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This is the bimonthly newsletter of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), the body that serves the prophetic calling of all Presbyterians by preparing studies, resources, and policy recommendations for action by the General Assembly.



MORAL IMAGINATION AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY *(and an ordination to celebrate after the business!)*



It often starts with a question like, "What if the church...were to tackle such and such a problem?" Some cynic might immediately respond, "No, church is good for hand-holding, prayer, and maybe worship." Yet our church has been a place of moral engagement since the beginning. We experience God in our lives of conscience and read God's moral claims, from the 10 Commandments to the Beatitudes and beyond.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) does some of its moral imagining and reasoning in the form of reports to our General Assembly. Where else does, “blessed are the peacemakers,” become a program full of experiences of reconciliation? Or where, other than at this year’s General Assembly, do we ask how God is guiding the church forward in peacemaking after 13 years of wars since 9/11/01? And that is only one of eight subjects on which commissioners will have opportunity to enter into shaping the social and ethical witness of our Christian community for the days ahead.

Here are brief summaries of eight reports coming to the Assembly from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP)—eight invitations to moral imagination and moral responsibility:



Risking Peace in a Violent World: This is a set of 5 affirmations for debate and voting in presbyteries, the second stage of a six year discernment process initiated by the General Assembly in 2010. Seventy-three focus groups responded to study material. A Steering Team boiled it down to 5 affirmations. The GA is asked to send these onto the presbyteries to test them over the next 2 years, with a final policy proposal to come to the 2016 Assembly. This year’s recommendations also thank the congregations committed to peacemaking that have sustained the Peacemaking Offering for over 30 years. The Peacemaking Program and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, from different angles of vision, would both be asked to help the presbyteries engage with these affirmations.

Tax Justice: A Christian Response to a Second Gilded Age: This is a theologically-based, straight-on proposal to make our tax system more progressive so that government can do what it is supposed to do. The US has more poverty (more than 20% of our children) and more inequality than most developed nations, and our tax system mirrors and reinforces that inequality. Earned income is taxed far higher than capital gains, “carried interest” rates let hedge fund managers pay at lower rates than most income taxes, and international corporation “transfer pricing” lets them use tax havens to reduce their payment, shifting more to the individual taxpayer. Taxes are part of a social covenant that has been broken; our Reformed faith puts a just social order ahead of anti-tax ideologies.

The Gospel from Detroit: Renewing the Church’s Urban Vision: The General Assembly meets in Detroit this June, and, like every host city, Detroit will extend a hand of friendship and welcome. Yet we know, more than most cities, that Detroit’s grip has been weakened by decades of deindustrialization and population flight, starting well before the civil unrest that is disproportionately blamed for city problems. This resolution, written primarily by two Detroit residents, does not sugarcoat. Yet it has hope and it presents strategic and practical actions for the church that would help their city and many others. And it explores the roles of community organizing, intentional communities, and other strategies for renewing Presbyterian presence in our cities. The online justice journal, Unbound, is currently doing a series of articles on urban ministry—see www.justiceUnbound.org

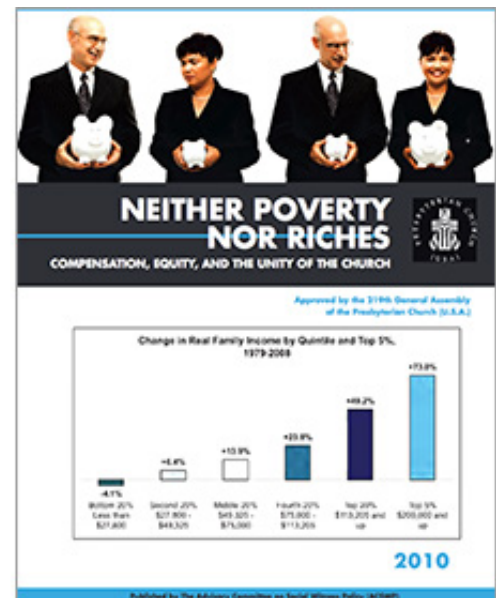
SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY FOR COMMISSIONERS AND ASSEMBLY VISITORS: On Sunday, June 15, a special outdoor and indoor worship service will be offered at Calvary Presbyterian Church, Detroit. Kevin Johnson, the pastor, will lead us in 2-3 brief prayer stops on the way to his church, looking at the colossal remains of the old Packard plant, the wall once built to keep city residents out of the suburbs, and possibly the Heidelberg art project. At Calvary, we will go out into the neighborhood as pastor and members do, partly to prevent gun violence, and then we will gather for worship led by Rev. Johnson, followed by lunch. Register for this when registering for the GA!

Drones, War, and Surveillance: Already partly tested as a study in *The Thoughtful Christian*, this resolution looks at the new face of war and the inextricable link between the drones and the larger surveillance state. Because it is unlikely this growing and now international technology can be put back in the bottle, drones need national and international controls to keep them from extending rather than decreasing the battlefield. Already the hum of aerial surveillance is heard on our own Southern border, and the dangers to privacy and civil liberties are evident—though not restricted to eyes in the sky. This resolution advances some principles and calls for much greater oversight and judicial review for the use of drone and other forms of surveillance. Not all uses are bad, and there are terrorists; the trick is not to make more of them, or treat citizens like them.

Sexual Violence in the U.S. Military: A Human Rights Update: This is not a pleasant topic, but one that persists despite initial efforts to address it. In a joint resolution with the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy looks at the changes in military justice and regulation so far and calls for further measures, and not simply the removal of prosecution from the chain of command. Having victims of sexual abuse vulnerable to decisions by their commanding officers on matters of legal protection is part of a larger system or culture, yet there are measures that can move us closer to the more disciplined both-gender militaries of other nations.

Fairness in Ministerial Compensation: Solidarity and Incentives:

This report is a response to two referrals from the 2012 Special Committee on the Church for the 21st Century. How can we raise the salaries of ministers in churches barely able to pay Board of Pensions’ dues, including disproportionate numbers of women and racial ethnic pastors, and what relevance is our theology of compensation to our modified market system, both in the parishes and in our national agencies? Fact is, we are in the world and too much of it, with great inequality among us; yet the problem cannot simply be addressed by more solidarity without some measures of accountability on the presbytery and General Assembly levels. At root, Christian incentives are not financial. This report looks at an enduring problem for which the salary data printed in *Minutes*, Vol. II, remains one element of mutual accountability in the one church in which we pledge to serve Christ.



Western Sahara: Occupied, Non-Self-Governing Territory and Test Case for International Law: Another response to the request of the 2012 General Assembly, the concern was whether the territory of Western Sahara, South of Morocco and largely controlled by that larger nation, could be given more attention by the church. There was also the question of whether it was an occupied territory similar in some respects to Palestine, and if so, whether it should be a focus of similar witness and advocacy. Short answers: yes, and not exactly. With analysis from the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations and the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI), this resolution proposes certain actions that recognize the roles of the United Nations and primarily Muslim Arab states in the region. This territory remains a test case for international law in which all religious bodies have a basic justice interest.

Resolution on Equal Rights for All Inhabitants of Israel and Palestine, and for Conversations with Prophetic Voices: Whatever happens to the current “peace process” sponsored by the Obama Administration, most of the Palestinians living under the control of Israel will not have equal rights, including the right to vote. This resolution proposes a basic benchmark of equality to support the human rights of all inhabitants, many of whom do not have citizenship rights in the

absence of a Palestinian state or a bi-national state. Further, given the debate particularly within US Christian and Jewish communities about how to support Israelis and Palestinians in a nonviolent transition to greater equality for all, this resolution recommends that congregations be communities of moral discourse using shared prophetic texts and making space for diverse and sometimes minority voices committed to justice and peace.



ACSWP at the General Assembly—and Other Events!

Come visit us at our booth, pick up resources on Christian ethics and social witness, and discuss any of the eight social witness reports or others.

Other ACSWP events at GA:

- On Sunday of the Assembly, **Dr. Gloria Albrecht and Rev. Thomas Priest** will be speaking on urban issues at Fort Street Presbyterian Church from 1-2:30pm.
- **Rev. Kevin Johnson, the pastor of Calvary, Detroit**, will be responding to the screening of the movie, *Trigger*, on gun violence, Tuesday evening of the Assembly.
- Thursday evening, at the “simple meal” dinner hosted by Compassion, Peace, and Justice ministries of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, the **Rev. William Barber**, leader of the Moral Mondays movement in North Carolina, will be the speaker.
- We note that the speaker at the Peace Breakfast, **Ms. Medea Benjamin**, is a published activist on drone warfare and human rights.

ORDINATION FOR MANAGING EDITOR OF UNBOUND!!

With great pleasure, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy announces the ordination to the ministry of word and sacrament of Ms., now Rev., Ginna Bairby, Associate for Young Adult Social Witness and Managing Editor of *Unbound*, the online justice journal. The ordination was held at the First Presbyterian Church of Richmond, Virginia, Ginna’s home congregation. A recent graduate of Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, her ordination service included two professors from that seminary, Drs. Frances Taylor Gench and Dawn DeVries, as well as teaching and ruling elders from the Presbytery of the James, the ordaining body.

Dr. Christian Iosso, Coordinator of ACSWP, presented the charge, and Compassion, Peace, and Justice ministries of the Mission Agency was represented by Director Sara Lisherness and by Ms. Ruth Farrell, Coordinator of the Presbyterian Hunger Program, and Rev. Laurie Kraus, Coordinator of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. The three Mission Agency executives prayed with Ginna and presented her with a stole made by one of



the fair trade groups with which she worked when she served as a Young Adult Volunteer in Peru.

Grace, peace, and Justice,
ACSWP



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