



Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

presbypeacefellowship.org/ga223

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text updates from PPF at GA

#PPFGA @presbypeace

Briefing Paper for GA Committee

8

Environmental Issues

Dear Committee 8,

Greetings from the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. You are on a historic GA committee and you will consider what we think is the most important issue at GA:

What would Christ have us do now in response to climate change? Easy, right?

Responding to climate change requires an unprecedented mobilization of human genius, unity, timeliness and love. We in the Peace Fellowship have come to see climate change as a peacemaking issue. As the climate changes and resources like food, land and water become scarcer, violence and war will increase.

As peacemakers, 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 employment, loans and investment. We also support the 40 presbyteries that are bringing Overture (08-01) for Presbyterian fossil fuel divestment.

Responding to climate change is complex. We are all implicated in the use of fossil fuels. We are all mindful of the families whose income is currently dependent on fossil fuel extraction. And we all love God's people and God's creation. You will be receiving many words and charts from financial agencies of the church. However, we urge you to trust the guidance and hope of these 40 presbyteries calling for divestment. On these brief pages we explain why. *Thank you for reading!*

Have courage and have a wonderful experience in St. Louis. If there is anything that the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship can do to be of help, please call on us.

Sincerely,

Emily Brewer, PPF Executive Director
ga@presbypeacefellowship.org

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 contact us by texting 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

5 Reasons Why We Support (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.”

1. 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 created us to be.



Fossil fuel divestment brings together Presbyterians from different generations, working together.

Photo: 2017 Climate March, Chicago, PPF

2. Time is Up to Mitigate Climate Change.

Climate change is urgent and it is coming faster than first predicted. The PC(USA) has been at the table doing shareholder engagement for many years, not just four years. The results range from no results to minimal movement. If we had many more years to respond to climate change, shareholder engagement could be the appropriate response. **But we do not have time to let the fossil fuel industry take its time.**

How much time do we have? From words now removed from is 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.”¹

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 by 2100. 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.”²

The year 2100 is not far away; it is within the generation of our children and grandchildren. We need to act now.

Report (08-08) from the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) suggests that we have 32 years to mitigate climate change. However, climate scientists project that the international goal of containing the heat increase to 2° C can happen only if fossil fuel emissions peak **in 2020**. Then these emissions will need to start a rapid decline. This is less than two years away.

Time is not on our side. U.S. military experts have determined that previous climate change time and impact assessments were under-estimated because climate change is a self-accelerating process.³ As the arctic ice melts, the expanding darker oceans absorb more energy and heat than the shrinking white and reflective ice, making the polar region warm even faster.

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 consumers and deny the facts. We simply do not have more time to talk with the fossil fuel industry; they must change now.

3. War and Violence Will be Fueled by Climate Disasters.

Climate change will make resources such as food, safe water and habitable land much costlier and scarcer, 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.⁴

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.⁵ 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.”⁶ As peacemakers, we need to act now.

4. Divestment makes the Faithful Impact.

PPF has supported the work of MRTI over the years and we believe that they are often a prophetic voice on behalf of the denomination. We differ with MRTI on climate change. In report (08-08), MRTI recommends continued corporate engagement and rejects the idea of

divestment at this time. The results reported from their years of engagement efforts to date are minimal, but MRTI appears to be willing to continue them two more years.

What do we gain by waiting? Two more years will not be enough time for the fossil fuel industry to change its business model of oil and gas extraction. But two more years does increase the time that the church fails to be a moral leader for fossil fuel divestment. It is clear that when the decision to divest is made, it will be made by the General Assembly itself. The window to act in a prophetic way is small. It is critical that General Assembly make this move now. Time is already up.

In addition to not having the time required for a process of engagement to work, we think this is a case where corporate engagement may be simply unable to work.

A more fruitful engagement, after accomplishing fossil fuel divestment, would be to focus MRTI's work on industries that can reduce their carbon footprint and have more flexibility in their models such as the manufacturing and transportation sectors. After we have divested from fossil fuels, let's entrust MRTI with engaging in corporate dialogue with every corporation that we can about reducing fossil fuel use across the economy, even as we work to reduce our own carbon footprint as a nation, as the church and as individuals.

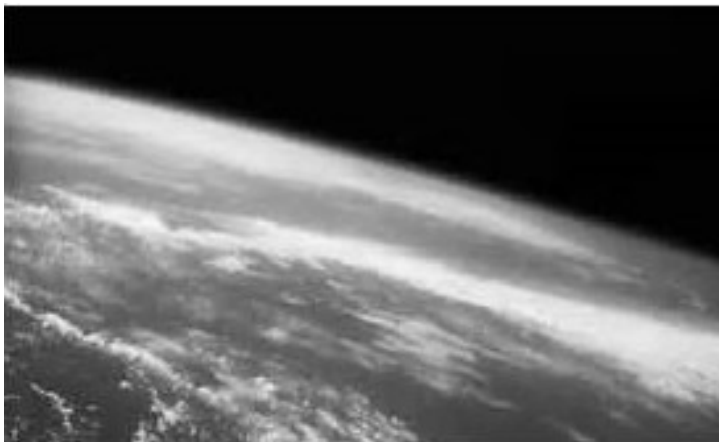


Photo: NASA

5. 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 of creation. 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.

Other Committee 8 Overtures

PPF supports aspects of other overtures on fossil fuels, on commending MRTI for their work and on our urgent responsibility as stewards of creation. But without categorical divestment from the entire industry, these overtures are not sufficient.

Overture (08-02), on selective divestment, would focus on the most egregious companies, including those not meeting standards of the Paris Accords. This is good, but not enough, as the Paris Accords provide a minimum threshold for progress. Overture (08-03) *On Engagement with the Issue of Climate Change* would provide resources to mobilize congregations and councils for action and advocacy. This overture should be approved, but it also is insufficient. This is what we have already been doing at many levels of the church. Divestment is the additional moral leadership that Presbyterians can bring to the crisis of climate change.

There are two overtures (08-04) and (08-05) asking us to "listen to the perspectives and voices of people most impacted by environmental injustice, including environmental racism." **When we do listen to such voices, we learn that many of them are calling for divestment.** Climate change disproportionately affects people who are poor and people of color. Overture (08-06) on healing the climate urges clergy to "accept the mantle of moral leadership" and all of us to "incarnate the changes for which we long."

We support (08-02), (08-03), (08-04), (08-05) and (08-06) if the step of categorical divestment from fossil fuels is added to the other actions in these overtures. We are past the point in time when it is faithful to love creation with some of our options, but not all of our options. Adding divestment to these overtures proclaims our love for creation with all aspects of our lives as Presbyterians, including our stewardship of investments.

Overtures (08-09) and (08-12) suggest carbon pricing strategies. Carbon pricing requires government action. This appears to us to be unlikely to ever be implemented in the window of time to make a difference, but it should be part of the larger response to climate change. We cannot pass the responsibility to government alone. These are overtures to which PC(USA) action for categorical divestment should be added. Because of our faith in a Creator God and our love for God's creation and God's people, the church is called to lead with love that is timely and courage that is clear.

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

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

3 www.cna.org/reports/accelerating-risks

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

5 U.S. Dept of Defense, "2014 Climate Change Roadmap."

www.acq.osd.mil/EIE/Downloads/CCARprint_wForward_e.pdf

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

Creator God,

You spoke the earth into existence and placed us here to serve and preserve it.

You gave us talents and we dug in the ground.

Through investments in oil companies we have claimed ownership of Your land.

We sell the fruits of our exploitation and exploit each other in the process.

By our greed and hubris, we have become disconnected from the land. We have commodified creation and each other.

Bring us back and inspire us into right relation with You and all Your creation.

Help us to invest everything You have given us in ways that will glorify You.

We acknowledge that Salvation in Christ means that we have responsibilities beyond ourselves.

And we hope to join into Your joy.

In the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Perfect Steward, Amen!

---- Samuel Adu-Gyamfi,
Student at Columbia Theological Seminary



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To learn more about fossil fuel divestment,
see fossilfreepcusa.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"

***Climate change is not an "issue."
Climate change is an escalating
catastrophe*** that is destroying God's exquisite gift of creation.

As followers of Jesus ---the one who preached about sparrows and fig trees and mustard seeds--- we have an urgent calling to renew and protect the fragile ecology of the earth. I have four grandsons (four and under!) and each of them revels in the wonders of the beach and the mountains and the forests. Will they be able to live free and breathe free and play free in a world becoming dim with pollution and extinction and climate-induced natural disasters?

As Presbyterians, we have both an individual and a denominational responsibility to act. Last year I switched my 403b Retirement Account to a fossil free portfolio through the PCUSA Fidelity Retirement Plan.

I encourage all of us to examine our own practices and values as climate change eats away at our grandchildren's future --and the future of life itself. Divestment from the fossil fuel industry is an ethical mandate for all Presbyterian investments. The longer we wait to act, the more we are desecrating the creation God has given us.

Susan Andrews,
Moderator of the 215th General Assembly,
PC(USA)