

Overture On Support of Peace Churches in the PC(USA)

The Presbytery of _____ overtures the 223rd General Assembly (2018) of the Presbyterian Church (USA) to do the following:

1. Celebrate with gratitude the completion of the “Peace Discernment” effort of the 219th General Assembly (2010) to “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” and to “identify, explore, and nurture new approaches to active peacemaking and nonviolence” (*Minutes*, 2010, Part I, pp. 68, 967).
2. Acknowledge the wonderful materials and curriculum that the Peace Discernment Steering Team made available to the churches for their discernment work and the inspiration it gave to many.
3. Acknowledge that the 5 Affirmations were one of the fruits of this church-wide discernment and commend them to all church sessions for reading and study.
<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/five-peacemaking-affirmations/>
4. Acknowledge that many churches have continued their own process of discernment and some have declared themselves “Peace Churches,” while others continue to study, pray, reflect and explore this subject in their own church community.
5. Recognize and commend those churches who have declared themselves “Peace Churches” and encourage all churches interested in peace to continue their own discernment and further encourage the Peacemaking Program to maintain a list of churches who declare themselves “Peace Churches” on the Peacemaking Program website when they are notified by said churches.
6. Encourage the Peacemaking Program to republish the discernment materials developed in the “Peace Discernment” process for use by churches and others who wish to continue their own educational and discernment process.
7. Encourage the Peacemaking Program to identify or develop curriculum to help young adults discern their position on war and violence before registering with the Selective Service System for possible military conscription as required by federal law.
8. Reaffirm the PCUSA policy on conscientious objection and encourage those who are conscientious objectors to register their decision with the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly as established by previous General Assemblies and described in “Presbyterians and Military Service,”
<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/conscientiousobj1.pdf>

Rationale:

During the Peace Discernment process from 2010 to 2016, the church committed many resources and many talented people contributed their expertise to create a significant body of biblical, theological and historical information. The quality of these contributions is exceptional

and because of these materials, many churches have declared or are in the process exploring whether to declare themselves “Peace Churches.” A few of examples include First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto (Presbytery of San Jose), the Church of Reconciliation in Chapel Hill, NC (New Hope Presbytery) and Montclair Presbyterian Church in Oakland, CA (San Francisco Presbytery).

The ongoing violence (of which the Las Vegas massacre is only the latest event) that has become a daily occurrence within our communities, our country and the world demands that we continue to understand how to engage as peacemakers with the growing violence and terror. As Rabbi Abraham Heschel said, “we are not all guilty, but we are all responsible.” The completion of the “Peace Discernment” process should not be the end but should be the beginning of an ongoing pursuit of justice and peace for all God’s people.

For those churches who are continuing this difficult work by declaring themselves a “Peace Church,” the PCUSA should be able to acknowledge their commitment as consistent with the spirit of the “Peace Discernment” process.

During the “Peace Discernment” process, there was a wonderful curriculum that was created to help congregations engage in conversation as well as share a spectrum of experiences and opinions in the spirit of inquiry. This curriculum should not be lost but should be republished for the benefit of the entire church.

Our congregational baptismal vows commit us to the ongoing guidance and nurture of all the young people in our churches by word and deed with love and prayer, encouraging them to know and follow Christ. Therefore, we should be assisting our young people to complete an “inventory of conscience” to help them to discern their beliefs about war and violence. The materials from the “Peace Discernment” process should be part of such a curriculum. Other helpful resources are available from the Center On Conscience & War and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship.

Recognizing the importance of registering conscientious objectors with the Office of the Stated Clerk as prescribed in OGA document, <http://oga.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/conscientiousobj.pdf>, let us reaffirm this policy and confirm that the processes for registering conscientious objectors are straight forward and manageable for all concerned.