

On Strengthening the Peacemaking Program

(GA – Item 13-11)

219th General Assembly Action: Approve as Amended with Comments

Comments: The Committee urges the 219th General Assembly to allocate the costs associated with item 13-11 equally between the G.A.M.C. and per capita budgets. The Committee further recommends that 3g from 13-01; 2g from 13-02; 2g from 13-03; and 3g from 13-09 be answered by the action on 13-11.

Lifting the example of Jesus as the model of our behavior and beliefs in love and peacemaking exemplified in Luke 6: 27–38 as our policy for Presbyterians now and in the future, the 219th General Assembly (2010) directs the General Assembly Mission Council, through the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) and the Peacemaking Program, to appoint a five-person steering team, at least one of whom shall be a college student or other young adult, to work with ACSWP and Peacemaking Program representatives to design and implement a broadly participatory four-year process to do the following:

1. Seek clarity as to God’s call to the church to embrace nonviolence as its fundamental response to the challenges of violence, terror, and war;

2. Identify, explore, and nurture new approaches to active peacemaking and nonviolence, reporting to the 221st General Assembly (2014) with recommendations for policy and action. This process shall include the following elements:

a. Build upon “Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling” (1980), “Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age” (1988), “Just Peacemaking and the Call for Intervention for Humanitarian Rescue” (1998), and other policies related to just war, just peacemaking, and nonviolent principles and issues of peace and justice approved by past General Assemblies; culminating in updated policies on nonviolence and peacemaking.

b. The steering team is encouraged to consult with ministries of the General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC), particularly Compassion, Peace and Justice, World Mission, and Presbyterian Women; Office of the General Assembly; college chaplains and campus ministers; middle governing body staff; and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship in the design and implementation of the proposed policies and process.

c. The steering team is encouraged to consult with national and international ecumenical and interfaith partners and draw on the experience and learnings from the International Ecumenical Peacemaking Convocation of the World Council of Churches (2011), and other initiatives of the broader Christian and interfaith community.

d. The process shall help Presbyterians on all levels of the church to recognize and focus upon updated policies and actions that

(1) consider the new realities, challenges, and opportunities for working for peace and seeking justice, including the dangers currently posed by weapons of mass destruction, globalization, pluralism, the implications of U.S. foreign policy (including two current wars), impact of climate change, and an increasing competition for natural resources by developing nations as they affect the worldwide mission of the church and promotion of peacemaking;

(2) explore new thinking on nonviolence, reconciliation (including the role of truth-telling, forgiveness, confession, and public apology), human rights, security strategies, genocide and terrorism prevention, economic conversion, development, and the violence of poverty;

(3) explore new models for engaging in active peacemaking and working for justice, including new technology for advocacy and organizing, communication and decision-making, accompaniment, conflict-resolution, artistic expressions, church-based community organizing, and nonviolent direct action;

(4) respond to and prevent violence on the local level (e.g., action and advocacy concerning gang violence, gun violence, and family violence), the national level (e.g., action and advocacy on budget priorities, and decisions about investments in dependent industries), and the international level (e.g., action and advocacy on issues of war and peace) through prayer, direct action, and advocacy; and

(5) address sexism, racism, and other patterns of oppression as tasks of peacemaking and justice seeking.

e. The steering team shall

(1) consider at least two gatherings of individuals who are engaged in action and reflection on peacemaking and justice seeking, including faculty and students from Presbyterian colleges, universities, and seminaries (“... to engage students in active peacemaking and to share the wisdom of faculty among our church-related educational institutions”), activists, individuals engaged in nonviolent witness, grassroots persons working for justice and peace, and others engaged in peacemaking in congregations, middle governing bodies, Presbyterian Women, and other Presbyterian-related entities;

(2) invite Presbyterians, individually and corporately, across the church into a time of study and reflection on the root causes of violence and responses to it, and on peace, justice, and ministries of peacemaking and justice—seeking that honor the gospel, the history of the church, and the movement of the Holy Spirit as the church attempts to live out Christ’s command to love one another, even those we call our enemies; and

(3) create new resources or identify existing resources, working ecumenically when appropriate, that will help Presbyterians pray and study Scripture for guidance about how to respond faithfully to Jesus’ call to be peacemakers in this time.

f. The steering team, in consultation with the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy and Presbyterian Peacemaking Program staff, would recruit additional writer(s) or team members as necessary to help create a report with recommendations to bring to the 221st General Assembly (2014).

g. An interim report shall be made to the 220th General Assembly (2012). The interim report to the 220th General Assembly (2012) will include specific recommendations of strategy and policy to invite the broader church into the time of discernment, framing the conversation, naming the best partners, and laying out a process to help our congregations to wrestle with these important ethical questions.

h. The steering team will offer its recommendation for action to the 221st General Assembly (2014), asking for that assembly to receive the report for a two-year period of study before final action in 2016.]

Rationale (original)

Thirty years ago the 192nd General Assembly (1980) issued a call to the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America to give priority to peacemaking and to create a Peacemaking Program. The biblical and theological ethics of *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling* have served the church well. The Peacemaking Program has educated the church with excellent programs, educational materials, international visitors, study tours, and conferences. At this time, however, the mission of this program deserves careful review, both in terms of current challenges to peace and commitment of the church's resources for this witness. Some funds designated for the program in the past have been spent down, and other related education and action programs (such as *Church & Society* magazine) have been ended. The United Nations' Office has also seen its funding reduced, at a time when the needs and opportunities for theologically informed international witness substantially increased.

The introduction to *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling* said that

This request of the General Assembly was a product of its times

- born in part from the United States' defeat in Southeast Asia and the loss of prestige and power in the changing world situation;
- born in part from the unwillingness of the emerging nations to accept the continued domination of the developed nations;
- born in part from the increasing insecurity over the perilous nuclear weapons stalemate in which any miscalculation could annihilate humanity;
- born in part from concern for the hungry and oppressed of the world. (*Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling*, p. 1)

However, the times have changed:

- The United States regained its prestige and new powers prior to 9/11, playing the role of “superpower” and “indispensable nation” in the eyes of many.
- The cold war was concluded.
- New wars have broken out and threaten to break out over disputes about weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) have become a major issue at the United Nations.
- The phenomenon of globalization has been recognized and to many it represents Americanization of the finances of the world. The credit crisis and global recession have weakened the capacity and credibility of the United States' global leadership.
- Religions of the world are now widely recognized to be major influences in wars, peacemaking, and international decision making.
- The rise of Muslim influence and militancy was not considered as a factor in the 1980 policy.

These new factors interrelate to make very timely a review of *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling* and the peacemaking work of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Arms control, expenditures, and threats of war over the non-proliferation questions require work beyond the 1988 policy, *Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age*. There is now fear that terrorists are seeking weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capacity. The U.S. and its supporters apply economic sanctions to countries suspected of developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and consider war against certain countries obtaining weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capacity. The issue of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capacity was one of the motivating factors for the second war in Iraq.

Peacemaking work deserves the counsel and expertise of the church to address these issues. This need could be met by a committee of Presbyterian experts in the fields of disarmament, social ethics, weapons, war and peace studies, the United Nations, development, and human rights. These experts should be drawn from previous task forces, resolution teams, or outstanding peace leaders in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who have in-depth understanding of both church and international relations. Six persons consulting quarterly should be sufficient. This same pool of persons, including those with military experience, would provide nominees for the review task force and college and seminary consultations.

Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling recommended actions vis-à-vis higher education, and new priorities and funding for this work can be based on a study of opportunities of peacemaking in these institutions. The whole panoply of tasks around peacemaking work deserves review if a prudent selection of work to be energized and funded is to be considered. This is particularly true for coordinating peacemaking work in seminaries and colleges of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). There is much energy and expertise in the Presbyterian higher education world that the church should encourage and relate to its peacemaking work. Not only is peacemaking part of our evangelism on college campuses, new forms of joint work can be cost-effective with cyber networking technology.

Since 1946, General Assemblies have called for the negotiated abolition of nuclear weapons, based on the immorality of relying upon weapons of mass destruction (WMD) for security. *Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age* (1988) warned against the numbing acquiescence to nuclear weapons. The church is in danger of learning to live with weapons of mass destruction (WMD) until they are used.

Energy and commitment inspired by Jesus Christ's peacemaking needs to be ignited in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to face new issues not discussed in 1980.

Rationale (ACSWP)

Summary of overtures

Item 13-11 is one of a number of overtures, or sections of overtures—Item 13-01 (section 3g), Item 13-02 (section 2g), Item 13-03 (section 3g), Item 13-06, Item 13-07, and Item 13-09 (section 3g)—that seek to strengthen the peace witness and peacemaking efforts of Presbyterians and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Together these overtures reflect the role of General Assembly commissioners in providing vision and guiding policy for the short- and long-term ministries of the church at all levels. All build on existing policy and call the church to explore new ways of thinking about peacemaking and new ways of engaging in ministries seeking peace and pursuing justice.

The items considered all reflect the current policy of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), of which we cite two statements. The 192th General Assembly of the UPCUSA (1980) accepted the report, *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling*, as the church's guiding policy on issues of war, violence, and injustice. It stated unequivocally:

1. *The church is faithful to Christ when it is engaged in peacemaking....* (Minutes, 1980, Part I, p. 202).

3. *The church bears witness to Christ when it nourishes the moral life of the nation for the sake of peace in our world.* The church's faithful obedience to its calling means active participation in the formation of the values and beliefs of our society... By God's grace we are members of a world community and can bring our global insights and peacemaking to our particular settings. By God's grace we are freed to work with all people who strive for peace and justice and to serve as signposts for God's love in our broken world. To deny our calling is a disservice to the church and the world.... (*Minutes*, 1980, Part I, p. 203)

In 1988, the 200th General Assembly (1988) adopted a major policy statement entitled *Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age*. The statement followed an inquiry into the basic question of the morality of war, with the added dilemma of whether the nature of war—given nuclear weapons—had been qualitatively changed. The policy approved by the General Assembly determined that nuclear war could not be justified on traditional “just war” grounds, and analyzed non-violent conscientious objection by individuals and the Christian community.

Reviewing the specific overtures, Item 13-11 is a comprehensive overture that recommends authorizing a task force with expertise to review the foundational 1980 policy, *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling*, with the intent of updating the engagement of Presbyterians in peacemaking, and to prepare a shorter resolution on recent concerns not addressed by the assembly: ongoing dangers of WMD (weapons of mass destruction), the effects of on-going Iraq and Afghan wars, and more. It calls for the creation of a new advisory committee to work with the Peacemaking Program on issues of WMD. It calls for convening Presbyterian seminary and college/university thinkers to bring new ideas before the church on the dangers facing us thirty years after *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling* and “to engage students in active peacemaking.” There would be a report to the 220th General Assembly (2012). While the ACSWP appreciates the scope of this overture, this response drops the potentially costly role of an advisory committee for the Peacemaking Program, intending the process here recommended to draw upon such experts in the field.

Items 13-01 (section 3g), 13-02 (section 2g), 13-03 (section 3g), and 13-09 (section 3g) call for convening a seminary- and college-wide review of peace studies with an emphasis on “peacemaking opportunities appropriate to the need to demilitarize U.S. international relations” (Item 13-09). There would be a report to the 221st General Assembly (2014).

Item 13-06 calls for the church “... to enter into a six-year ‘time of discernment’ seeking clarity on whether God is calling the church, at this historic moment, to embrace nonviolence as its fundamental response to war and terror.” It lays out a range of elements to guide the church through that discernment process. It calls for the creation of “a broadly representative committee (appointed by the current Moderator in consultation with the two prior Moderators) to study the issue of nonviolence and report its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly in 2014, allowing the entire church to reflect on their report before taking final action in 2016.” It also identifies questions for the committee to address with recommendations. While sharing the overture's conviction that Jesus calls us to be faithful peacemakers and endorsing a number of its elements, this response focuses more intentionally on younger persons and shortens the timeline. Using a smaller committee, and existing staff and committee members should be less costly than the use of a special committee.

Item 13-07 calls for the exploration of the possibility of instituting study and education programs dealing with peacemaking and contemporary challenges to peace and justice. This exploration would involve the PC(USA)-related seminaries and colleges, ecumenical partners, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, World Mission, and any other appropriate units of the GAMC. There would be a “preliminary report” to the 220th General Assembly (2012).

Each overture represents a deep commitment to engage in careful theology and prayerful action for peace and justice. Each overture builds on existing policy and seeks to strengthen the peacemaking and justice-seeking witness and efforts of Presbyterians and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In their different ways, these overtures testify to the importance of the social witness policy, *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling*, in the life of the church, honor the effective work of the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, and recognize the need for new thinking, action, and spiritual discipline if the church is to embody nonviolent peacemaking and justice seeking in the years ahead.