



Syria, A New Editor for Unbound, Peace Discernment, Tax Reform, and Other Concerns

Syria and Social Witness

On Syria, still unbombed as this is written, the issue is not the wrongness of chemical weapons, but finding a means of enforcing justice that does not undermine it. Thus the Committee, with many staff of the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Stated Clerk, are grateful for the Obama Administration's cooperation with the Russian initiative for neutralizing chemical weapons and sincerely hope that it succeeds. We invite you to read [Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons' statement on the violence](#) and [Chris Iosso's editorial in Unbound](#). Chemical bombing deserves justice, but the President's initial proposal for a military strike was moralistic - with unclear strategy and wrong or missing bedfellows - and would weaken prospects of international justice or serious negotiation. Chris' editorial also provides the General Assembly policy base for the non-bombing approach to Syria, Iran (a primary proxy target), and the Arab Awakening generally. It is likely that Presbyterians will need to address again the struggle of the United States to confront its empire shadow overseas, where ostensibly good intentions lead so predictably to larger tragedies. It has also been noted that US engagement with Syria, like the wars that followed 9/11, may well allow the "peace process" in Israel/Palestine to be safely back-burnered for another decade.

Unbound – New Managing Editor and New Issue

Many of our readers will be familiar with the online journal Unbound (www.justiceUnbound.org), which was created to equip Presbyterian individuals and congregations with resources to assist us in lifting up our voices. As the URL for "Unbound" alone was taken, we took "justiceUnbound" as a near alternative. The title was suggested in an open contest; Rev. Noelle Damico, well-known from the Fair Food campaign with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, came up with the idea of a journal that was no longer in bound paper form. The previous printed form, a justice journal in the Presbyterian Church that enabled Presbyterian social witness for 98 years, was most recently known as Church & Society magazine, copies of which are still available in hard copy and online.

The new editor of Unbound is Ms. Ginna Bairby, a recent graduate of Union Presbyterian Seminary who was awarded one of the top honors at that seminary, support for a year's advanced graduate study. As the story by Presbyterian News Service notes, she has been involved in supporting the use of Fair Trade and Sweat-Free products, among other social witness efforts, and was an intern with our Office of Public Witness in Washington, DC. Check out the [Presbyterian News Service's announcement](#) and her [editorial on the situation in Syria](#).

Unbound began its release of a new issue on Tuesday, September 17th, entitled [Amos' Plumblin: Whose Church? The Future of Social Witness](#). This new series listens to emerging leaders in the church tell their stories of the creative ways they have participated in the church's ministry of social witness, often from places on the fringe of society. Unbound is publishing these essays as a rolling issue in the style of Cynthia Holder Rich's [Ecclesio](#) and other online publications that post smaller



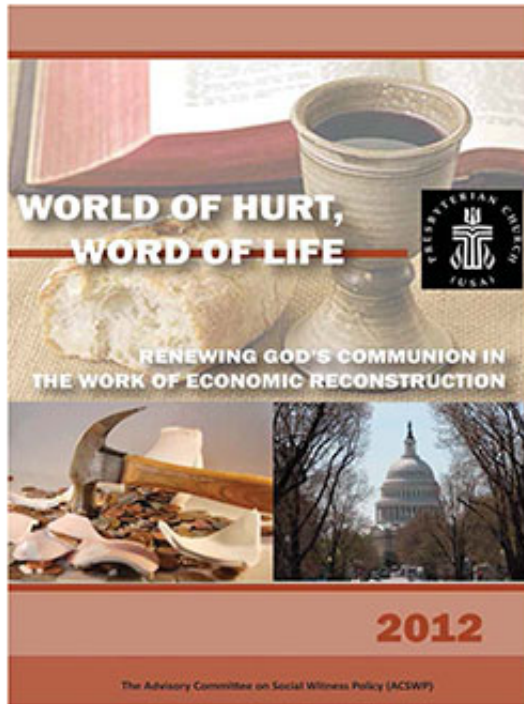
numbers of articles more frequently. We invite you [to read the first week's articles](#) and check back every Monday and Thursday for the next 10 weeks for new articles.

Peace Discernment, Tax Reform, and Other Concerns for GA 2014

The importance of linking timely struggles for justice and peace with our connectional life as a church, from presbyteries and synods to the General Assembly, is to recognize that we do not need to reinvent wheels on the local level for each struggle. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy is a steward of our church's institutional memory. It is also the result of the year in and year out efforts of advocates to build capacity for the church to use its voice wisely and effectively, so that our leaders can speak with the confidence that dedicated Presbyterians - mainly volunteers with expertise on given subjects - have thought FIRST before we speak. And it means that our adult study groups - still a natural part of our informed faith life in many congregations - can dig into materials that are not dumbed down. Certain policy statements alone will not save, but it often pays to save them if you know that each one represents a particular justice struggle. The Committee is comprised of members elected by the General Assembly, through the GA Nominations process, with three of the twelve nominated by the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

The Advisory Committee is currently working on the next stage of the [Peace Discernment process](#). Many of you and your congregations may have participated in the discernment groups that studied and looked at their own experiences of violence. Reports from those groups - still coming in - are being reflected on by the Steering Team and a report to the General Assembly is being prepared. It will not be a final report; the process was designed to bring a proposal to the Assembly that would be sent to the presbyteries for a vote to guide the 2016 Assembly. So this is not a focus on individual issues, but an effort to address the massive "principalities and powers" that lead our nation so often to grab Thor's hammer before we can think. How are we shaped by a culture that has much violence and fear in it, and which devotes so much of its wealth to a standing military its founders would not recognize? And how has our national identity of military supremacy affected our understanding of the Prince of Peace?

The General Assembly also authorized a [study of tax reform](#), based on a broader study of the economic crisis. That study, [World of Hurt, Word of Life](#), addresses the problems of unemployment, income stagnation for most, and the weakening of social protections. It also looks at the enormous growth of inequality, which is eating now into the assets of the middle class (including churches like many of ours). A key part of the transmission of inequality is our tax



system. That report is expected for the 2014 Assembly.

Among other matters, ACSWP will also be bringing resolutions on drones, urban mission and the case of Detroit, means to improve ministerial compensation in financially challenged congregations, and a model for congregations to hear prophetic voices. Along with Advocacy Committee on Women's Concerns, ACSWP is considering a potential resolution on violence against women in the military and other institutions. With regard to Detroit, the Committee has found it a providential opportunity to look not only at the bankruptcy process in light of democratic principles, but also at the patterns of job, housing, and transportation segregation that hurt all our cities. This is not to ignore the real devastation in many rural areas, but the Detroit case sharpens the question: what future presence for Presbyterians will there be in our cities?



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