

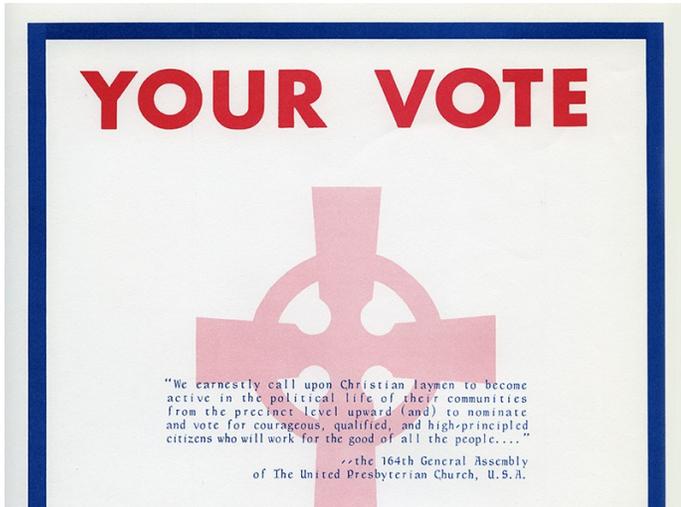


Washington Report to Presbyterians

Summer 2016

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

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



Tools to Reclaim Democracy in an Age of Voter Suppression

Nora Leccese

In this election year, it is more critical than ever to understand the mechanics of our democracy, to reclaim the values and the promise of our electoral process. The right to vote is being restricted in many places, which raises questions for U.S. Reformed Christians about the meaning of our democracy. At

the direction of the General Assembly, we at the Office of Public Witness have compiled resources to aid individual church members and congregations to look at these questions. We hope this discussion guide will prove a helpful template in your process of reflection and action.

We draw on U.S. history, Presbyterian Social Witness Policy, Scripture, and other resources to focus on the gradual and uneven recognition of members of minority groups as full voting members of society. While some of these matters can be challenging or frustrating, we have sought new ways to encourage real dialogue in our congregations and communities about the lasting impacts of segregation, and the ongoing struggles for equity for women, people of color, working people and those unable to work. In a polarized environment, we still affirm the promise of a government “of the people, by the people, and for the people”—for *all the people!*

Respect for the conscience of the individual anchors Presbyterian reverence for the right to vote for everyone. Public service is seen by us as a high calling, and government itself a servant and agent of the people, accountable to all citizens. Politics as public decision-making has an ethical purpose and benefits from laws that prevent corruption by special interests against the common good. Weakening the rights of citizenship for some and unfairly enhancing the power of others distort the practices and legitimacy of democracy. As a Reformed Christian church, understanding God’s covenant to have been opened by Jesus Christ even to “the least of these,” the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) seeks to live out and witness to its values of love and justice in the public sphere.

This critical resource is called “We Shall Not be Moved: Advocacy in the New Age of Voter Suppression” and can be found at officeofpublicwitness.blogspot.com, please share widely with your congregations and communities.



Advocacy Training Weekend 2016

Nearly three hundred Presbyterians came to Washington, DC, on April 15-18 to raise their voice for justice and participate in Advocacy Training Weekend!

Thanks to all who were able to participate and make this weekend a great success!

Presbyterians came together at the historic New York Avenue Presbyterian Church on April 15th for Compassion Peace and Justice Training Day. The purpose of the day was to take a look at how Presbyterians are working to address the suppression of political and economic rights of people of color, immigrants, workers, and the poor in our own country and abroad. The plenaries and workshops examined how decisions that affect the global economy, our day-to-day life, and the well-being of the entire global community are being made in secret with little or no transparency or accountability.



For a full account of the day, check out this story from PC(USA) News Service:

<http://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/4/18/more-200-presbyterians-take-part-cpj-training-day/>

After Compassion Peace and Justice Training Day, Presbyterians joined the ecumenical community for Ecumenical Advocacy Days. Nearly 1000 people of faith gathered for a weekend of prayer, education, networking and advocacy around the realities of racism, class, and power. The weekend culminated with participants visiting their members of Congress to lift their voice for the Voting Rights Act and for Fair Trade rather than Free Trade.

For a full account of the weekend see this story from Ecumenical Advocacy Days:
<http://advocacydays.org/2016/04/20/faith-based-advocates-lift-every-voice-for-voting-rights-just-and-fair-trade-at-ead-2016/>



Save the Date!
Don't miss next
year's conference!
April 21-24, 2017

The Abuses of Payday Lending

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's Payday Lending Rule: What it Means for those living in the Debt Trap

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) is widely expected to soon propose a new national rule that addresses payday and car title lending. If strong enough, the rule has the potential to rein in the worst abuses of these kinds of high-cost loans, which carry triple-digit interest rates.

Payday loans are simply unaffordable; a typical payday borrower making \$35,000 annually does not have enough income to repay their loan and cover other monthly expenses, and subsequently is caught in the payday lending cycle for months at a time. Lenders require the submission of a check dated at the borrower's next payday, giving them direct access to their bank account and the ability to withdraw payment regardless of the consumer's other expenses.

As people of faith we recognize this as a detriment to the building of true community and a deterrent to family welfare. **The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has proposed a new rule that would provide stronger regulations on the payday lending industry, and we encourage all people of faith to submit a comment and lift their voices to ease this injustice.**

Our concerns as servants of the Kingdom of God related to predatory lending practices are deeply biblical and theological. The Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures both address the issues of fair lending practices. Exodus 22:25 is likely the earliest when it focuses the concern in reference to the poor.

If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them. (NRSV)

More information at
www.faithforfairlending.org

2016 ISSUE
PRIORITIES
Speaking Truth to Power in Love

REFORMED THEOLOGY TEACHES THAT BECAUSE
A SOVEREIGN GOD IS AT WORK IN ALL THE WORLD,
THE CHURCH AND CHRISTIAN CITIZENS SHOULD BE
CONCERNED ABOUT PUBLIC POLICY.



We support:

Family-Friendly Policy

The fair and widespread implementation of deportation relief authorized by the Obama administration in November 2014, the end to family detention, and support for local campaigns to stop the detention and deportation of immigrants.

Fair Trade not Free Trade

Stopping the Trans Pacific Partnership, and advocating for a new framework that promotes fair trade not free trade.

Peace in the Middle East

A negotiated settlement for Israel/Palestine where both peoples can live in peace and security, a diplomatic resolution to the Syrian conflict, and an end to the militarization of the region.

Defending Human Rights in Colombia + Central America

Taking Steps to End US Economic Embargo on Cuba

Supporting legislation that would end the travel ban on Cuba and dismantle the economic embargo of Cuba.

Human Rights in Africa

Human rights and a peaceful end to the conflicts in Sudan, South Sudan and the Congo

Humanitarian Aid to Syrian Victims of Conflict

Increased humanitarian aid and increased support for refugees and all victims of the conflict.

A Measured US. Policy on Drones

Passage of legislation to govern the military use of drones and opposing the targeted killing or assassination of suspects these weapons facilitate

Standing with Workers for Labor Justice

Legislation that furnishes livable wages, better working conditions, protection from wage theft, work supports including paid sick and family leave, and the right to bargain collectively with employers

Addressing Money in Politics

Addressing the undue influence of private money in politics, which drowns the voice of the public good in favor of the interests of private greed

Living with Abundance and Reducing Hunger

The Child Nutrition Bill, which needs reauthorization this year and includes funding for the School Breakfast and Lunch programs as well as WIC. We will call for increased access to nutritious food for hungry children, as we deny the fact the one in five children in the wealthiest nation in the world are food insecure

Protecting God's Creation

Strong regulation of greenhouse gases like carbon and methane reducing fossil fuel extraction, production, and transportation, and U.S. investment in the Green Climate Fund, to help the most vulnerable people in the world adapt to climate disruption.

Promoting Economic Justice for All

Stop funding cuts to the program that serve the most vulnerable people. We promote economic justice and equitable distribution of resources as a path to shared prosperity.

Ending Mass Incarceration

Reevaluation of minimum sentencing for non-violent drug offenses and the reduction of over-incarceration of adults and juveniles, a practice that disproportionately affects low-income people and communities of color. We hold that it is wrong for a private company to profit off of the incarceration of a human being and stand against private prisons.

Public Education

Full funding for pre- and after school programs, robust investment in public schools and pathways to higher education

Gun Violence

Assert the need for commonsense gun legislation

A Report Back from the Atlanta Summit

by Catherine

On April 19 and 20th leaders and staff of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) joined representatives of 24 churches and church related organizations from Palestine and the United States for two days of prayer and action for Israel and Palestine. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the ethical urgency for a just peace in Palestine-Israel, to express ecumenical unity in action towards a lasting political solution to the Israeli occupation, and to strengthen the Christian presence in the Holy Land.

In a statement released by the group the leaders stated, "Christian leaders have come together for two days of prayer and open dialogue in a spirit of theological and ethical urgency for a just peace, and to express ecumenical unity in action towards a lasting political solution to the occupation in the Holy Land."

The current situation on the ground and efforts for a comprehensive peace were high on the agenda. In his

statement to the group, His Beatitude Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, called on the churches to be stronger proponents for peace. He told the group, "In light of the continuing tragedy and injustice being perpetrated against the Palestinians, and the continuing failure of the US government to find a solution, you should become stronger advocates. One of our major challenges is standing alongside all those trying to find a solution to issues that spark violence, conflict and war, like the building of new settlements. Church leaders must have the courage to speak up for justice and freedom, for Jews and Arabs alike."

The Rev. John Dorhauer, general minister and president of the United Church of Christ, stated that, "The United Church of Christ will remain a friend and ally with our partners and the people of Palestine. While we recognize the right of the State of Israel to exist within secure and recognized borders, we will nonetheless continue to challenge that government to end its illegal occupation of Palestinian territories, and continue to assert Palestinian rights to self-determination in a state of their own."



t of American and Palestinian Churches Catherine Gordon

Members of the Palestinian Christian community presented on the current challenges facing the Christians in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the broader West Bank. Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, President of the Diyar Consortium, gave an overview of the struggles of Christians in the Holy Land and the effects of the Israeli military occupation. Case studies of Jerusalem and Bethlehem were presented by Mr. Yusef Daher, Executive Secretary of the Jerusalem Inter-Church Center and Ms. Vera Baboun, Mayor of Bethlehem.

In the final session former President Jimmy Carter joined the group. He told the church leaders that in order to promote peace, "We need very strong ties with Palestinian Christians and Muslims, and with churches in the United States." The Carter Center has full-time offices in East Jerusalem, Ramallah and in the Gaza strip. Because of the Center's work, Carter was awarded the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize.

After the two days of discussions, the participants endorsed a statement that outlined ways in which the churches can develop a more effective advocacy effort in the United States to keep alive the prospects of a negotiated solution and to cease the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. Among the suggested actions: fact finding trips to the Palestinian territories for clergy, lay leaders and seminarians as well as better coordination of the advocacy efforts of churches in both regions.

President Carter said that he fully agreed with the statement and hoped it would have some effect. However, Carter said, "It will not have any effect unless the churches and members here work on them jointly, enthusiastically and aggressively."

Participants from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) included Hunter Farrell, Director of World Mission, Catherine Gordon, Representative for International Issues at the Office of Public Witness, and Rev. Fahed

Abu-Akel, former moderator of the PC(USA).

Full text of the statement can be found here: <http://nationalcouncilof-churches.us/pursuing-peace-and-strengthening-presence/>



A Chance at Repair: Advocacy Efforts for the Green Climate Fund *by Mara Sawdy (YAV)*



Over the past nine months, the Office of Public Witness has accelerated our support and advocacy for a global equity tool known as the Green Climate Fund. The Green Climate Fund is an international fund that was established to help countries in the Global South build resilience to the impacts of climate change and enhance the ability of other countries to limit or reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. The countries contributing money to the fund have economies built on fossil fuels, and their economic growth has been a primary driver of global

warming. The money from the fund is distributed to industrializing nations that will bear disproportionate impact from climate disasters they are not responsible for creating.

The United States has pledged 3 billion dollars to the Green Climate Fund by the year 2020, with one installment of 500 million paid this past March. For fiscal year 2016-2017, the President's proposed budget includes a payment of 750 million in order to stay on target with reaching 3 billion dollars by the year 2020. President Obama made this pledge at the Paris Climate Talks, where the United States was one of 195 countries to sign the Paris Climate Deal, committing to efforts to hold the increase in the global average temperature to below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Investing in the Green Climate Fund plays an essential role in pursuing this effort.

In April, the members of the Washington Interreligious Staff Committee made a push to meet with Senate offices to discuss the Green Climate Fund. Opposition has risen in the Senate in the form of letters from Senator Barrasso of Wyoming. The first letter from Senator Barrasso, took issue with President Obama's process of pledging funds without the consent of Congress, and stated that Congress will not be forthcoming with the funds in the future without a vote. The second letter, also from Senator Barrasso, was written in March of this year and asked that no funds be appropriated for the Green Climate Fund for fiscal year 2017.

The first Senate meeting was with Senator Blunt's (MO) office staff. Senator Blunt had signed the first letter by Senator Barrasso stating that Congress will not be forthcoming with money for the Green Climate Fund without a vote, but did not sign the second letter that asked to block funding to the Green Climate Fund. While meeting with the office, the staffer reiterated that the Senator is not against the Green Climate Fund itself; Senator Blunt just greatly emphasized that he believes funding for international deals needs to be approved by Congress. The same sentiment came out of Senator Alexander's (TN) office.

While Congress did not explicitly authorize funding for the Green Climate Fund, it is not unusual for the State to fund initiatives similar to the Green Climate Fund without an authorization first, such as Power Africa. In 2013, President Obama outlined a Power Africa Initiative, which aimed to give first-time access to electricity for 50 million people by the year 2020. The United States House of Representatives then passed the Electrify Africa Act this past year to provide a framework for a major public-private partnership between the United States and sub-Saharan African countries to help millions gain access to electricity.

The Green Climate Fund helps the most vulnerable countries adapt to the impacts of climate change and also puts money towards mitigating the effects of climate change through low-carbon development pathways. As a major emitter and contributor to climate change, the US has a responsibility to aid other countries in adapting to our climate crisis. Climate change presents a threat to vulnerable populations living in poverty around the globe. As people of faith, we have a moral obligation to consider the needs of others and rise to the challenge of caring for them. In order for us to remain on track with our payments and pledge, we must also endorse the 750 million dollars in funding for this upcoming year. We are intimately tied to those that have come before us and to those that will come after. As tenants of this earth, we have a responsibility to care for Creation in a way that will ensure a hospitable home for the next generation of God's children.

Welcome the 2016 OPW Summer Fellows!

We are preparing to welcome our 2016 Fall Fellows. They need your help! Each fellow receives a stipend to help defray the cost of living expenses, which are considerable in Washington, DC. Your gift could make the difference between a vocational dream and a lived reality. Please give generously to support our Interns and Fall Fellows.

**Give online at
[bit.ly/
OPWgiveinterns](http://bit.ly/OPWgiveinterns)**

Shannon Schmidt

Shannon is a Woman of Vision Scholar and rising senior at Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida, where she is working toward degrees in History and English with the intention of pursuing graduate studies on the intersection of policy and religion. She has just returned from a semester abroad at the University of Wuerzburg in Germany, where she had the opportunity to engage in an internationally-diverse dialogue on sociopolitical issues ranging from the refugee crisis to justice in the developing world. For the past two summers, Shannon has coordinated and led a youth service group at her home church, the United Methodist Church of Oakhurst, New Jersey. In St. Augustine, Shannon attends Memorial Presbyterian Church, the oldest Presbyterian Church in the state of Florida. Shannon has spent her undergraduate career performing on multiple platforms of campus leadership at Flagler College, ranging from Student Government Vice Presidency to the assistance of faculty members on their historical research. At present, she is founding her college's first-ever Interfaith Council, the mission of which is to promote interfaith dialogue and solidarity at Flagler. Subsequent to her fellowship with the Office of Public Witness, Shannon will be competing with her college's nationally-competitive Mock Trial team, working to grow her interfaith council, and soaking in that Floridian sunshine while she still can. In her spare time, Shannon goes on feminist rants and watches Seinfeld reruns.



Calista Malone

Calista Malone, or Callie, is student at Queens University of Charlotte, NC majoring in Creative Writing and English Literature. Malone currently writes on politics and culture for the Odyssey, a weekly publication at her university. She was Public Relations Vice President for her chapter of Kappa Delta sorority and is a member of First Presbyterian Church of Quincy, FL. She was employed by Montreat Youth Conferences for two summers where she was able to grow in a faith community and learn more about herself and God's call for her. Malone seeks to expand her body of published work by finishing her current collection of short stories, would like to find opportunities to write about social justice issues.

For more information on Service Learning Opportunities at the Office of Public Witness, or to learn how to apply, please visit www.pcusa.org/washington/internship or email



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