



Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

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Briefing Paper for GA Committee

3

General Assembly Procedures

Dear Committee 3,

Greetings from the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship as you prepare to serve at the 223rd General Assembly. We write to lift up two items before Committee 3 and to share a concern about a GA plenary action.

One PPF member who served as GA commissioner writes, "When I was a commissioner, it wasn't the overtures and their advocates, but rather the long reports from GA agencies that consumed so much of our time and energy."

For one week, every two years, the church assembles to hear from presbytery overtures and advocates, commissioners, advisory delegates, mission workers, ecumenical partners, visitors and local church members who care enough to participate, as well as our agencies. This opportunity for hearing and reflection together should be celebrated, not curtailed.

The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship opposes (03-19) because it would limit the effectiveness of overture advocates by allowing only two advocates for each overture, from the originating and first concurring presbyteries. This is a poor idea because the GA committee considering the overture would be unable to hear from any other concurring presbyteries which may have their own unique reasons for concurrence. Also, due to presbytery meeting schedules, the "originating" and "first concurring" presbyteries may not be the ones who have the most expertise about the topic, or even have the resources to send an advocate.

Are there too many overtures and overture advocates at GA? No. Two committees have zero overtures from presbyteries. Nine have from one to eight overtures and only two committees have more than eight distinct overtures. We encourage you to look at the work given to committees and read some of both agency reports and overtures before making a decision about this.

The "problem" of too many advocates and too little time for overture hearings is better addressed by the leaders of each GA committee. They now schedule **(see over)**

Celebrating 74 Years!

Who we are: Founded in 1944, the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship is a nation-wide community of Presbyterians who act on the example of Jesus to reduce war, violence and exploitation. We are a non-partisan group, open to all Presbyterians. Except for a small staff, we are volunteers who pay our own way to GA. We do not work for or represent any government or outside lobby group. Because of our focus on peacemaking, we have divested our Peace Fellowship Endowment Fund at the Presbyterian Foundation of all fossil fuel companies and over 20 companies that profit from or enable the Occupation of Palestine by Israel.

Be Bold! Nonviolence Works.

Please see presbypeacefellowship.org/ga223 for information on all peacemaking issues coming to the 223rd GA. If you have questions or suggestions at GA, you can always text us. Text GApeace to 33222.

In the GA Exhibit area, visit us at **Booth 119-121** for conversation & for education/action resources.

Join Us for the Peace Breakfast!

Wed. June 20, 7am, Tickets at ga-pcusa.org

Progressive Presbyterians GA Issues Briefing Breakfast, Sat. June 16, 7-9 am

at Centenary Methodist Church. No ticket is required, but please register at presbypeacefellowship.org/ga223 Option: Following this briefing, join the last leg of the 260 mile PCUSA Walk for a Fossil Free World, from the Centenary Methodist Church to the General Assembly.

PCUSA Walk for a Fossil Free World

June 1- 16, We are walking from the PC(USA) offices in Louisville to the GA in St. Louis. Step-by-step, the walkers join 40 presbyteries that have called for action at the 223rd General Assembly to protect creation by divesting from fossil fuel stocks. **See pcusawalk.org**

To join The Walk for the final day, including the entry into St. Louis, contact info@presbypeacefellowship.org **Closing Worship** –Join in The Walk's closing worship service on Fri. June 15 at 7pm at Centenary Methodist Church, 55 Plaza Square, St. Louis.

You can also view live-streamed teach-ins and worship from The Walk each night June 1- 15 at **#walk2divest** or pcusawalk.org

(cont.) a reasonable amount of time for the presentation and allow the advocates for an overture to jointly decide how to best use that time.

A second proposal (03-13) would prohibit presbytery overture advocates from participating in open hearings that are hosted by each committee for anyone who wishes to speak on an issue before the committee.

It is certainly unfair for an advocate to speak in the open hearing and then again in the official presentation of the overture. But in cases where a very large number of presbyteries wish to show support, the committee should seek ways to hear from as many of them as possible. The advocates will usually want to select a small number of people to make a consolidated official presentation. In this case, some presbytery overture advocates will not be able to speak to the committee unless they can participate briefly in the open hearing. **Because we believe GA committees benefit from the perspectives of every presbytery supporting an overture, PPF opposes this proposal.**

While these rule changes may seem to streamline committee work, they will actually serve to limit the number of voices that commissioners and delegates are able to hear. The few voices that are heard may not be the ones most qualified to explain the issue. More time will be given to GA staff and appointed resource people, and less to the presbyteries bringing the concerns to the GA. The role of overture advocate is an ideal way to involve young adults and local church members as important participants in the policy processes of our church. These proposals would send a message that their participation is unwelcome, unneeded, and unwanted.

One of the reasons for the suggested limits on overture advocates may be that there is one overture (08-01) arriving at the 223rd GA with the support of 40 presbyteries! We celebrate the enthusiastic overture advocates who are coming to the Assembly to make a passionate plea for climate justice, many of them young adults attending their first GA. Please welcome them, listen to them. Reject recommendations that would silence their voices. **(See the enclosed paper for more information about their overture.)**

We wish you faith, energy and a wonderful experience in your service in St. Louis! If there is anything that the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship can do to be of help, please call on us.

Sincerely,
Rev. Emily Brewer, PPF Executive Director
ga@presbypeacefellowship.org

Through GA Committee 14, all commissioners will consider a proposal to adopt Martin Luther King's 1963 "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" as a Contemporary Statement of Faith. Here is one selection:

I had also hoped that the white moderate would reject the myth concerning time in relation to the struggle for freedom.... the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills....

Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of [people] willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right.

**---Martin Luther King, Jr.
"Letter from Birmingham City Jail"**

The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Reflects on One GA Plenary Issue: Climate Change

Addressing climate change requires an unprecedented mobilization of human genius, unity, timeliness and love. We support many of the climate-related proposals before GA, including steps to reduce carbon use by individuals, churches and institutions, as well as support for alternative energy loans, employment and investment. Along with 40 presbyteries, we call upon GA to support Overture 08-01, "Overture on Directing the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation to Divest from Fossil Fuels and Actively Invest in Securities that Focus on Renewable Energy."

Top Five Reasons to Divest from Fossil Fuels Now

1. Because we believe in God, Creator of heaven and earth. From the beginning (Genesis 1:28/Genesis 2:15), God calls humanity as stewards of creation, in order to keep the earth a home for all living things. Jesus calls for repentance; when we have gone in a wrong direction, Christ helps us **turn around**. He gives us the courage to act now as the stewards God made us to be.

2. Because war and violence will be fueled by climate disasters. Climate change will make food, safe water and habitable land scarcer and costlier, indirectly leading to perpetual violence and war. According to the research of Marshall Burke and Solomon Hsiang, for each half-degree increase in temperature, we can expect a ten to twenty percent increase in armed conflict.¹ With an increase of five degrees, we could see world violence double by the end of this century. The U.S. Department of Defense describes climate change as a "threat multiplier" of poverty, disease, mass displacement, migration and political instability.² Climate-caused resource scarcity has already been deadly for the people in Syria, Somalia and other places. In "National Security and the Accelerating Risks of Climate Change," the CNA Advisory Board (retired high-level U.S. military officers) writes: "The extent to which military forces will be used to protect the homeland in response to projected climate change impacts should not be limited by our past history of military deployments or limited by failures of imagination."³ As peacemakers, we need to act now.

3. Because time is up to mitigate climate change. Climate change is coming faster than first predicted. From words now removed from its website under the current EPA administrator, the EPA stated in 2015: "Global temperatures are projected to increase

worldwide by 2° F to 11.5°F by 2100."⁴ What does this mean? In a stunning article worth reading by every Presbyterian, David Wallace-Wells organized the scientific literature on what could happen with this increase in heat. His findings go far beyond rising sea levels: "Absent a significant adjustment to how billions of humans conduct their lives, parts of the Earth will likely become close to uninhabitable, and other parts horrifically inhospitable, as soon as the end of this century."⁵ There are no "do-overs" with climate change. The fossil fuel industry has known of these dangers since the 1970s and has expended millions of dollars to confuse and deny them. We simply do not have more time to talk with the fossil fuel industry; they must change now.

4. Because divestment makes the faithful impact. Divestment, not more corporate engagement, will wake up the oil and gas industry from "business as usual." There are many ways we can fight climate change, but divestment is the most direct action the Presbyterian Church as a whole can take. Divestment aligns all our investments with PCUSA policy against investing in ways that harm people. We are powerful when we join over 800 other faith, academic, and philanthropic institutions, with assets of \$6 trillion, to divest from fossil fuels. We have the support of 40 presbyteries that have voted in favor of this.

5. Because we need to be at the right table. The MRTI report calls us to stay at the table of the oil and gas industry. Is that the right table for us? No. We are called to the table of people who are marginalized, to the table of our siblings in frontline communities who already suffer because of fossil fuels. Proponents of shareholder engagement tell us that divestment means we will shame the industry. Yes, we probably will. But until we divest, we betray Christ's call to care for people who are marginalized and God's call to be stewards. Fossil Fuel divestment is now central to living out our faith. All the good actions and writings of our denomination to respond to climate change are for nothing if we continue to fund the industry that is harming creation.

1 Burke, Solomon and Carleton, "Conflict in a Changing Climate," The European Physical Journal, Spring 2016. www.stanford.edu/~mburke/papers/Carleton_Hsiang_Burke2016.pdf

2 U.S. Dept of Defense, "2014 Climate Change Roadmap." www.acq.osd.mil/EIE/Downloads/CCARprint_wForward_e.pdf

3 www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/MAB_5-8-14.pdf

4 www.epa.gov/climatechange/science/overview (No longer available on-line)

5 David Wallace-Wells, "The Uninhabitable Earth," www.nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/07/climate-change-earth-too-hot-for-humans-annotated.html