



WINTER, 2017–18

Presbyterian Advocacy Day Calls Us to Witness

Adapted from a story by Henry Stone originally published in *Unbound: An Interactive Journal of Christian Social Justice*



The Rev. Jimmie Hawkins speaks in front of the U.S. Capitol during a day of advocacy

WASHINGTON, D.C. — “A budget is a values document. AMEN! A budget is a moral document. AMEN! A federal budget is a spiritual document. AMEN!”

So responded clergy members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) on Tuesday in front of the U.S. Capitol.

The Office of Public Witness (OPW) hosted a day of advocacy on September 12, interceding on behalf of a “Faithful Budget” as highly contentious budget negotiations continue on the Hill.

OPW Director the Rev. Jimmie Hawkins began by emphasizing that the president’s proposed 2018 budget increased military spending by \$54 billion while cutting social programs by the same, stating, “The budget is a moral document and reflects our values — and therefore our values are with the poor.”

Although advocating for a major role of government in society, speakers also made clear that they felt called to be “prophetic disturbers” of government when its policies are unjust. The Rev. Dr. Rhashell Hunter argued U.S.

federal policy has historically had an unequal impact on Americans divided along financial and racial lines — particularly the GI bill, which she said disproportionately benefited white Americans and financed 40 percent of the mortgages in 1946 and 1947.

“If Jesus were here, we would want Jesus to have access to healthcare,” she said. “We would want Jesus and those who followed him to be able to eat.”

Following the news conference, many of the faith leaders met with congressional and senate staff.



A Word from our Director

All the Israelite men and women whose hearts made them willing to bring anything for the work that the Lord had commanded by Moses to be done, brought it as a freewill offering to the Lord. (Exodus 35:29 NRSV)



The past year has been marked by grave threats to the marginalized and repeated need for powerful mobilizations of solidarity and support. At the Office of Public Witness, we saw a renewed need for prophetic advocacy and grassroots organizing on behalf of God's beloved community. We have devoted greater resources to supporting leadership in the pews and in the streets- our goal is to ensure you have the training, the background and the information to raise your collective voices.

The call to justice work has never been louder and we need we need your help to answer that call. Please visit presbyterianmission.org/donate/E865714/ to make a contribution to the work of the Office of Public Witness.

There are many opportunities we provide for Presbyterians to increase their skills and the impact of their justice work. Our internship program continues to grow and, as a result of a new emphasis we have put on outreach to young people, we are hearing that young adults and college students are resonating with a call to justice and advocacy in their daily lives. Furthermore, we are training more advocates of all ages through Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD) and Compassion Peace and Justice Training Day. In the past two years we have increased our annual attendance by 30 percent each year and have begun to support regional advocacy days in Presbyteries and Synods around the country. We continue to be in partnership with you through our briefings, webinars, conference calls, and good, old-fashioned one-on-ones. Our trainings prepare you to build your social witness ministry and demonstrate the power of a prophetic voice in the halls of power.

In an effort to keep you informed, we have expanded our communications strategy to include print, online/email, and social media (blogging, Twitter, Facebook). Our staff members hold leadership roles in the ecumenical and interfaith community on a Faithful Federal Budget, Health Care, Immigration, Middle East Peace, Eco-Justice, International Global Security and conflict resolution, Africa issues, International Economic Justice and Human Rights.

Please visit presbyterianmission.org/donate/E865714/ to accompany us in justice work by making a contribution to resource the road ahead. You can also mail a check to:

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

P.O. Box 643700

Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700

Make check out to Presbyterian Church USA, Memo: OPW ECO#865714

In the Faith We Share,

Rev. Jimmie Hawkins



Christian leaders call on Congress to oppose the “Israel Anti-Boycott Act”

WASHINGTON, D.C. November 6, 2017: Leaders representing 17 Christian organizations sent a letter to all members of Congress calling on them to oppose the “Israel Anti-Boycott Act.” The legislation was introduced in both the House and the Senate in March of this year.

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

Jim Winkler, President and General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S. and a signer of the letter said, “The effort to outlaw the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement is not only illegal, it will fail to achieve the results intended by those who support this legislation because it will make martyrs of those who are prosecuted and persecuted as a result of this bill.”

The leaders explained in the letter that their opposition to the Israel Anti-Boycott Act “is an effort to change unjust Israeli policy toward Palestinians, not to delegitimize the State of

Israel, nor to marginalize or isolate our Jewish neighbors, or their enterprises. Our choices to purchase and invest responsibly, and to advocate with corporations or governments, are motivated by our firm commitments to justice and peace for all people, without discrimination or exclusion.”

Dr. Peter Makari, executive for the Middle East and Europe of the Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) said, “No matter each of our churches’ and organizational policy on using economic leverage related to Israel/Palestine, we all support the right to use that leverage, and have done so in many other cases — with success. We do not believe it is appropriate for Congress, or any state legislature, to restrict that right, or to determine how we act to be conscientious and faithful stewards of our resources.”

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

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



Peace Delegation Returns from South Korea

A Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) peace delegation traveled to South Korea in November in response to Overture 12-01 and Committee Referral 12-13, which focus on the reunification of the Korean Peninsula and the need to build upon the increasing momentum toward peace. They were adopted at General Assembly 222 (2016) in Portland.



Leading the delegation was the Rev. J. Herbert Nelson II, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly. He was joined by Catherine Gordon of the OPW, the Rev. Jose Luis Casal, director of Presbyterian World Mission, the Rev. Robina Winbush, assistant stated clerk and



director of the Office of General Assembly's (OGA) ecumenical relations and the Rev. Mienda Uriarte, coordinator of World Mission's Asia-Pacific office. The Rev. Ed Arnold and The Rev. Ed Kang, members of Cayuga-Syracuse Presbytery, originators of the overture also attended.

“Our delegation to Korea is a witness to our common faith and abiding love for our longstanding relationship as Christians,” said Nelson. “As we continue to advocate for the reunification of North and South Korea, it is important that we witness to our belief that God is still active in the causes that

bring people together. It is also important that we give rise to our active engagement to challenge the indifference expressed by governmental leaders of North Korea and the United States.”





To Breathe Free Documentary film features Syrian family now living in Washington, D.C.



Participants in the film screening of *To Breathe Free*

On September 28, 2017 Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office, the UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency and Refugee Council USA sponsored a policy briefing and screening of the documentary, *To Breathe Free* on Capitol Hill with congressional staffers and aides.

To Breathe Free follows the five-year journey of a Syrian family fleeing the war in Homs to the refugee camps in Jordan and starting a new life in Washington, D.C. Using home movies, phone video, family photos and interviews with family members and former refugees, this short documentary gives an intimate and unique perspective not seen in current media reporting on the refugee crisis. *To Breathe Free* captures the intersection of individual narratives from a family fleeing the Vietnam War in 1970, to the Syrian Conflict in 2017, to the families who help create a new home in our nation's capitol, giving voice to our common humanity and the struggle that binds people together.

Watch the trailer at pda.pcusa.org/pda/resource/to-breathe-free/

Learn more about the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s #WeChooseWelcome campaign: pcusa.org/
WeChooseWelcome





Meet the YAVs and Interns at the OPW

Ben Pistora is an intern with the Office of Public Witness, PC(USA), and a second year student at George Washington University studying Political Communications & History. He comes from the small community of Kenton in Northwestern Ohio, where he is a 13-year member of Trinity United Presbyterian Church. The son, grandson, and great-grandson of ministers of the Presbyterian and Czech Brethren churches, the church has been an active presence throughout Ben's life. Though born in the Czech Republic, he comes to DC, both as a college student and with the OPW, recognizing the deep struggles of the rural Midwestern community he grew up in and rural communities across America, facing the perils of joblessness, economic despair, and the ever intensifying heroin crisis. Having volunteered with several political campaigns, he continues to be active in college with political organizations as well as campus radio. Through his experience with the OPW,

BEN PISTORA



he hopes to transform longheld passions for socioeconomic and racial justice into true experiential knowledge and a greater capacity to act upon such passions.

Clare Forrister will serve this year as a Young Adult Volunteer (YAV), dividing her time in DC between the Office of Public Witness and New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. She is pursuing an undergraduate degree at Guilford College with a double major in economics and women's, gender and sexuality studies. After this year of discernment as a YAV, she plans to return to her studies and graduate in December 2019 before seeking further work in organizing and advocacy. While at Guilford, she worked on *The Guilfordian* as a reporter and editor, helping promote the student paper's

CLARE FORRISTER



commitment to social justice and diversity through holistic coverage of the campus community. She also took part in justice work through groups like PRIDE and the student coalition Integrity for Guilford. She draws her commitment to social justice from her faith and the support of faith communities in her life, starting with her home church, Immanuel Presbyterian in Montgomery, Alabama. During her year with OPW, Clare is excited to explore community-driven advocacy on issues of voting rights, environmental justice, education reform, racial justice, LGBTQ+ justice and global economic justice through creative approaches to policy and grassroots organizing. Her YAV blog is seekingclaritydc.wordpress.com.



Announcing the PC(USA) Commitment to a New Poor Peoples Campaign

On the fiftieth anniversary of the announcement of the first Poor People's Campaign of 1967-68, a growing and diverse leadership has come together in Washington, D.C., to announce the launch of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. This broad and deep national moral fusion movement, co-chaired by Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II of Repairers of the Breach and Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis of the Kairos Center, is rooted in the leadership of the poor and dispossessed as moral agents, reflecting the great



moral teachings of our deepest religious and constitutional traditions.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is excited to announce our full participation in the campaign — from our grassroots to our highest levels of leadership. This campaign represents part of our longstanding work to be in solidarity with poor and working class people,

and builds on, most recently, our commitment from the 222nd General Assembly to:

Encourage congregations, mid council governing bodies and national agencies of the PC(USA) to locate ourselves with the poor, to advocate with all of our voice for the poor, and to seek opportunities to take risks for and with the poor. (Overture on Choosing to be A Church Committed to the Gospel of Matthew 25)

Visit poorpeoplescampaign.org to make a pledge to join the campaign. Email Nora Leccese, nora.leccese@pcusa.org (OPW Representative for Domestic Policy) if you are interested in joining your state organizing committee.





Presbyterian Mission
**Office of
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