t *affirm* much. I do think that there are ways to affirm nonviolence from all of these perspectives, and “Risking Peace” lays some of that groundwork. The dialogues need to continue but I’m not sure there’s an effective way to capture that in the affirmations themselves.

Because not everything can be said that needs to be said in five short affirmations, I also left out the second sentence of Affirmation #4. This is not because I think this sentiment is unimportant, though. In fact, I think that one of the most impactful actions the church could take would be to engage in support for military veterans. “Risking Peace” mentions the work of Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini with regard to “moral injury.” In a forthcoming article in the *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* (January 2016, 37.1)*,* which I have edited, Joshua Daniel makes a persuasive argument that such injuries must be healed in a communal context and cannot be adequately addressed through merely clinical means. Faith communities are well positioned to tackle this important problem and be truly supportive to combat veterans. Of course, the church can and should do more in terms of material support to combat veterans suffering from physical and psychological wounds as well. I gave serious consideration to a separate affirmation regarding these issues, but in the end decided that such an affirmation would still seem out of place and risk appearing to be token, consistent with some comments made in the presbytery responses. Even so, such an affirmation might read:

**We commit ourselves to continuing the long tradition of support by the Presbyterian Church (USA) for our sisters and brothers who serve in the United States military, veterans, and their families. We promise to support materially and socially veterans of war who suffer injury in body, mind, or spirit, even as we work toward the day when they will need to fight no more.**

Another omission, in both the original affirmations and my revisions is a listing of the kinds of violence to which we stand in opposition. Several commenters noticed that environmental degradation was not mentioned. Some commentators gave lists of the kinds of structural violence we encounter in our daily lives: “rape culture, bullying/cyberbullying, domestic terrorism, human trafficking… and hate crimes (related to racism, sexual orientation, religious practice).” “Risking Peace” also effectively discusses structural violence and cultures of violence, but it is difficult to be both clear and succinct with regard to naming the many faces of violence that we encounter. I opted for including the term “structural violence” in hope that this will have enough resonance to stand in for these many important instantiations.

I wonder if some or all of these omissions might be mentioned in a postscript or accompanying document, but I remain worried that too much verbiage can water down the effect that five concise affirmations might have.

**How these revisions might be used:**

I offer these revisions not so much as potential substitutes to the original affirmations, but as propositions for creative contrast. I was asked to look with “fresh eyes,” so I’ve tried to be creative and offer something that is both novel and helpful.

Likely, the most helpful piece of this analysis will be the identification of trends in reception. Several of these trends probably should lead to modest revision in the affirmations at least.

I do also hope that the affirmations can be streamlined a bit. My focus on nonviolence is one way to do that, but in any case some effort should be made to make the affirmations a bit simpler and more practical. I would love to see a set of affirmations that can be widely disseminated and have immediate resonance that clearly leads to action.

Finally, it has been my privilege and pleasure to contribute to the peace discernment process with this analysis. I would love for this contribution to be the continuation of a conversation that extends into the future. Please let me know how I can clarify what I’ve said here, extend this analysis, or otherwise continue to be helpful.

APPENDIX D: SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF FIRST STAGE OF CONGREGATIONAL DISCERNMENT

*This Appendix summarizes themes in the responses to the discernment study materials circulated in late 2012 and 2013, and notes the Presbyterian Panel Survey done by Research Services of representatives Presbyterian attitudes towards matters of violence and nonviolence, peace and war.*

“The present Peace Discernment Process, initiated by the 219th General Assembly (2010) and affirmed by the 220th General Assembly (2012), differs from previous studies in that it seeks broader participation from the denomination and focuses more on the example and teaching of Jesus and the early church. The full texts of the 2012-13 discernment materials and response forms used are available on-line at: <https://www.pcusa.org/resource/peace-discernment-interim-report-encountering-gosp/>.

These discernment resources, some of which are reflected in this report, were designed to introduce “ministries of peacemaking and justice-seeking that honor the Gospel, the history of the church, and the movement of the Holy Spirit . . .” and to inform eventual recommendations of new policy and action (*Minutes*, 2010, p. 69). The resources were presented to and partly tested by the Peacemaking and International Affairs Committee of the 220th General Assembly (2012), which recommended that the discernment process proceed:

[http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4015&promoID=254](http://pc-biz.org/(S(h2tdti4qbakhwt3gxyzx1x3t))/Explorer.aspx?id=4015&promoID=254)

Presbyterians in more than forty-five congregations and eighteen presbyteries came together in small “focus groups” to pray, to reflect, to engage in individual and communal discernment, to “seek clarity as to God’s call to the church to embrace nonviolence as its fundamental response to the challenges of violence, terror, and war; and to identify, explore, and nurture new approaches to active peacemaking and nonviolence” (*Minutes*, 2010, Part I, p. 68).

Most participants found that the Peace Discernment Process encouraged meaningful sharing that was powerful and engaging. They appreciated the opportunity to hear varied perspectives and opinions in a framework where almost everyone had at least one loved one with experience in war. Some were surprised at the level of trust that developed in their small groups, allowing individuals (including veterans) to risk being vulnerable and speak about difficult personal experiences they had had with violence. One participant called it “a very holy process.”

**Nonviolence, Just War, and Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling**

Presbyterians generally agree that peacemaking is the calling of all believers, but they differ about whether violent means of peacemaking are faithful to Jesus’ life and witness. Some focus on Jesus’ call to love our enemies and his sacrifice on the cross, and they conclude that violence can never be a faithful Christian response to violence, injustice, or evil in the world. They gravitate toward Christian nonviolence. Others point to Jesus’ defense of the poor and oppressed, the weak and vulnerable, and believe that violence or coercion can be justified in restraining evil forces and defending the innocent. Drawing on the gospel’s portrayal of Roman soldiers and Paul’s letter to the Romans, where he states that God has entrusted political leaders with “the sword,” they believe that political leaders and their agents (soldiers and police) have a responsibility to pursue a relatively just, tranquility of order that allows humans to flourish. They also believe that Christians are called to faithfully participate in the world and that in a democracy they should exercise their public responsibility to pursue peace and justice. They gravitate toward the just war tradition. For many participants, the Peace Discernment Process was their first introduction to both the methods of nonviolent action and the criteria of just war.

**Lamenting our Culture of Violence and War**

It is clear, after more than ten years of war, that a majority of Presbyterians are deeply concerned about the enormous human and economic costs of war—the hundreds of thousands killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, the millions displaced, the thousands of U.S. soldiers killed or injured, the trillions of dollars spent, and the damage done to our economy. Understandably, there was a focus on those wars where our country has been most directly involved, but many were aware of other wars and long conflicts initiated and suffered by others. A majority of Presbyterians are also deeply worried about the violence pervasive in U.S. culture—the high incidence of gun violence compared to other countries; school shootings; violence against women; violence in media, sports, and entertainment; and the underlying structural violence of economic injustice and social oppression (racism, sexism, other exclusions).

Many appreciate the important connection between justice and peace. They understand that were a relatively just order is lacking, people are tempted to violence. They also understand that direct, physical violence is often caused by injustice, and that a genuine peace can only be brought about by working toward justice and equity for all. Many lifted up God’s vision of shalom, affirming that peace is a rich mosaic of human flourishing within the global community in the broader context of God’s good creation.

**A Desire to Learn Peacemaking Skills**

At the same time, many expressed a sense of being overwhelmed by the enormity of the issues, particularly at the national and international level. Weary of the stream of grim news of bombings and terrorism, there were questions about what our years of war had achieved. Some questioned the effectiveness of both social policy statements and the primarily educational approach of the Peacemaking Program, facing a political system dominated by money. They are looking for direction and guidance about how individuals and congregations can take effective action to further justice and peace. In this vein, there seems to be broad interest in learning concrete peacemaking skills that they can use in their daily lives—skills in nonviolent communication, negotiation, mediation, community organizing, social movement building, and nonviolent direct action.

**Challenging U. S. Militarism**

While most Presbyterians are not ready to renounce violence as a means of restraining evil or protecting the innocent, a large majority of the discernment participants would nevertheless support:

* Just Peacemaking initiatives to promote justice and prevent war
* Downsizing the military-industrial-surveillance complex
* Economic conversion from a war economy to a peace economy
* Shifting resources from the military to international diplomacy and development
* Ending policies of pre-emptive attack, targeted assassination, and torture, which lead to violent “blowback” and which seemed immoral to many discernment group participants
* Moving the U.S. away from the role of global policeman, finding other ways to support international structures of security cooperation

Given the high level of motivation in the discernment groups, a representative survey of Presbyterian opinion was commissioned from Presbyterian Research Services. While the questions presented by the Presbyterian Panel survey instrument were necessarily shorter, there is considerable similarity in overall outlook to the written narrative summaries from the discernment groups. <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/media/uploads/research/pdfs/nov_2012_panel_summary_violence_and_war.pdf>.

**APPENDIX E. Brief Summary of Christian and Presbyterian Approaches Prior to 1980, and Concluding Concern: Excerpt from a paper by the Rev. Edward L. Long, Ph.D.**

The centrality of peace as a distinctive feature of Christian fidelity goes back to the Bible, to the idea of shalom in the Hebraic tradition and to the idea of being peacemakers in the teachings and pattern of Jesus’ own fidelity to God. But translating this concept into policies that further human well-being has challenged Christian thinking ever since the church ceased to be bands of dedicated believers existing as outsiders within Greco-Roman culture.

Within the Christian movement two main traditions developed dedicated to the goal of peace, but each understood responsibility for achieving it in different ways. The first, claiming a strong grounding in the New Testament and the practices of the early church, is Christian pacifism; the other, the just war tradition, grows out of the realization that when Christians become holders of authority and exercise office in a political world they may be called upon to use violence for the protective love of neighbor and for the maintenance of justice and order. Both of these moral stances need to be seen as very different from the views that religion may use violent means to advance its own interests—the premises of an ethic of the crusade, or that nationalisms or ideologies may claim de facto religious sanction for dominating others—the major causes of war for more than two centuries, particularly in Europe and countries colonized by European empires.

During the Protestant Reformation some groups, from which the “peace churches” emerged, understood Christian discipleship to require the repudiation of violence in the manner of the earliest church. Other groups, from which most mainline Reformed bodies emerged, understood Christian discipleship to allow for the restrained, and hence legitimate, use of the sword to preserve justice and order. Presbyterian Confessions generally contain just war positions in relation to the role of the magistrate, or civil government. These two main Christian approaches to war and violence retained theological coherence as Christians sought to apply them through revolutions and wars of conquest, liberation, defense, and humanitarian intervention. American Presbyterians participated in and justified the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, World Wars I and II, and the Korean conflict, but have been less and less of one mind on smaller wars like Vietnam, the Nicaragua/Contra war, the two Iraq wars, and Afghanistan.

In 1936 and 1938, when pacifist sentiment was strong in American Social Christianity, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. sent the presbyteries proposals to remove just war language from the Westminster Confession, which was then the church’s only confessional standard. While a majority of the presbyteries voted to remove or amend the language, in neither case did the outcome reach the supermajority of presbyteries required to accomplish that result.

During WWII, which had the overwhelming support of most Americans following Pearl Harbor, two important developments took place. First, some individual Presbyterians felt called to be conscientious objectors and were generally supported in taking this position (or at least benignly tolerated) by the Church. That support made it amply clear that a pacifist conviction was a legitimate form of Christian discipleship. (The influence of the votes in the 1930s may be seen here). The second development found the Presbyterian Church in cooperation with many other denominations giving extensive thought to what would constitute a just and durable peace. Studies were undertaken both in the denominations and in ecumenical bodies which explored such concerns and were staffed with competent specialists. That work contributed to support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations and was likely to have helped the postwar settlement avoid the vindictive features of the armistice that settled WWI.

The development of the Cold War and its tendency to divide the world into two polarized positions eventually brought increasing questions about the wisdom and adequacy of military and particularly nuclear means for establishing peace and justice on a world wide scale. Many Christian ethicists at the time argued that the draft laws should recognize the validity of conscientious objection on just war grounds as well as on fully pacifist grounds, and the General Assembly of 1967 emphatically reaffirmed the right of Presbyterians to be conscientious objectors. (See *Conscience, Conscription, and the Church*). This action highlighted the legitimacy of conscientious differences about participation in war by individuals, and made individual integrity a foundational reference point for moral reflection. That action did not overcome the differences between pacifist and just war commitments in the Church’s corporate stand, but it clearly undercut any presumption that just war thinking inevitably means subservience to the policies of the state or that pacifism is unacceptable because it is unpatriotic.

Thus the recent history of our church is marked by a persistent belief in the importance of peace but also by continuing good faith disagreements as to what kinds of policies and commitments most faithfully translate that central belief into prudent and responsible action. Some of these disagreements have challenged the Peacemaking Program, the primary agency through which *Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling* and other social witness policies were to be implemented. Some have been impressed with what the Church has done in the last quarter century, particularly the extent to which it has managed to be critical of the prevailing trends in the society of which it is an integral part. Others feel that the program has been insufficient in its vigor and lacking in prophetic intensity and are disturbed by the fact that at the same time the Church has been engaged in this program the country has become more and more involved in the use of military ways of meeting the threat of terrorism and other international crises, and has landed on what amounts to a permanent war footing.

**APPENDIX F: DEFINITIONS**

**A very succinct summary of just war principles:**

Those applying to the decision whether or not to go to war (*jus ad bellum*).

1. There must be just cause.

2. There must be right intention.

3. The action must be undertaken by the proper authority.

4. The action must be taken as a last resort.

5. There must be a reasonable hope of success (to defend, protect, or otherwise gain a just peace).

Those applying to the conduct of war *(jus in bello)*.

1. The force or violence used must be proportional to the result intended.

2. Noncombatants are not to be directly attacked.

See Edward LeRoy Long, Jr. *War and Conscience in America (Westminster Press, 1968) 22-33.*

**Ten Principles of Just Peacemaking**

1. Support nonviolent direct action.

2. Take independent initiatives to reduce threats.

3. Use cooperative conflict resolution.

4. Acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustice and seek repentance and forgiveness.

5. Advance democracy, human rights, and religious liberty.

6. Foster just and sustainable economic development.

7. Work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system.

8. Strengthen the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation and human rights.

9. Reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade.

10. Encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations.

See Glen Stassen, ed. *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War (Pilgrim Press*, 1998)

**Six Elements of Nonviolent Strateg**y (More from a faith perspective)

1. Nonviolence is for the strong rather than the weak. It is a difficult discipline that eschews cowardice. It is not nonresistance but a particular method of resistance.
2. Nonviolence does not seek to “defeat or humiliate” the opponent, but to win them over. It is not employed for the purpose of scoring points but as a means of creating “the beloved community.”
3. Nonviolence directs itself “against the forces of evil rather than against persons who happen to be doing evil.” One may despise a particular form of evil, but one may not despise the doer of the evil.
4. Without making suffering into something to be sought, nonviolence can bring home the truth that “unearned suffering is redemptive.” It can be creatively enacted in ways that transform evil into a potential for good.
5. The attitude of nonviolence must be within the heart of the individual as well as his outer actions. “The nonviolent resister not only refuses to shoot his opponent but he also refuses to hate him.”
6. Nonviolence “is based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice.” The practitioner can believe that she is not going against the grain of what is ultimate, but seeks rather to exemplify what is ultimate: redemptive suffering love.

These six come from Martin Luther King, Jr.’s *Stride Toward Freedom* (NY: Harper & Row, 1958), summarized by Robert McAfee Brown in *Religion and Violence* (Phila.: Westminster, 1973). King learned from Mohandas K. Gandhi, who in turn learned from Leo Tolstoy on the spiritual grounding and orientation of nonviolence.

**APPENDIX G:** SEVERAL EXAMPLES OF METHODS OF VIOLENCE REDUCTION:

By Rev. Roger Powers, Pastor, Light Street Church, Baltimore; consultant to the Steering Team.

**Nonviolent Communication**

Too often the words we use, especially in conflictual situations, escalate tensions rather than reducing them. We use words as weapons to blame, judge, criticize, or dominate others. At the same time, we don’t listen well. What we hear is distorted by our own prejudices and misconceptions.

Nonviolent communication is a process developed by Marshall Rosenberg that helps people to exchange the information necessary to resolve conflicts and differences peacefully. When using nonviolent communication, people listen deeply to themselves and others and articulate their observations, feelings, needs, and requests, honestly and respectfully with empathy and compassion. Nonviolent communication can help bring healing and reconciliation to interpersonal relationships in a variety of settings. More information is available from the Center for Nonviolent Communication ([http://www.cnvc.org](http://www.cnvc.org/)).

**Inter-religious Understanding**

Religions are often blamed for being the cause of conflict and violence in the world. Religious identity is impossible to separate from other dimensions of personal identity, yet those who blame religion isolate it as the primary causal factor. In reality, political, ethnic, and economic factors bear much more responsibility for creating the underlying conditions that lead to violent conflict. Nonetheless, religions have within them a storehouse of resources to prevent violence and promote peace and reconciliation. For example, the Golden Rule – “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31) – is found in some form in all of the world’s major religions. Increasing inter-religious understanding through interfaith dialogue is critical to peacemaking in the 21st century. Some Presbyterian teaching elders and congregations have been involved in interfaith dialogue in their local communities, particularly between Christians and Jews. These conversations are important and to be encouraged. At the same time, efforts to promote inter-religious understanding and reconciliation must expand to include Muslims and other faith traditions. Strengthening these bonds of mutual respect and understanding between the religious traditions has a stabilizing effect in society.

Training and educational resources are available from a number of organizations, including the Tanenbaum Center for Inter-religious Understanding ([https://www.tanenbaum.org](https://www.tanenbaum.org/)), the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs ([http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu](http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/)), the Religion and Peacemaking Program of the U.S. Institute of Peace (<http://www.usip.org/religionpeace>), the Program on Religion and Reconciliation at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies (<http://kroc.nd.edu/research/religion-conflict-peacebuilding/program-religion-reconciliation>), the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions ([http://www.parliamentofreligions.org](http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/)), and Religions for Peace ([http://www.religionsforpeace.org](http://www.religionsforpeace.org/))

**Conflict Resolution Skills**

Methods of conflict resolution such as negotiation and mediation seek to settle disputes peacefully through mutual agreement. We encounter conflict regularly in our day-to-day lives -- at home, at work, in school, and in our congregations. Knowing how to manage and resolve these conflicts well is essential to the well-being of ourselves and others. But few people ever receive training in conflict resolution.

Many community mediation centers offer training in conflict resolution skills. For church leaders who want to learn the skills needed to address conflict in church settings, the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center ([http://www.lmpeacecenter.org](http://www.lmpeacecenter.org/)) offers a Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders. Excellent educational resources are also available through the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School ([http://www.pon.harvard.edu](http://www.pon.harvard.edu/)).

**Faith-Based Community Organizing**

Congregations have joined together in faith-based community organizations to work for social and economic justice in their communities. By building relationships with one another they discover their shared self-interest. By organizing their people and money, they build the power they need to influence key decision makers in government and business to act in the community’s interests. Working across lines of religion, race, and class, these interfaith community organizations have fought for affordable housing, better schools, funding for social services, and a host of other issues. These are efforts that address causes of structural violence, and hence contribute to less violence in families and communities.

Training in faith-based community organizing is available through four national organizing networks: the Industrial Areas Foundation ([http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org](http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/)), the Gamaliel Foundation ([www.gamaliel.org](http://www.gamaliel.org/)), the PICO National Network ([http://www.piconetwork.org](http://www.piconetwork.org/)), and the Direct Action and Research Training Center (DART) (<http://www.thedartcenter.org/>).

**Nonviolent Third-Party Intervention**

Most nonviolent direct action has been used by one or more parties directly engaged in a conflict. However, in the past few decades there has been growing experience with third parties, who are not part of a conflict, intervening nonviolently in the hopes of deterring violent attacks and human rights violations. Organizations such as Peace Brigades International (<http://www.peacebrigades.org/>), Witness for Peace (<http://www.witnessforpeace.org/>), Christian Peacemaker Teams (<http://www.cpt.org/>), Nonviolent Peaceforce (<http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/>), and the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (<http://www.eappi.org/>), recruit, train, and deploy volunteers who provide an international nonviolent presence in areas of violent conflict.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has played a part in this through its Colombia Accompaniment Program (<http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/colombia/accompaniment>), which began in 2004 at the request of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia (IPC). Colombia church leaders who had spoken out against human rights violations and who had supported families displaced by decades of war were facing threats of political violence. They asked the PC(USA) to send international accompaniers to stand with them and provide a measure of safety for them as they carry out their prophetic ministry. In response to their request, the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship has worked with PC(USA) World Mission and the IPC to train over 130 volunteers, of whom 90 have been deployed as short-term mission workers to Colombia. Accompaniers practice a ministry of presence with the IPC and with the displaced communities and human rights leaders with whom they work. The primary goal is to be a nonviolent presence of Christian support and solidarity with our church partners in the IPC, to “see and be seen,” and to share the story with churches and communities in the U.S. through prayer, education, and advocacy efforts.

1. Johnson, Kermit D. “Just War and Nuclear Deterrence,” in Ronald H. Stone and Dana W. Wilbanks, Eds., *The Peacemaking Struggle: Militarism & Resistance* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), p. 197. Johnson went on to determine that even various “tactical” nuclear war options then being advocated would not fit the criteria of Just War. a [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Much recent mainline pacifist discussion has been prompted by the writings of John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and a number of Roman Catholic priests (whose vows forswear violence). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Long, Edward L. “The Mandate to Seek a Just Peace,” in Stone & Wilbanks, op. cit., pp. 29-41. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Presbyterians may be proud to know of the serious theological and ethical discussion of war and peace issues by Presbyterian scholars represented in several collections of essays, in particular: Ronald H. Stone and Dana Wilbanks, eds., *The Peacemaking Struggle: Militarism & Resistance* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985) and Ronald H. Stone and Robert L. Stivers, eds., *Resistance and Theological Ethics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004). With some writing more than once, 36 scholars participated in this work, representing most Presbyterian seminaries and a number of colleges and universities. Stone and Long, cited above, were chief co-authors of Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling. Stone’s role and that of the group of Theological Educators for Presbyterian Social Witness (now, Social Ethics Network) is described in Christian Iosso, “The Church Reformed, Always Resisting,” in Matthew Lon Weaver, ed. *Applied Christian Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington/Rowman & Littlefield, 2014). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Gowan, Donald E. and Ulrich W. Mauser, “Shalom and Eirene,” in Stone & Wilbanks, op. cit., p. 132-33. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. (Green, Lapsley, Miles, and Verhey, eds. *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Kathryn Poethig points to the fundamental asymmetry involved in structural violence and to key analysts Gayatri Spivak (“sanctioned” or non-innocent ignorance), Catherine Lutz on misleading names and language, Slavoj Zizek on the distancing and falsifying impact of “virtualization,” and Sturken on the distortions of fear magnifying insecurity. See Spivak, Gayatri (2003). A conversation with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: politics and theimagination, interview by Jenny Sharpe, Signs: Journal of Women in Culture andSociety, 28(2): 609-24 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Wink, Walter, “The Myth of Redemptive Violence,” http://www2.goshen.edu/~joannab/women/wink99.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. King, Martin Luther, Jr. *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community*. 1967. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), p. 62. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Rene Girard’s work gives depth to the concept of unmasking and has been part of Presbyterian ethicists’ discussions of the persistence of violence. An example of his view: “Christ does not achieve this victory through violence. He obtains it through a renunciation of violence so complete that violence can rage to its heart’s content without realizing that by so doing, it reveals what it must conceal… because it will be recorded and represented with exactness in the Passion narratives.” Girard, Rene, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), p. 140. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Robert McAfee Brown notes Brazilian Bishop Dom Helder Camara’s version of this in, *The Spiral of Violence* (Dimension Books, 1971); Brown’s own *Religion and Violence* (Westminster, 1973) presents a pioneering assessment of structural violence. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Ortiz, Isabel, and Matthew Cummins, “Global Inequality: Beyond the Bottom Billion,” UNICEF Social and Economic Policy Working Paper, April 2011, p. 12. http://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/files/Global\_Inequality.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Written February 28, 1948, Declassified June 17, 1974. Kennan, George, "Review of Current Trends, U.S. Foreign Policy, Policy Planning Staff, PPS No. 23. Top Secret. Included in the U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948, volume 1, part 2 (Washington DC Government Printing Office, 1976), 524-525. <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=goto&id=FRUS.FRUS1948v01p2&isize=M&submit=Go+to+page&page=524>. Kennan is best known for the strategy of containment that guided much US policy during the Cold War. Raised Presbyterian, his realism contained clearer moral components later in his published essays. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Friedman, Thomas L. “A Manifesto for the Fast World,” *New York Times,* March 28, 1999. http://www.nytimes.com/1999/03/28/magazine/a-manifesto-for-the-fast-world.html [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. The cost comparisons in this section are distilled from The National Priorities Project: http://nationalpriorities.org/analysis/2011/us-security-spending-since-911/ The 2007 Harvard study referred to: http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2009/09/new-study-finds-45000-deaths-annually-linked-to-lack-of-health-coverage/ The role of military expenditure in creating debt is summarized by Joshua Holland based on a study by economist Robert Higgs: <http://www.independent.org/newsroom/article.asp?id=1941> Holland’s article: <http://www.alternet.org/story/151119/five_eye-opening_facts_about_our_bloated_post-9_11_%27defense%27_spending?page=0%2C1> ) [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Johnson, Luke Timothy, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (SF: Harper Collins, 1996). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid., p. 149. Historical, literary, and other criticism can illuminate ways that texts and traditions developed, but Johnson, a biblical scholar himself, questions especially the use of Gnostic texts without passion narratives, as he relates “narrativity” to materiality. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. While appreciating Hays’ respect for the scriptural canon, Luke Timothy Johnson takes issue with him on his methodology for making ethical applications. For reviews by Johnson and four others: <http://www.westmont.edu/~fisk/articles/mvntreviews.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Horsley, Richard A., *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 319. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. See Horsley, Richard A. *Jesus and the Powers* (Mpls: Fortress, 2011) for a recent synthesis of his work. Horsley sees Jesus as a prophet in the covenantal tradition and movement leader, rather than an apocalyptic visionary, wisdom teacher, or self-proclaiming messiah. As a transforming public martyrdom, the crucifixion amplifies Jesus’ message and carries great power not only for occupied Israel but for all on the margins seeking hope. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Wink, Walter, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 175-193. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Margaret Aymer presented a critique of violent biblical imagery to the Peace Discernment consultation for Presbyterian universities and colleges in January, 2013, at Montreat, NC. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. King, Martin Luther, Jr., *Strength to Love*. 1963. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 39. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. David G. Hunter summarizes the scholarly consensus among diverse scholars (pacifist and not) of the Early Church; “Even those who differed radically in their evaluations of the ancient material shared three basic conclusions: 1) that the most vocal opponents of military service in the early church (e.g., Tertullian and Origen) based their objections on a variety of factors, which included an abhorence of Roman army religion as well as an aversion to the shedding of blood; 2) that at least from the end of the second century there is evidence of a divergence in Christian opinion and practice and that Christian support for military service (first reflected obversely in the polemics of Tertullian) grew throughout the third century; 3) that the efforts of Christians to justify participation in warfare for a “just” cause (most notably that of Augustine) stand in fundamental continuity with at least one strand of pre-Constantinian tradition.” David G Hunter, "A Decade of Research on Early Christians and Military Service", *Religious Studies Review,*18/2 (April 1992) pg. 87.  Again, in the book, *The Church's Peace Witness*(1994)**,** Hunter writes: “the pluralism of Christian witness today has a ground in the pluralism of the early church. From the very time when military service became a realoption for Christians, there is evidence that Christians responded to it in a variety of ways… The witness of the first three centuries does not provide the Christian today with a univocal mandate for pacifism”  (He reviews how early on Christians were *not allowed* to serve because they weren’t citizens and so military service was not an option.)  (pg. 180) <http://www.eerdmans.com/Products/0555/the-church39s-peace-witness.aspx> [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. (Stone & Wilbanks, op. cit. at 4, p. 187. A non-Realist reading of Augustine is presented by Eugene TeSelle in *Living in Two Cities* (Scranton: University of Scranton, 1998, following an earlier debate in Richard John Neuhaus*,* editor. Augustine *Today*. Encounter Series, 16. Grand Rapids, Mi.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993.) [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Wolterstorff, Nicholas *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Winn, Albert Curry, *Ain’t Gonna Study War No More* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), p. 99, cited in Ott, Daniel J., “Toward A Realistic, Public, Christian Pacifism.” [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Creach, Jerome F. D. *Violence in Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2013). [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Readers of Niebuhr will recognize references here to *The Irony of American History* and *Beyond Tragedy* as illustrations of his application of Biblical resources. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Ott, Daniel J. “Toward a Realistic, Public, Christian Pacifism,” [*American Journal of Theology & Philosophy*](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/american_journal_of_theology_and_philosophy) [Volume 33, Number 3, September 2012](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/american_journal_of_theology_and_philosophy/toc/ajt.33.3.html), pp. 245-257 [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. This paragraph is from the Revs. Mark Davidson and Roger Powers, both pastors on the Peace Discernment steering team, putting recent scholarship into admittedly simplified antitheses. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. For the Treaty of Westphalia’s implications: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sovereignty/> But perhaps the most fundamental and controversial account of what the church lost in the rise of empire in the West is Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker’s *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of this World for Crucifixion and Empire* (Boston: Beacon, 2008). Acceptance of violence is a big part of this fall into empire. For a positive if questioning review: <http://www.psr.edu/saving-paradisehow-christianity-traded-love-world-crucifixion-and-empire-review-tat-siong-benny-liew> [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. The argument of this paragraph is informed by Victor Paul Furnish’s, “Uncommon Love and the Common Good: Christians as Citizens in the Letters of Paul,” in Patrick D. Miller and Dennis P. McCann, eds. *In Search of the Common Good* (NY/London: T&T Clark, 2005). This essay in particular tempers other voices we have cited who argue for the recovery of a deliberately sectarian, distinctive church. Furnish gives a distinctive church but one concerned with its culture even in the earliest century when it had no power. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Iran has claimed that its program of enriching nuclear material is for energy production and not an imitation of the covert weapons development by Israel, India, Pakistan, N. Korea and the nuclear powers on the UN Security Council. International sanctions, plus computer viruses, sabotage, and assassinations of scientists led Iran to agree to dismantle its capacity to build a bomb, and submit to inspections in accord with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Agreement. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. The role of the transnational Roman Catholic community of Sant’Egidio in Mozambique is described by Andrea Bartoli, one of its members: “Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Mozambique Peace Process,” in Helmick, Raymond, S.J. and Rodney L. Petersen, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (Phila. & London: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001), pp. 361ff. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Stephan, Maria and Erica Chenoweth, “Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict” *International Security* 33:1, pp. 7-44.[*http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/isec.2008.33.1.7*](http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/isec.2008.33.1.7) [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Further information about the techniques for nonviolent direct action is available from The Albert Einstein Institution ([http://www.aeinstein.org](http://www.aeinstein.org/)) and the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (<http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/>). (Sharp himself, a minister’s son, does not emphasize particular religious motivation but encourages widest applicability.) [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. This story can be found at: <http://deedsofgod.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=181> [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. See Johnson, Kermit and Ronald H. Stone essays, op. cit. at endnote 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Quoted in Introduction, “The Promise of Peace,” *Church & Society*, Sept/Oct 1983, p. 4 That issue of *Church & Society* journal (available online through the American Theological Library Association) was edited by Robert F. Smylie, longtime Director of the Presbyterian United Nations Office (now the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations). Perhaps the best treatment of Presbyterian thinking on peace leading up to 1980 is Smylie’s “A Presbyterian Witness on War and Peace: An Historical Interpretation” *Journal of Presbyterian History*, Winter, 1981, 59:4. The Presbyterian response to the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings was influenced by the notable Federal and National Council of Churches’ study commissions chaired by Robert Calhoun and Angus Dun, which reported in 1944, 1946, and 1950. See Charles E. Raynal, “The Response of American Protestantism to World War II and Atomic Weapons,” in Thomas D. Parker and Brian J. Fraser, eds. *Peace, War and God’s Justice* (Toronto, Ont: United Church Publishing House, 1989). That Parker and Fraser collection, done for the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, stands well beside the two collections cited in footnote 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Hedges, Chris, *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* (NY: Public Affairs, 2002). [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Stassen, Glen, ed. *Just Peacemaking: Ten Principles to Abolish War* (Pilgrim Press, 1998) [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Get reference [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Stone, Ronald H. *Prophetic Realism: Beyond Militarism and Pacifism in an Age of Terror* (London/NY: T&T Clark, 2005), p. 119. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Narvaez, Leonel, *Political Culture of Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (Bogota: Fundacion Para La Reconciliation, 2009 (original Spanish) and 2010 (English).) Includes essays by Narvaez and Hicks. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. <http://www.faithandleadership.com/content/mel-baars-war-and-the-dimensions-love> ) The PCCMP was formerly the Presbyterian Council for Chaplains and Military Personnel: <http://pccmp.org/who-we-are/history> [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. See <http://www.brite.edu/academics/programs/soul-repair/regional-programs/history-of-the-soul-repair-center/> [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. See *Ministry to Persons in the Armed Forces*, adopted by the 187th General Assembly (1975), Minutes, Part I, pp. tk. This careful study reflects on chaplaincy from WWII through Vietnam, outlines Christian anti-war criticism, and builds on the 1969 policy endorsing conscientious objection to particular wars adopted by the 181st General Assembly in *War, Peace, & Conscience*. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. (John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 14) [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Attacks on “empire” are nothing new: Christians have been comparing their governments to Rome from the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment through to our day. And yet, the word still powerfully names the misuse of power, the use of other people and nations for our benefit more than theirs. Dan Ott, in his analysis of the results, proposed a definition partly based on national selfishness. “Empire” is that and more; it carries an echo of the “principalities and powers, and thus is retained for its metaphorical and Biblical power of association. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. For a downloadable version of Accra Declaration: <https://www.pcusa.org/resource/accra-confession-covenant-justice-economy-and-eart/> [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Fandos, Nicholas, “U.S. Foreign Arms Deals Increased Nearly $10 Billion in 2014,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 25, 2015: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/26/world/middleeast/us-foreign-arms-deals-increased-nearly-10-billion-in-2014.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. This paragraph combines a number of trend analyses reflecting a steady military spending trajectory: <http://www.ibtimes.com/global-defense-budget-seen-climbing-2014-first-total-increase-2009-russia-surpasses-britain-saudi>. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Mary Kaldor (“new wars”) and John Arquilla (network wars, or “netwars”) see globalization eroding state sovereignty so that non-state militants function in states that fail to provide protection and face social/demographic crises. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. See online: www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/A%20N ational%20Strategic%20Narrative.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Eisenhower’s words are worth remembering:

    “This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence -- economic, political, even spiritual -- is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.

    In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

    We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.” (Eisenhower’s Farewell Address, January 17, 1961) [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. See Ronald H. Stone, *Prophetic Realism*, op. cit. at xxx, chapter 6, “On Power and Purpose,” pp. 72-83, for influence on this section. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis and Transformation of the American World Order,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Bacevich, Andrew J. *Washington Rules: America’s Path to Permanent War* (NY: Metropolitan/Macmillan, 2010). This book provides the basis for this paragraph. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Winthrop, John “A Model of Christian Charity” See <http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/519465.John_Winthrop> [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. The placement of this text in Luke is another argument against the exchange with the money-changers being a violent one. This passage was one featured in the 2012 Season of Peace Bible Study leading up to the Peacemaking Offering: <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/seasonofpeace/biblestudy/> [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Little, David, ed. *Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution* (NY: Cambridge University Press/ Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, 2007). [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Ibid., pp. 442-447. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Allan Boesak included this analysis in his presentation to the Consultation on Peace Discernment for Presbyterian-related colleges and universities, January 19, 2013 [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Andrea Bartoli suggested this understanding of peacemaking as an art in his keynote at the Consultation on Peace Discernment for Presbyterian-related colleges and universities, January 19, 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Hallie, Philip, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The story of the village of Le Chambon and how goodness happened there* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 245. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. The San Jose Presbytery added a sixth affirmation reflecting the position of First Presbyterian Church, Palo Alto, by a vote of 38 yes to 36 no. That affirmation reads: “We encourage the Peace Discernment team, in collaboration with the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, to develop materials and processes by which individual churches may consider declaring themselves Peace Churches. A Peace Church is defined as a church embracing nonviolence as the fundamental response to the challenges of violence, terror and war. It is an expressed commitment to nonviolence as a solution to international conflicts and a statement of full support for anyone electing to be a conscientious objector to military service.” [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. I will use these parenthetical references throughout to give the reader a sense of where the comments come from and can be found. Again, I am not offering an exhaustive and exacting sociological analysis of the responses. I am not qualified to do so. But these observations are made after close reading of the responses, collating some of the kinds of responses, and rereading the responses for accuracy. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
69. “Risking Peace,” p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
70. “Risking Peace,” p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
71. “Risking Peace,” pp. 13-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)