



Washington Report to Presbyterians

Winter 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



A Panel from EAD 2014

Lift Your Voice in Prophetic Witness at EAD 2016

by Catherine Gordon

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness invites you to participate in Compassion Peace and Justice Training Day and Ecumenical Advocacy Days April 15-18 2016

In our neighborhoods and around the world, social, economic, corporate, and political powers are working to reduce citizens' access to decision-making. These practices severely hamper the ability of all citizens to determine the best policies for our communities and nations. As Christians, God calls us to lift up all voices so that we the people might regain influence in the policies that affect our nation and our world. Come to Advocacy Training Weekend April 15-18 and lift up your voice for transparent and participatory government at home and abroad.

Every year, hundreds of Presbyterians come to advocate for policies that reflect the Biblical and social justice values we cherish. Over the years, we have lifted up issues of concern around hunger, human security, gender issues, the environment, and immigration. In the past, Presbyterians have led our ecumenical partners in attendance at EAD and we hope to do so again this April. Last year, we focused on ending mass incarceration and this year we will look at racism, class and power.

At Compassion Peace and Justice Training Day (CPJ), we will 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. We will examine how decisions that affect the global economy, our day-to-day life, and the wellbeing of the entire global community are being made in secret with little or no transparency or accountability.

In the opening plenary of CPJ Training Day we will hear from our partners who are directly impacted by the issues of racism, class, and power. Rev. Mark Lomax will be our keynote speaker and Conrado Olivera from the Peru Joining Hands Network will speak on corporate power and the effects of trade agreements. We will also have speakers from the United Workers, Black Lives Matter, and Dreamers movements. In the workshops we will delve more deeply into the

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*Register now at advocacydays.org
Early Bird Registration extended until March 1!*

Office of Public Witness Director Applauds President Obama's Executive Order to Curb Gun Violence

The scriptures remind us of God's desire for abundant living: "The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10). Abundant living is difficult to achieve in a society where headlines are driven by the slogan "If it bleeds, it leads." In 2010, the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved a policy statement calling for a reduction in gun violence entitled "[Gun Violence and Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call](#)". Since then, the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness has vigorously advocated for Congress to act. But, consistently, in congressional office after congressional office we have been met with statements about the American people's opposition to any type of gun legislation. Ironically, when I visit many of these same congressional districts, constituents consistently ask, "What is your office doing about gun violence?" I concluded long ago that inaction on this issue is representative of a lack of courage.

With his announcement, President Obama demonstrated that abundant living is grounded in a feeling of being safe and secure and that in order to live abundantly we must have the courage to implement its requirements. The President signed an executive order implementing common sense gun laws.

His executive order includes:

- Keeping guns out of the wrong hands by requiring that anyone in the business of selling firearms have a license and run background checks on all purchasers of weapons (this includes online purchases)
- Making background checks more efficient and bringing an outdated background check system into the 21st century
- Getting more Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms personnel trained, hired, and equipped to investigate and assist with reducing gun violence
- Offering additional assistance for people with mental illness so that they can get the help that they need. (The vast majority gun deaths are a result of suicide.)
- Boosting new technology (smart technology) to improve gun safety



President Obama's executive actions will likely be challenged in the courts. But, I am deeply impressed with his courage to stand up for the requirements of abundant living, even at the risk of being misunderstood or maligned. I pray that we will witness the same courage in state and local communities. May this bring new energy to constituents who are willing to speak truth in love to power and continue to press for laws to reduce gun violence in the United States - 50,000 gun violence incidents and 312 mass killings in 2015 alone.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness will continue its support of measures to reduce gun violence in the United States. More importantly, we will continue to lift up the prophetic vision of witnessing peace abound - a day when men, women, boys and girls will engage in abundant living and not kill one another anymore.

A Photo Essay from the Philippines

Reverend Nelson leads workshops at Silliman University Church in Dumaguete, Negros Oriental, Philippines.



Reverend Nelson recently returned from the Mission Personnel Regional Gathering in the Philippines entitled *“Toward 200 Years of PC(USA) Global Mission: Shapes, Contours and Implications of Mission in Asia.”* He led mission co-workers in worship and conversation about the life of the Church.

An Update on the Fate of the Trans Pacific Partnership

“Those who call today for trade and investment free of controls seek a world that is a far cry from the biblical vision of community that provides hope for a just society encompassing the whole inhabited earth. A global economy of biblical dimensions would be a community of shared values and commitments that transcend geographic, political, ethnic, and cultural divisions...

The best hope is that trade functions as a means of grace to create dignified work that support people’s lives, puts food on the table, and undergirds the creation of a just society. The moral test is whether our increasingly globalizing economies support the human enterprise and the larger creation. If trade further impoverishes segments of the world’s population, its purpose is distorted and such injustice calls for reshaping global structures that cause economic oppression and creates wealth for only a few at the expense of the many. Such a world is a parody of the biblical vision for just community.”

217th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (2006)

Historically, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has opposed the current trade model that put the rights of corporations above the rights of citizens and governments to determine policy. One major example of this is in Peru. A provision of free trade agreements called the State-Investor clause has left developing countries at a significant disadvantage. This clause grants corporations the right to sue a host country for activities or regulation that result in loss of profit for the corporation, considering it a breach of the agreement.

The Peruvian government revoked an operating license for a smelter run by Renco Group, Inc. in La Oroya, one of the most polluted towns on the planet where 97% of children grow up with dangerous levels of lead in their blood. However, under the Peru Free Trade Agreement, the company was able to file an \$800 million claim against the Peruvian government for interfering with their ability to make profit. In partnership with the Peru Joining Hands Network, the Presbyterian Church has for many years accompanied and advocated on behalf of the citizens of La Oroya and many others who find themselves victims of unjust trade agreements.

Now we are facing another even larger trade agreement: the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) which will be voted on by Congress this year. The TPP is a binding pact that poses significant threats to jobs and wages, the environment, food safety, public health, access to medicines, human rights and democracy around the world. If enacted, the TPP would set rules governing approximately 40% of the global economy, and includes a “docking” mechanism through which not only Pacific Rim nations, but any country in the world, could join over time.

The absence of provisions within the TPP to protect workers, the environment, and the human rights of citizens across the globe is the direct result of a secretive negotiating process in which hundreds of corporate advisors had privileged access to negotiating texts, while the public was barred from even reviewing what was being proposed in its name.

The TPP can take effect only if the U.S. Congress approves it, and its fate in Congress is uncertain at best. [Fast Track](#) trade authority only passed through Congress by the narrowest of margins after a series of legislative maneuvers, with reluctant support from some key swing members contingent upon certain provisions being in the final TPP. The released text shows these concerns have been largely ignored.

And [an unprecedented array of organizations](#) have joined together in a powerful and diverse coalition to stop the TPP. Groups united on this extend well beyond labor unions and include consumer, Internet freedom, senior, health, food safety, environmental, human rights, faith, LGBTQ, student and civil rights organizations. Opposition to the TPP is growing at home and in many of the other countries involved.

If we do not speak up in this season, the moral failure is ours. We cannot wait until this agreement has already been implemented to see how it will impact lives. The moral test of this globalizing economy is how it treats living, breathing people and how well it tends the health of creation. Please contact your members of congress today and tell them to say NO to the TPP!

Go to the link below to send a message today.

<http://capwiz.com/pcusa/issues/alert/?alertid=68852626>



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Reverend Nelson Responds to the 2016 State of the Union

The Office of Public Witness welcomed President Obama's call to renew our civic responsibilities and live into the ideal of a government created "of the people" in his eighth and final State of The Union address. The President quoted President Lincoln when he reminded us not to adhere to the "dogmas of the quiet past" but instead to "think...and act anew." We find the same sentiment reflected in Scripture; Romans 12:2 reminds us not to "be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds." Our President urged us to turn away from the reactionary spirit, the angriest voice, and the vitriol that is in many cases the status quo, and aspire to create a country where politics is a high calling, where politicians breed not greed and petty partisanship but integrity and trust. We encourage Presbyterians around the country to act bravely, to re-engage in civic life in this election year, and remind you that your Office of Public Witness is available for resource and council on that journey.

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God— what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Romans 12:2 NRSV

In his speech, the President once again called attention to the plague of corporate money in politics, "I believe we have to reduce the influence of money in our politics, so that a handful of families and hidden interests can't bankroll our elections." In 2012, the PC(USA) General Assembly voted "...to support legislation, ballot initiatives, constitutional amendments and other means to prevent unlimited money from corporations, unions, individuals and other entities from distorting electoral campaigns and to restore legal boundaries between business corporations and human persons endowed with free speech and other constitutional rights." We pray that the President's words will help build the political will necessary to stem the flow of corporate money into our democracy. Without a government by and for the people, we cannot hope to achieve justice with common sense gun laws, mend our broken prison system, or care for our earth, God's creation.

Senate Workers Win Raise! But Struggle Continues



In December, Senate and other federal contract workers got a hard-won raise just in time to bring Christmas cheer. The Office of Public Witness stood in solidarity with these workers as they went on strike seven times over the past year to highlight their struggles to survive on poverty wages. While we celebrate this victory, we know that some federal contract workers were not included in this raise, and we are committed to see the campaign to victory; nothing less than \$15 an hour and a union.

Lift Your Voice in Prophetic Witness continued...

root causes of many of these issues and examine who is profiting from the status quo. Every workshop will discuss ways Presbyterians can take action on these issues.

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After CPJ Training Day, participants can join the ecumenical community for Ecumenical Advocacy Days, beginning the evening of Friday April 15th and culminating with a lobby day on Monday April 18th. Rev. William Barber, Marian Wright Edelman, and Sister Simone Campbell are confirmed speakers as well as a diverse array of excellent workshop leaders.



Save The Date

Ecumenical Advocacy Days and
Compassion Peace and Justice Training Day 2016
“Lift Every Voice! Racism, Class and Power”

April 15-18, 2016
Washington, DC

Young Adult Service Learning

The Office of Public Witness believes that the formation of servant leaders and advocates is vital to the public policy ministry and witness of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Our fundraising efforts for service learning are ongoing. YAV Placements contribute a portion of Volunteers' living expenses to the Presbytery. In addition, each Summer Fellow receives a modest stipend to help defray the cost of living expenses, which are considerable in DC. We need your help to continue offering these opportunities! Your gift could make the difference between a vocational dream and a lived reality. Please give generously to support our YAVs, Interns, and Summer Fellows.

Give online at bit.ly/OPWgiveinterns



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