



SPRING 2019

PC(USA) Stands with the Poor People's Campaign



In February 2019, the Rev. Jimmie Hawkins, Director of the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness (OPW), stood with the Rev. Dr. William Barber and the Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis to launch Phase II of the Poor People's Campaign (PPC), which remains focused on the goal of organizing the 140 million poor folks in our country who live paycheck to paycheck. In order to defeat the evils of racism, poverty, the war economy, ecological devastation and the distorted moral narrative, they are launching a **National Emergency Truth and Poverty Tour** beginning March 28. In 28 states, PPC will tour locations in order to amplify these real U.S. emergencies. In June, the PPC will gather in Washington, D.C. for the People's Moral Action Congress. Following this gathering, the Rev. Barber and the Rev. Theoharis will tour approximately 20 states. In June 2020, they will return to Washington D.C. for the Poor People's Assembly and March on Washington.

During the summer 2018, the OPW partnered with the Poor People's Campaign in its six-week campaign to demand living wages. The new PPC takes up the mantle of the

original 1968 effort spearheaded by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., which ended with his assassination. The new PPC is led by Rev. Barber and Rev. Theoharis, who is a Presbyterian minister who works with Union Theological Seminary in New York.

PPC's webpage provides this context for its work:

"Over the past two years, the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival has reached out to communities in more than 30 states across this nation. We have met with tens of thousands of people, witnessing the strength of their moral courage in trying times. We have gathered testimonies from hundreds of poor people, and we have chronicled their demands for a better society."

Last summer's campaign took place May 14 to June 23. The Office of Public Witness had the honor to host leadership of the PPC as they organized in Washington. Each week consisted of four segments. On Sunday, the campaign gathered in worship to prepare for the week's activities. Beginning early Monday morning, lawyers provided a briefing on what to expect from the Capitol police for those willing to participate in direct action on civil disobedience. At 10 am, the PPC gathered for a rally on the grounds of the Capitol. Then they marched to the site of direct action.

Each week the direct action took place in a different location — inside the Capitol, First Street and Senate office spaces, to name a few. On June 11, there were two different direct actions. While the Rev. Barber led a group to sit in the middle of First Street (in between the East front of the Capitol and the Supreme Court), the Rev. Theoharis led a smaller group of nine to pray in the plaza of the Supreme Court. There, they were arrested and detained overnight; the only group to be held in such a manner. The director of the Office of Public Witness, the Rev. Jimmie Hawkins, was one of those nine.

The final event was held on June 23, which coincided with the last Saturday of the 223rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in St. Louis, MO. A multitude gathered on the national mall to hear the Revs. Barber, Theoharis and Hawkins spoke about the goals of the new Poor People's Campaign.



Legislation Penalizing Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) Undermines First Amendment Protections

In an ecumenical statement on November 14, 2018, sixteen U.S. Christian leaders outlined developments in U.S. policy toward Israel/Palestine since the beginning of the Trump Administration, noting the negative impacts on Palestinians and on prospects for peace in the region. The statement was sent to all members of Congress and to President Trump. It was also sent to the new 116th Congress and again to the White House in January 2019. These Christian leaders lamented the current context saying,

“Forty years ago, the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel were signed and 25 years ago, the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) were signed. For many, these two events offered hope of movement towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Israelis, Palestinians, and other neighboring countries. While we recognize these anniversaries, the current situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories for most of the inhabitants is one of shattered hopes.”

The leaders note detrimental shifts in U.S. positions on Israeli settlements, Jerusalem and Palestinian refugees. They further outline U.S. government measures taken against Palestinians, including cuts to funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and to other Palestinian aid. They state,

“While President Trump’s administration is not the first to show its favoritism of Israelis over Palestinians, we are deeply troubled by its attempt to pursue a sweeping and coordinated set of policies designed to punish Palestinians and take away their human rights, dignity and hope. By promoting these policies, the Trump administration makes it harder for peace to be realized and increases the chance that there will be new violence.”

The statement includes a call to people of faith to support human rights for Palestinians and Israelis, and urges the Trump administration to restore humanitarian aid to Palestinians and “to pursue engagement in honest, credible, and serious efforts with Palestinians, Israelis, regional parties, and the international community, to seek a just resolution to the conflict.”

Unfortunately, included in the first piece of legislation passed by the U.S. Senate in 2019, was the Combating BDS Act (CBA).

The CBA supports a range of laws that have been passed in U.S. states aimed at suppressing the supporters of the grassroots boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign for Palestinian rights. The CBA and the various state laws have



been condemned by civil liberties groups, including the ACLU, as an infringement on the First Amendment right to freedom of speech. Many churches and other faith groups that have adopted boycotts, divestment and/or ethical investment screens to avoid being complicit in the suffering of Palestinians are also speaking out against these unjust laws.

The Stated Clerk of the PC(USA) General Assembly spoke out when this legislation passed,

“It’s unfortunate that one of the first things the Senate has done following the government shutdown is pass a law that threatens the constitutionally-protected right of Americans to engage in boycotts in support of human-rights causes ... A growing number of churches and other faith groups, including the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), have endorsed time-honored tools like boycotts to avoid profiting from injustice. In passing the [Combating BDS Act], the Senate is condoning attempts by politicians at the state level to suppress our efforts to be true to our faith and avoid being complicit in the suffering of others. This legislation may prompt resistance, including civil disobedience, from the faith community, as well as numerous lawsuits.”

The legislation will now head to the House of Representatives. At the current time, it seems unlikely to pass in the House, but it is important to continue to speak out against this unjust legislation and for a more just approach to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.



Please join us!

2019 Advocacy Training Weekend

April 5–8 in Washington, D.C.

In 2019, we gather at a time in which people of faith and conscience are again called to stand in the prophetic stream of those who have come before us, those who were not afraid to stir up **#GoodTrouble** for the sake of God’s kingdom.

Join us April 5, for Compassion Peace and Justice Training Day at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. Gather with your fellow Presbyterians as we look at how our church and our partners are working to organize for change. In plenaries and workshops, we will look at the Church as movement,

as well as at ways to build movements for change. Keynote speakers will be the Rev. Jimmie Hawkins, Director of the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness, and David LaMotte, award-winning songwriter, activist, speaker and author.

Over 20 workshops will be offered including:

- **Advocating for U.S. Welcome: *Monitoring, Accompanying and Advocating for humane border and asylum policies***
- **Presbyterians and the Poor People’s Campaign**
- **Must we still do nothing? *Christians challenging the***

military-industrial complex

- **Let’s Talk Faith and Climate: *Guidance for Faith Leaders***
- **Making Change in the 21st Century: *Emerging approaches, challenges and effectiveness in movement-building, and the church’s role***

After Compassion, Peace & Justice Training Day, join the ecumenical community for **Ecumenical Advocacy Days**, April 5-8. The weekend culminates in “Lobby Day” on Monday, April 8, when we raise our voices in the halls of power on Capitol Hill.

‘Troubling the Waters’ for the Healing of the World

Get to know OPW!

The Office of Public Witness has a video that introduces the office to all who are not familiar with it. Members of the staff — the director and the representatives for international and domestic issues — provide information on the work of the office. The four-minute video can be shown to inform Presbyterians about the justice ministry of the PC(USA) in the nation’s capital. Watch or download at bit.ly/pcusaopw.





The Work of PC(USA) Public Witness in 2019

Reformed Theology teaches that, because a sovereign God is at work in the world, the church and christian citizens should be concerned about public policy. The Office of Public Witness (OPW) is the public policy, advocacy, and information office of the PC(USA). We function as the voice of General Assembly in Washington, DC, and elsewhere. It is the OPW's function to represent the church and equip its members to do advocacy based on the public witness of the General Assembly. Each year, we review the social witness policy from the General Assembly, overlaid by the most pressing issues of the day. This practice results in the OPW's annual priorities. The OPW's 2019 Issue Priorities are:

Domestic Priorities

• Address systemic racism

The OPW will seek to dismantle public policies that have institutionalized white supremacy and to promote a vision that eliminates systemic racism. This aim pervades the rest of our domestic policy work, informing OPW advocacy on poverty and economic injustice, voting rights restoration, immigration, environmental racism, drug policy reform, and health care disparities.

• Keep the government open to serve the common good

In recent years, the President and Congress have resorted to government shutdowns in moments of political disagreement, using workers across the public and private sectors as bargaining chips. Shutdowns cause real suffering to people and the environment. The federal government

should defend the common good and serve the people. People's lives are not a bargaining chip. Politicians must stop closing the government to create political leverage.

• Restore voting rights and common-sense government reform

The PC(USA) endorses full restoration of the Voting Rights Act. Moreover, the OPW will support measures that reduce barriers to voting, increase voter participation, ensure equality and fairness in elections, enforce accountability and transparency in elections, reform the campaign finance system and "renew our democracy," such as primary reform and electoral college reform.

• Improve jobs, reduce poverty and defend the social safety net from erosion

The PC(USA) supports measures that make headway against systemic and cyclical poverty, including increased wages, paid sick and parental leave, child care support, and equal pay. The OPW will also continue to defend the social safety net, which reduces the hardship

of poverty, providing support and sustenance to those in need.

• Support compassionate, comprehensive immigration reform

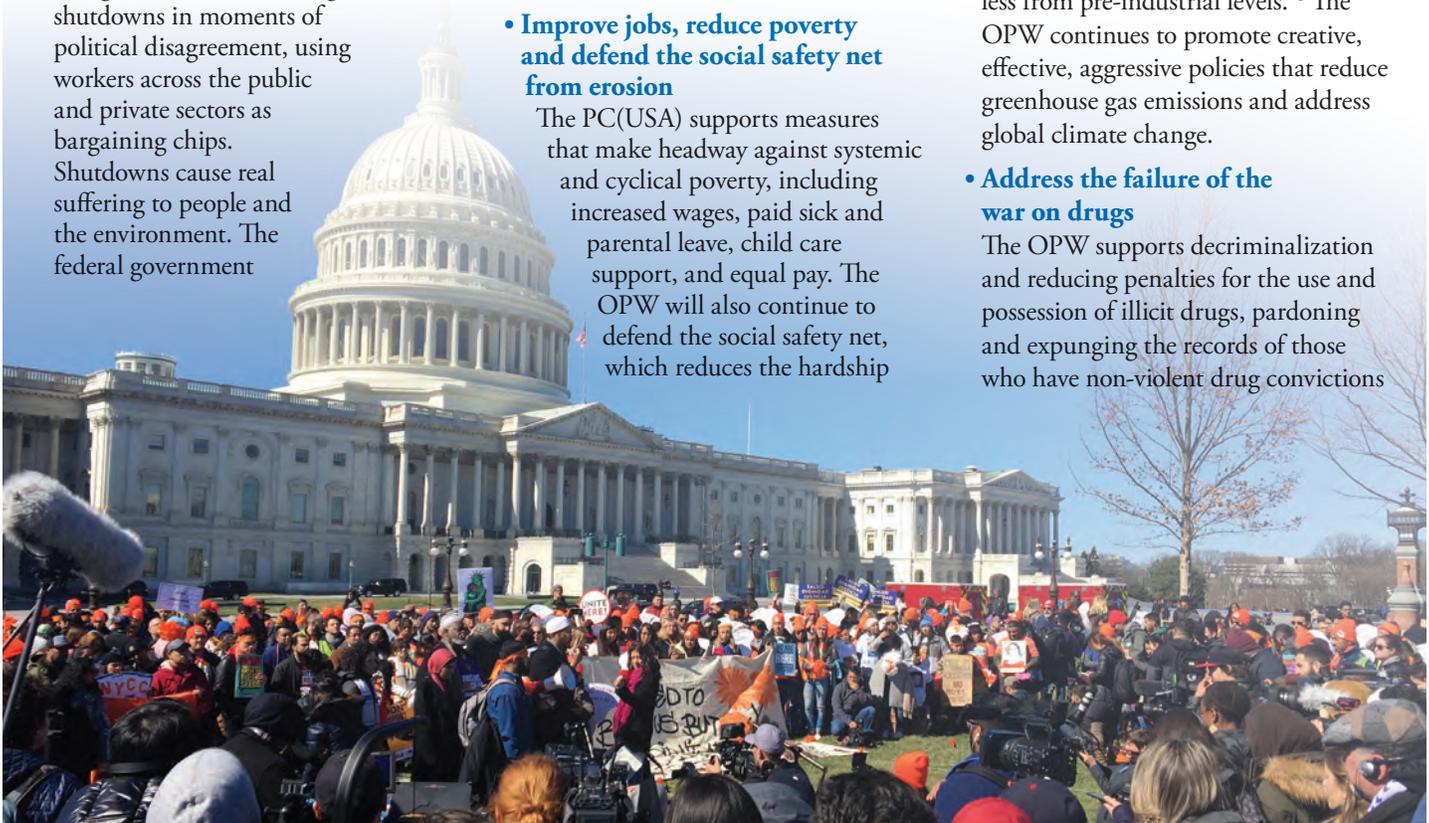
The OPW works to enact policies that reduce barriers to migration, keep families together, ensure safe shelter, provide a pathway to citizenship for DREAMers and enable a safer, more humane immigration system.

• Promote decisive, effective solutions to climate change

"The PC(USA) supports comprehensive, mandatory, and aggressive emission reductions that aim to limit the increase in Earth's temperature to 2 degrees Celsius or less from pre-industrial levels."¹ The OPW continues to promote creative, effective, aggressive policies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address global climate change.

• Address the failure of the war on drugs

The OPW supports decriminalization and reducing penalties for the use and possession of illicit drugs, pardoning and expunging the records of those who have non-violent drug convictions





and shifting our nation’s drug policy from outright prohibition toward compassionate health treatment and science-based regulation.

• **Advocate health care for all**

The PC(USA) General Assembly “endorse[d] in principle the provision of single-payer universal health care reform in which health care services are privately provided and publicly financed.”² The OPW advocates for universal health care coverage for all people, in addition to supporting Medicaid expansion, improvement of the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and other programs that promote health and wellness.



International Priorities

With the withdrawal from the INF treaty and Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran, the current administration has continued to pursue an “America First” policy that increases the threat of war as well as nuclear proliferation. We remain committed to international nuclear treaties and will continue to advocate for the U.S. to play a positive role in the community of nations.

• **Promote diplomatic solutions to the conflicts in Nicaragua and Yemen**

The Administration continues to support the war in Yemen, which has caused the largest humanitarian disaster in the world. The OPW advocates ending U.S. involvement in the Saudi-UAE war in Yemen and will remain vigilant in pressing for additional humanitarian aid to those who are most affected.

• **Support a just resolution to the conflict in Israel/Palestine**

The administration’s one-sided policies toward Israel/Palestine — cuts in aid to UNRWA, the move of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem and the lack of condemnation of illegal Israeli settlements — has completely

alienated the Palestinian population and relinquished the United States’ role as an arbiter for peace. The PC(USA) remains committed to a just resolution to the conflict, as well as a diplomatic resolution to the other wars raging in the region.

• **Lift up Human Rights and Conflict Resolution in South Sudan, Sudan, Cameroon and Congo**

The OPW continues to have serious concerns about human rights conditions in South Sudan, Sudan, Cameroon, DR Congo and other countries where human rights abuses are common. We continue to work for peace and justice in these countries and around the globe.

• **Defend the Defenders: Speak out for endangered human rights defenders across the globe**

Threats are increasing against people around the world who risk their lives to improve the lives of others. Violence and violent conflict are now the leading causes of displacement worldwide, driving 80 percent of humanitarian need and a major cause of human rights violations, according to the World Bank. The OPW is asking Congress to support the Global Fragility Act and S. Res. 80, which will create a Human

Rights Commission in the Senate.

• **Address Global Economic Justice Issues, Corporate Accountability and Fair Trade Policies**

The PC(USA) supports trade and investment policies that put people over profits. The OPW is working to ensure the NAFTA 2.0 deal guarantees access to affordable medicines. OPW advocacy also promotes responsible lending and borrowing, increasing debt relief for poor countries, curbing illicit financial flows and corporate tax avoidance, moving forward an international debt resolution process, pushing reforms in international financial institutions and protecting poor people from predatory financial behavior.

• **Support refugees and work to stop anti-Muslim bigotry**

The OPW continues to work to combat anti-Muslim bigotry. The office works with Shoulder to Shoulder to promote a greater understanding of Muslim Americans in the United States. We also advocate against the current Administration’s Muslim bans and in favor of increasing the number of refugees admitted to the U.S., given the current global crisis of displacement.

Continued on page 7



A Presbyterian Rebellion

In the 116th Congress, we welcome three new Presbyterians to Capitol Hill, for a total of 26 Presbyterian members of Congress. There are 13 in each chamber. They are both Republicans and Democrats.

As these new Presbyterians start their first term, it is worth considering the history of Presbyterianism in the American experiment. Nine presidents have identified as Presbyterian and two more, Abraham Lincoln and Rutherford B. Hayes, worshiped in Presbyterian churches. The earliest Presbyterian president was Andrew Jackson, but the influence of Presbyterianism in American politics started long before that.

Presbyterian ministers were some of the first to make public statements supporting the American Revolution. Uniquely among religious groups, Presbyterians were unified and coordinated in their efforts to support the Revolution. The Anglican Bishop Charles Inglis wrote:

“I have it from good authority that the Presbyterian ministers... passed a resolve to support the Continental Congress in all their measure. This, and this only, can account for the uniformity of their conduct, for I do not know one of them ... who did not by preaching and every effort in their power promote all the measures of the [Continental] Congress.”

Indeed, these ministers served as a counterpoint to the Anglican bishops who advocated for allegiance to the king. John Witherspoon, a Presbyterian minister and professor of theology at Princeton, was the only ordained clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence.

The Revolutionary War, which King George himself called “a Presbyterian Rebellion,” turned out to be only the start of political activism for Presbyterians. Presbyterian lobbying efforts helped to codify the separation of church and state in state constitutions, most notably in Virginia. The efforts did not end at the state level; eleven of the 55 delegates at the Constitutional Convention were Presbyterian.

Clearly, American Presbyterians have never been afraid to stand in conflict with power that they perceived to be unjust. Indeed, they have been rather effective in that practice.



A colonial preacher gathers a crowd.

We hope that the 26 Presbyterians currently serving in Congress will continue the tradition of influencing U.S. politics and policies with conscience and good faith. We welcome them to stand with the PC(USA) on ongoing matters of social justice and human rights. Presbyterian political practices have evolved much in the last three centuries, as the church itself is Reformed and always reforming. However, the tradition of American Presbyterians speaking truth to power has its roots in the very foundation of the United States.

Presbyterians in the 116th Congress (2019–20):

- 26 members of Congress (13 Representatives, 13 Senators)
- 9 fewer Presbyterians than in the 115th Congress
- Most represented states: Tennessee (4), Delaware (2), Alabama (2), New York (2), and South Carolina (2)
- Presbyterians make up 13 percent of the U.S. Senate — the most heavily represented Protestant denomination in Senate
- Presbyterians make up 5 percent of Congress

To see a list of all Presbyterian members of Congress, please visit bit.ly/PCUSAOPW.

References:

- Gardiner, Richard, “*The Presbyterian Rebellion: An analysis of the perception that the American Revolution was a Presbyterian war*,” (2005). Dissertations (1962–2010).
- McGill, Alexander T., “*Centennial Historical Discourses Delivered in the City of Philadelphia, June, 1876, by Appointment of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. With the Moderator’s Sermon before the General Assembly of 1876.*”
- “*Faith on the Hill: The Religious Composition of the 116th Congress*,” Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (Jan. 3, 2019) pewforum.org/2019/01/03/faith-on-the-hill-116/.
- Fastnow, Chris, J. Tobin Grant, and Thomas J. Rudolph. 1999. “*Holy Roll Calls: Religious Tradition and Voting Behavior in the U.S. House*,” *Social Science Quarterly* (University of Texas Press) 80 (4): 687–701.



Welcome Christian Brooks!



The Office of Public Witness is pleased to welcome our new Representative for Domestic Issues, Christian Brooks. A St. Louis native, Christian recently graduated from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. As a seminarian, Christian served as President of the Student Association and co-founded a student advocacy group called

Seminarians United for Racial Justice (SURJ), which is committed to giving voice to the concerns of students of color across a broad coalition of allies.

Off campus, Christian served as pastoral intern at Judah Fellowship Church and as a group supervisor for the Manchester Youth Development Center (MYDC), where she served upwards of 60 youth in a neighboring Pittsburgh community. At MYDC, she gained invaluable insight into the causes of the national disparities in educational outcomes between suburban and inner city, at-risk youth. It was at this pivotal moment that Christian heard her demonstrative call to justice advocacy, realizing with determination that policy initiatives are the only adequate responses to the educational system, which is replete with inequities and injustices.

While in seminary, Christian also had the opportunity

to explore what social justice advocacy can look like in the international context. Christian went on a trip to Trinidad and Tobago for the Transatlantic Roundtable on Race and Religion, as well as attended mission trips to Vietnam and Kenya. During her time in Kenya, she encountered the remarkable strength and courage of women of the all-female village of Umoja. Their confidence and determination inform her efforts towards justice. These global experiences undergird her understanding of how properly to use her power and privilege on behalf of others.

“As Jesus demonstrated, advocacy work is about coming alongside marginalized people, joining in unambiguous solidarity with them, creating space for them to tell their own stories and envisioning with them what God’s future intentions for them are, based on God’s faithful promises.”

Most recently, Christian served as the Racial Equity Policy Fellow for Bread for the World Institute, a D.C.-based anti-hunger advocacy organization and PC(USA) partner. This role spotlighted Christian’s professional writing, research and analytical skills, as she regularly wrote and published blogs regarding connections between food security and education. She also co-authored a research paper on racial equity in federal nutrition programs.

Christian holds a Bachelor of Science in Accounting from the University of Pittsburgh, a Master of Divinity from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and a Master of Science in Public Policy and Management from Carnegie Mellon University.

The Work of PC(USA) Public Witness in 2019 *Continued from page 5*

- **Urge passage of legislation to ease and ultimately end the embargo on Cuba**

The PC(USA) supports measures that will open up trade with and travel to Cuba and opposes the current Administration’s moves to roll back previous efforts to open Cuba and improve the lives of Cubans, both in Cuba and the U.S. The OPW also urges the President to continue a bipartisan waiver of Title III of the Helms Burton Act, which, if not waived, would seriously hamper the Cuban economy,

implicate foreign companies and alienate U.S. allies.

- **Advocate de-escalation and resolution of the conflict with North Korea**

The OPW continues to press for additional humanitarian aid for North Korea, an easing of sanctions, repatriation of remains and family reunification. Now in its 69th year, the OPW advocates for a final settlement of the Korean War, as well as continued confidence-building measures to lay the groundwork for peace.



¹ *Power to Change: U.S. Energy Policy and Global Warming*, approved by the 218th General Assembly, (2008)

² *On Supporting Single-Payer Universal Healthcare Reform*, approved by the 218th General Assembly (2008), pp. 1133-1134



Presbyterian Mission
**Office of
Public Witness**

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Office of Public Witness
Compassion, Peace & Justice Ministries
100 Maryland Avenue, NE Suite 410
Washington, DC 20002-5625

WASHINGTON REPORT TO PRESBYTERIANS (ISSN NO. 1093-5436) is published by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness, 100 Maryland Ave. NE, Ste. 410, Washington, DC 20002 (202-543-1126). Periodicals postage paid Washington, DC. Postmaster: Send address changes to Washington Report to Presbyterians, 100 Maryland Ave. NE, Ste. 410, Washington, DC 20002. For subscription information, please contact that address or email ga_washington_office@pcusa.org.

**Periodicals Postage Paid
Washington DC and at
additional offices**

Become our partners in ministry!

We offer two special giving opportunities that directly fund the public witness of the church and the formation and training of young adult leaders. Please designate:

Public Witness: **Internship/Fellowship:**
ECO# 865714 **ECO# 051422**

Please send donations to:

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness
100 Maryland Ave. NE, Ste. 410
Washington, D.C. 20002

**Give online at bit.ly/OPWgive
Or bit.ly/OPWgiveinterns
Or text
PCUSA OPW to 20222 to give \$10**

The Office of Public Witness wants to help you stay informed!



Scan the code to the left,
or visit capwiz.com/pcusa
to sign up for:

- *action alerts*
- *Legislative updates*
- *event notices*
- *Advocacy as Discipleship*

Visit our website at bit.ly/PCUSAOPW.



**Connect with us @PCUSAWashington and
presbyterianmission.org/opw**