



Washington Report To Presbyterians

Spring 2017

From the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness

Raising a Prophetic Voice through the Social Justice Policy of Presbyterians since 1946

The Budget is A Moral Document!

A Theological Reflection on the 2018 Federal Budget

By Rev. Jimmie Hawkins

We get clear guidance from the Bible that those with political power, economic wealth, and social status are to use their positions to benefit those who our society has marginalized. The rich are given a command to use their wealth to benefit the whole, not simply to enrich their own. They are instructed in the book of Deuteronomy that when their servants harvest the crops, they are to leave a portion for the poor to come along and glean. The prophet Hosea strongly criticized the wives of wealthy merchants sitting on their couches in luxury while others starved.

President Trump has released a 2018 budget proposal, which is diametrically opposed to the biblical instruction to care for the least of these. It advances billions of dollars in spending cuts to most government agencies, and would use the savings to pay for large increases in military and home-

To politicians, the prophet Isaiah says:

*Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees,
who write oppressive statutes,
to turn aside the needy from justice
and to rob the poor of my people of their right,
that widows may be your spoil,
and that you may make the orphans your prey!
What will you do on the day of punishment,
in the calamity that will come from far away?
To whom will you flee for help,
and where will you leave your wealth,
so as not to crouch among the prisoners
or fall among the slain?
(Isaiah 10:1-4 NRSV)*



Interfaith Advocates make visits to urge Congress to pass a budget that preserves social safety net spending

land security spending. The proposal would also eliminate funding for nearly 20 smaller independent agencies, including the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Legal Services Corporation, which finances legal aid groups.

People of faith decry a budget that would generously fund war while cutting those things which truly make a nation strong: public education, adequate healthcare, and resilient communities. Our priorities are reversed when we not only increase spending on weapons of war but also take away support from those elements in society which increase our creativity and knowledge. Rev. Jim Wallis reminds us that a national budget is a moral document for it highlights what is of importance to us all.

A Greeting from OPW Director Rev. Jimmie Hawkins

Micah 6:5 reads: “...And what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.”

2017 has been a whirlwind of activity. The year has not yet reached its half-way point, yet it has already been filled with uncertainty and chaos. Through it all we have faith that God is still sovereign, graceful, merciful and kind.

The OPW has had a busy two quarters of the year. Colleagues Catherine and Nora have been working diligently on their respective areas. Internationally, we have been monitoring and communicating with the Church concerning issues relevant to the Korean peninsula, South Sudan, and Israel/Palestine. Domestically, we have raised concern and protest about the proposed 2018 budget cuts to social programs, the exit from the Paris Climate Accords, and the six-country ban on refugees entering the U.S. We have worked with our interfaith and ecumenical partners in meeting with members of Congress, posting and supporting sign-on letters, and attending rallies and marches. The pace of threats to vulnerable communities has been rapid, but so has the pace of our response.

One of the highlights thus far has been our Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD) conference held in April. Before the official beginning of the conference, we held our annual training day specifically for Presbyterians at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. The attendance at Compassion Peace and Justice Training Day was the largest in history, topping out at 260 registrations. Presbyterians came together to learn and share out of a desire to serve out our commitment to discipleship in the name of Christ Jesus. EAD followed with over 700 people of faith recommitting to the work of justice. Participants left recommitted to the cause of advocacy on behalf of God’s children who are held in bondage by suffering, injustice and oppression. One of the most meaningful aspects of a gathering such as this is the change brought forth in each one of us as we continue to allow the Spirit of God to help us recognize our common humanity and the connection it produces. We are truly “one in the Spirit and one in the Lord.”

In Faith We Share,

Rev. Jimmie Ray Hawkins



Rev. Hawkins at a rally to urge the President to remain in the Paris Climate Accords.

Compassion Peace and Justice Training Day and Ecumenical Advocacy Days 2017



Clergy and EAD attendees practiced civil disobedience in a pray-in at the Hart Senate Office Building to demand a just federal budget.



Dr. Leslie Copeland Tune speaks at an EAD press conference to affirm the ecumenical community's commitment to federal spending that promotes dignity and health for all.



Amal Nassar, Stephanie Quintana-Martinez and Elona Street-Stewart speak at the opening plenary of CPJ Training Day



**Save the Date for CPJ and
EAD 2018!
April 20-23 2018
Washington D.C.**

Stated Clerk, Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson preaches at EAD 2017

An Update from

With more than 1.8 million refugees – including one million children – seeking safety in neighboring countries, South Sudan is now even more distant on the horizon. And, the ongoing violence and increasing humanitarian crisis have made our Community more vital than ever.

South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in July 2011 and ended Africa's longest-running civil war. The new struggle erupted between the President and the Vice-President. Violence spread like wildfire. The two warring factions formed that are opposed to the government.



(l-to-r) The Rev. Tut Koney, South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church; The Rev. Debbie Braaksma, PC(USA) World Mission Africa area coordinator; and the Rev. Peter Gai, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan/Chair of South Sudan Council of Churches.

(Photo provided)

forming that are opposed to the government.

In February of this year, the United Nations and the Government of South Sudan, and the hunger crisis has only become more severe. In addition, attempts to bring aid to those in need of aid workers. These aid workers continue to face detentions.

[United Nations Agencies](#) working on the ground in South Sudan. It is estimated that South Sudan - will face life-threatening hunger.

The famine in South Sudan is a direct result of the civil war. The famine in large portions of the country has produced this food crisis. It is a direct consequence of a conflict prolonged by

In May, the UN Refugee Agency and the World Food Programme announced a US \$1.4 billion to provide life-saving aid to South Sudanese refugees. 14 percent funded.

Unfortunately, the FY 2018 budget proposal from the current administration, as well as other international assistance programs at a time when the McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program, and Development

The proposed budget also contains deep cuts in funding for the United Nations and UN Peacekeeping. The FY 2017 budget has put the United States back into arrears for the first time in nearly a decade. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan is still in South Sudan. International humanitarian organizations and UN agencies are at these sites, providing food, shelter, health services. At a time when increased diplomatic efforts and emergency assistance are needed to quell conflicts like those in South Sudan, the US Agency for International Development by 30%.

South Sudan is in dire need of emergency refugee assistance, food aid, and diplomatic engagement from the United States Congress and the administration. Ask them to ensure that United Nations funding request for the South Sudanese refugees. Apply diplomatic pressure on the armed actors in South Sudan to halt the conflict and provide humanitarian access for food and aid.

In addition, in order for the diplomatic, emergency assistance and development work to continue it must be funded. Request that the international affairs budget.

South Sudan

South Sudan has become the world's largest refugee crisis. In addition there is a famine. The path toward peace, justice, reconciliation, and stability for South Sudan requires the role of the United States, the United Nations, and the International

South Sudan, a fragile state quickly plunged into conflict in December 2013, when a power struggle between the president and his deputy ended in a peace agreement in August of 2015, but the fighting continued and the fighting has since spread over the country with new, armed groups

The government of South Sudan declared a state of famine in several areas of the country. A formal famine declaration means people have already started dying and relief efforts need have been interrupted by armed groups who block the free movement of aid. The situation, threats, physical assault and killing.

South Sudan say that the situation is "the worst hunger catastrophe" since fighting began. By July nearly 5.5 million people – almost half the population of South

Sudan is a man-made famine. The multi-sided conflict with the collapse of rule-of-law and destruction and looting has led to a food crisis. The U.S. State Department recently issued a [statement](#) on the famine saying that, "This crisis is man-made and is the fault of South Sudanese leaders who are unwilling to put aside political ambitions for the good of their people."

The U.S. State Department's South Sudanese refugee assistance program appealed to donors to increase support for refugees fleeing South Sudan. Humanitarian agencies are seeking to assist these refugees in the six neighboring countries. So far, the South Sudanese refugee assistance program remains only

The current administration would severely cut funding for the United Nations as well as other programs of great need. It eliminates funding for International Food Aid, the U.S. Food for Peace Program Assistance. Global nutrition programs are cut by almost half.

The current budget already cut U.S. contributions to UN Peacekeeping, putting the U.S. at risk of not currently protecting more than 190,000 civilians across South Sudan. U.S. military services, and education to camp residents.

South Sudan, the president's proposed budget would slash the State Department's

U.S. State Department and the international community, please contact your members of Congress. The refugee assistance program is fully funded and urge them to put increased funding for food aid.

1. Please ask them to provide no less than \$60 billion in the fiscal year 2018



If you would like to give funds to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and its work in South Sudan please click [here](#) or follow this link: <http://bit.ly/2rHIZxT>.

Funds will go toward humanitarian assistance and/or trauma care for families affected by the conflict and civil strife.

To learn more about the PC (USA)'s work in South Sudan as well as our mission co-workers, click [here](#) or follow this link:

<http://bit.ly/2s0gyhK>

... “Moral Budget” Continued from Page 1

We thank God that the budget put forth by the White House is only a blueprint; it is now up to Congress to compose a final budget agreement to fund the federal government in 2018.

If budgets are living documents, then they must be influenced by our faith in the living Lord. We are each disciples of Christ Jesus who teaches us that God has a heart for the poor. In Luke 6 Jesus pronounces blessings upon the poor and woes upon the rich. He identifies service to God in Matthew 25 as feeding the hungry and providing for the sick and imprisoned. He did so many miracles that he is known as the Divine Physician. This is the one we are called to follow to the ends of the earth, duplicating his actions and living by his words. Our budgets must provide for all through strongly supported social programs enabling people to live full and dignified lives.

Step into Leadership: Become a Grassroots Advocacy Coordinator

In many of your congregations, you may already have a social witness ministry, a social justice committee or a collection of people dedicated to justice work. The Office of Public Witness invites you to organize and formalize a Grassroots Advocacy Team to engage your congregants and community members in the creation of public policy and the advancement of a justice agenda in 2018 and beyond.

What does an Advocacy Team do?

As a member of an Advocacy Team, you commit to having a relationship with your team, your members of Congress, and The Office of Public Witness over a period of at least a year. We support your team with action alerts, team building and organizing resources, and issue briefs throughout the year.

Here are some suggestions for establishing a team:

- Ten or so people (but even fewer is a fine start!) who are geographically nearby ideally in the same congressional district.
- A commitment from those people to devote time each month to challenging racism, xenophobia, environmental degradation, war mongering and economic exclusion which harms God’s people and God’s good creation.

How Do I Recruit People to Take Action?

Most people are moved to take action through individual conversations. Here are some tips for having successful conversations to inspire people to take action with your group. These conversations often happen one-on-one. **Note:** look for people who are already in leadership roles: who is organizing the weekly coffee hour? Who is leading informal political discussions after service?

Interested in becoming a Grassroots Advocacy Team Coordinator? Visit our website and sign up!
www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/compassion-peace-justice/washington/advocacy-teams/

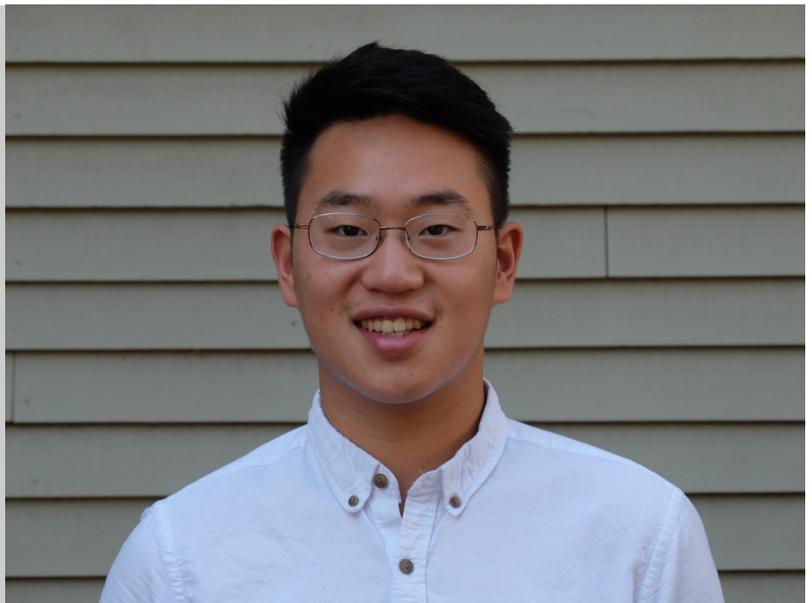
Welcome to the Young Adults at the OPW!



Leslie Cox is an inquirer in the PC(USA), a third year student at Columbia Theological Seminary, and a Flagler College graduate (2015). Throughout her studies at Columbia she has been recognized as a Courageous Student Communicator for her work in racial justice, inclusive theology, and student leadership. Her passion for justice and advocacy led her to serve as a delegate at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (2017) and

to seek out an experience with the Office of Public Witness. During her summer fellowship, she is eager to focus on public policy that promotes gender justice, LGBTQ rights, and ending environmental racism, which she hopes will inform her plans after completing seminary. In her free time, she runs a blog project promoting and elevating LGBTQ stories and voices, which can be found at LoveLes.Co.

Ray Chen is currently a Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow placed at the Office of Public Witness, PC(USA). He previously worked with Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN) for the fellowship field placement prior to joining the office. With LA CAN, he organized around issues related to food justice, civil rights, and housing justice, focusing his time on coordinating a community-based food assessment of the Skid Row neighborhood. He graduated from Stanford University in spring of 2016 with a degree in Human Biology that focused on community health, a minor in African & African American Studies, and honors in education. While a student, he was deeply involved with Asian American communities, through which he first developed a social justice orientation and a commitment to envisioning, creating, and maintaining just and sustainable communities. As an immigrant and Christian, he is excited to be working with the OPW on mobilizing and empowering congregations and their surrounding communities to protect immigrants of all statuses. He is also interested to learn more about how faith-based advocacy groups prophetically speak forth and engender a vision of justice, healing and reconciliation.





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