



EIGHT REPORTS TO THE 221ST GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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.

Committee Meeting in Louisville

As the 221st General Assembly (GA) approaches—it will be held June 14-21, 2014 in Detroit—ACSWP has been finalizing reports, policy recommendations, and responses to referrals. The Committee met in Louisville, KY, from January 16 to January 18 and, along with working on policies, received visits from Linda Valentine, Executive



Director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, and Sara Lisherness, Director of Compassion, Peace, and Justice Ministries. The Committee shared a summary of their present work with both of these leaders and exchanged perceptions on issues facing the church. Both discussed ways in which social witness policy adopted by past assemblies is being implemented through PMA and CPJ ministries.

The Committee also received a visit from Rev. Rose Mitchell of the Office of Funds Development. She is tasked to organize support for the [Presbyterian Ministry at the UN](#) and the [Office of Public Witness](#) in Washington, DC. She presented her approach of educating individuals and congregations about how social witness and justice advocacy are not new but are “part of our Presbyterian DNA.” Rev. Mitchell showed preparatory work she has done on the history of Presbyterian social witness and sought the Committee’s feedback concerning directions to explore and Presbyterians who exemplify courage and generosity in a broad frame of social mission.

ACSWP’s January meeting occurred alongside meetings of the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns (ACWC) and the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC). The Committees shared meals together that provided opportunities both for fellowship and for sharing the work that each committee will be bringing to the General Assembly. These meetings were particularly helpful in light of a joint proposal that ACSWP and ACWC are bringing before the Assembly regarding sexual violence against military personnel within the U.S. military.

Peace Discernment and Tax Justice

The two most substantial items that the Committee will be bringing to the Assembly are the

recommendations for the second stage of the Peace Discernment Process and a study on tax reform.



The Peace Discernment Report, entitled *Risking Peace in a Violent World*, comes in the fourth year of a six-year discernment process updating the PC(U.S.A.)'s peacemaking policy from [Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling](#) (1980). About 75 congregations and presbyteries have participated in the Peace Discernment Process over the last four years, and the Peace Discernment Steering Team has sought to be faithful to responses from these focus groups as they drafted the report. The report pays respect to the wide range of opinion within the PC(U.S.A.) regarding questions of war and peace—from advocates for pacifism to Presbyterians serving in the military. At the same time, the Peace Discernment Team and ACSWP have drafted five affirmations regarding peacemaking in the PC(U.S.A.) that will be sent to the presbyteries for an

advisory vote before the process is concluded at the 222nd General Assembly in 2016.

The study on tax reform, entitled *Tax Justice: A Christian Response to a New Gilded Age*, was commissioned by the 220th General Assembly as a follow-up to the resolution [World of Hurt, Word of Life](#) (2012), which addresses the work of economic reconstruction through communion-based principles. The tax justice report addresses taxation through the Reformed understanding of covenant and proposes a set of principles upon which it suggests the Church call the US tax system to be based: progressivity, transparency, solidarity, sustainability, and effectiveness/adequacy. The report includes a theological exposition of taxation as part of responsible self-government, a historical overview of progressive taxation in the United States, and specific recommendations for the Church's public witness based on the five principles.

Drones, Detroit, and Other Business

The Committee also discussed a proposal on the use of drones, both in war and surveillance context. There was significant debate about both uses of drones and when the use of drones for targeted killing may be permissible, if ever. The final shape of this proposal seeks to articulate common ground, recognizing the growing US military investment in drones, danger of a "drone race" among nations, and their inextricable relationship to new forms of surveillance. Despite its diversity of opinion, the Committee agreed that Christian voices were needed in the establishment of standards for this new and controversial means of warfare and surveillance.

As the Assembly is being held in Detroit, two Committee members from that area drafted a resolution entitled *The Gospel from Detroit* that examines the hope and crisis in our nation's cities using Detroit as a focal example. It contains a pastoral concern for parts of cities effectively abandoned by society, and traces the decline of the church's own presence—urging other presbyteries to analyze their urban presence as well. It looks at urban mission strategies, including community organizing and intentional communities of worship and service. The proposal



ultimately seeks to renew the Church's commitment to urban ministry and invites the larger PC(USA) to hear the Gospel proclaimed anew from places like Detroit, where, "out of the experience of unjust suffering, a faith grows that knows its utter dependence on God alone...and devotes its life to serving God with love, hope, courage, and strength that is foolishness to the wise and the satisfied and the keepers of accounts."

Along with the above-mentioned joint resolution on sexual violence in the military, ACSWP will bring three additional resolutions:

Equal Rights in Palestine and Israel: Conversations with Prophetic Voices, a proposal for conversations on nonviolent change that include new voices in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities and address rights usually anchored in citizenship that Palestinians have lacked for many peace processes.

Solidarity in Pastors' Pay in a Culture of Inequality, a response to two referrals from the Committee on the Church for the 21st Century. This brief study analyzes the internal market factors that make it hard to increase near-minimum pastoral salaries, reviews the church's theology of compensation that encourages us to resist conforming to the world's inequality, summarizes further lack of parity for female and racial-ethnic pastors, and includes the GA agency compensation policies in the overall picture.

Western Sahara: Occupied, Non-Self-Governing Territory and Test Case for International Law. This report responds to a referral that compared the situation of Western Sahara, a territory between Mauritania and Morocco, to that of Palestine, and requested an examination of how the church should respond to this case where people have not been able to exercise self-determination.

The final versions of these papers—not yet available at this time—will be available in the future at [http://www.pc-biz.org/MeetingPapers/\(S\(w4wvelw1vj10g2cbszfrgojy\)\)/Explorer.aspx](http://www.pc-biz.org/MeetingPapers/(S(w4wvelw1vj10g2cbszfrgojy))/Explorer.aspx).



Workshops on drones, tax justice, and new directions in peacemaking are slated for the [Compassion, Peace, and Justice Training Day](#), Friday, March 21, in Washington, DC, just before the [Ecumenical Advocacy Days](#). The Committee is also working on plans to assist Detroit's Calvary Church in developing a community-immersion worship experience at the Assembly and to develop options for special studies of Presbyterian

Social Teaching for seminarians and others.

Regarding its internal organization, ACSWP elected a new co-chair, Dr. Ray Roberts, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Westfield, NJ, to serve with Dr. Christine Darden, a retired NASA scientist and elder from Hampton, VA. Roberts, who has a PhD in theological ethics, succeeds the Rev. Raafat Zaki, Synod Executive of the Synod of the Covenant. A third member of the ACSWP Coordinating team is Rev. Dr. Marsha Fowler, a professor of nursing ethics and spirituality, who oversees electronic communications, assisted by Rachael Eggebeen, a teacher in Arizona, as alternate. The Committee heard a very good report on its online journal, www.justiceUnbound.org from its managing editor, Ms. Ginna Bairby.

Grace, peace, and Justice,
ACSWP



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