

Be Bold: Nonviolence Works

Volume 73 Winter 2017

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Hope in Intersectionality: Reflections on the Women's March on Washington

By Emma Warman, Elon NC

Like many people after this past election, I felt overcome by hopelessness and unsure of actions to take to best support my marginalized friends and communities. I heard about the Women's March on Washington and decided that showing up would be a good place to start.



PPF participants in the DC Women's March. Photo by Colleen Earp

The feeling of unity on the day of the march was like nothing I'd experienced before. Joy, peace and compassion were evident from participants crowding the metro and streets, displaying on posters bold statements of love for survivors of gender-based violence and discrimination as well as solidarity with people suffering in all walks of life. Chants such as "immigrants are welcome here" filled the air as people as young as toddlers and old as my grandparents united to stand with communities marginalized for their race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, gender, and immigration status. This peaceful weaving together of generations reminded me of the millions who had marched these streets before us for justice in the civil rights movement and against the Vietnam war. Faith

and undying hope were present here, and it wasn't until after the event that I learned millions in the U.S. and 80 countries around the world had walked simultaneously with us on these Washington streets.

The news media response in the following days gave room for reflection in recognizing my place in the march as a white, straight, able-bodied and mid-socioeconomic class woman. I am privileged in my faith, as described by PPF Director Emily Brewer in a recent article on the PPF website. PC(USA) Presbyterianism, apart from being over 90% white, is one of the wealthiest religious groups in the country. A black Facebook friend of mine posted that in her experience, feminist movements normally exclusively pertain to white women. Though this march was initially organized by white women, she wrote that this march felt different. The march website states its mission is to learn about one another's intersecting identities, and I believe this is a necessary goal as the movement progresses. Women's rights are human rights regardless of race, age, ethnicity, religion, immigration status, sexual identity, gender expression, economic status, or disability, but there is still much work to be done by white and all women, as proven by broader wage gaps based on race than gender for women and men.

With the overload of action available to take, I hope that the "10 Actions in 100 Days" campaign (www.womensmarch.com/100/) stemming from the march will be organized and visible enough that diverse supporters will continue this work together. Women's rights and so many more must be fought for side by side, and by fully acknowledging our privileges in all forms, we can fully accept one another as we work together toward justice. (*Emma Warman was a PPF General Assembly Intern in 2016.*)

Peace Seeking Churches: PPF Plans Outreach to Congregations

By Art Hunt, Hamden CT

Peace Seeking Churches is a working group of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Activist Council. Our mission is to promote the values of PPF as recorded in our statements "What We Believe!" and "The Peacemaker's Creed" by establishing peace partnerships with and supporting the peacemaking efforts of PC (USA) churches, seminaries, and governing bodies.

In general, Peace Seeking Churches work for justice, the promotion and protection of human rights and human dignity, the elimination of violence, the demilitarization of law enforcement, conflict de-escalation and conflict resolution, and many other peacemaking activities.

Peace Seeking Churches embrace The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s principle of nonviolence as a way of life for courageous people – active resistance, assertive spiritually, and continuous advocacy for justice.

PPF has led nonviolent direct action for nearly 75 years. During Holy Week in 2015, we adopted the statements "What We Believe!" and "The Peacemaker's Creed". Both are available on our website at www.presbypeacefellowship.org on the Resources tab. Peacemakers were invited to join the Activist Council by affirming the nonviolence of Jesus Christ and their intent to follow him, committing to participating in the life of PPF and pledging ongoing financial support. In 2016, the Activist Council formed the Peace Seeking Churches Working Group along with related working groups for Fossil Fuel Divestment, Peace Communities, Colombia, Middle East, Gun Violence Prevention and Anti-Racism.

We invite you to join us as we build on the work of peacemakers who came before us – drawing from the tradition of Christian pacifism and Christian nonviolence – to help guide our responses to injustice and the PC(USA)'s interpretation of what this deepened commitment means for us today.

As the Peace Seeking Churches Working Group, our initial aspirations are to: establish partnerships with PC(USA) churches, seminaries, and governing bodies to support and share their peacemaking

successes, challenges, and plans; provide peacemaking training, speakers and resources; publicize local peacemaking work; and promote local and regional peacemaking cooperation. We invite you to join our group and help to develop and guide our work.

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Make Your Pension Fossil Free

By Kathy Dean, Dobbs Ferry NY

The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Fossil Free Working Group will be sending a letter soon to advocates across the PC(USA) asking them to ask their synods, presbyteries and congregations to divest from fossil fuels.

Meanwhile, the Board of Pensions (BOP) has made individual fossil fuel divestment a little easier by offering a new investment option. The Pax Global Environmental Markets Fund Institutional Class (PGINX) invests in fossil fuel-free global companies offering solutions in energy efficiency, water infrastructure, waste management, and sustainable food and agriculture.

Susan De George, a Teaching Elder in Hudson River Presbytery, transferred her funds to the fossil free option in early January. The contact for the transfer is Fidelity (800-343-0860). When Susan called, the representative initially told her such a fund was not available. Since Susan had the flyer from BOP in hand, she was able to ask the representative to check on the specific fund. The representative located it without a problem. Susan was then given a choice regarding percentage of her funds she wanted transferred. She chose 100%. Then Susan learned that she had to make a separate request for future contributions to the 403b retirement fund to go into the fossil free account. She made the request while on the phone. The whole process took less than 10 minutes

If you decide to invest your Board of Pensions funds in the fossil free option, would you please let the PPF Fossil Free Working Group know? Also, we would love to have you involved in the work of our group.

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Kathy Dean, kathy@presbypeacefellowship.org.

A Peacemaker's Calendar

April 21 - 24: Ecumenical Advocacy Days. Join us in Washington for "Confronting Chaos, Forging Community" to grapple with the intersectionality of racism, materialism, and militarism. (advocacydays.org)

April 27 - 29: PPF Spring Activist Council Gathering in Chicago. We'll learn from activists in the Alianza Community and Christian Peacemaker Teams and offer a witness on the intersection of overcoming racism and preventing gun violence. Everyone welcome! Register now at presbypeacefellowship.org

July 22 - August 4: Interfaith Network for Justice in Palestine Delegation to Israel and Palestine. Sponsored by American Muslims for Palestine (AMP), Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), and Presbyterian Peace Fellowship (PPF). See p. 5

August 7 - 18: Presbyterian Peacemaking Program Travel Study Seminar to Guatemala and Costa Rica will focus on peacemaking, climate justice, and faith in Central America. (presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/travel_study/)

Fall 2017: Colombia Accompaniment Training. Stony Point, NY. Date TBA. (colombia@presbypeacefellowship.org)

Sept. 26-29: Presbyterians for Earth Care 2017 Conference. Menucha Retreat Center on the Columbia River, OR. (presbyearthcare.org)

November 6 - 18: Presbyterian Peacemaking Program Travel Study Seminar to Madagascar will focus on creation care and reconciliation. (www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/travel_study/)

Support the Water Protectors at Standing Rock

The Water Protectors are asking people to move their accounts from Chase Bank if they have them there. Chase is a big investor in the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL).

Confronting the Crisis in Syria

By Don Mead, Glen Arbor MI

The on-going conflict in Syria has been called the most serious humanitarian crisis of our lifetime. More than 11 million people have been driven from their homes and more than half a million killed, disrupting civil society and civil discourse across the globe. For those who are concerned about the increasing militarization of American foreign policy, Syria may be the central place where that is playing out today.

Those of us committed to the work of nonviolence and peacemaking struggle to sort through the escalating conflict in that region, searching for a vision of good outcomes and a path to reach that goal. My own path through this thicket has involved reading as well as listening to the voices of Syrians, including those of our Syrian Christian partners.

It appears that among the many factions currently actively engaged in the conflict in Syria, there is no single group with any political, diplomatic, or military authority which reflects our hopes for a tolerant society where all voices can live in respectful acceptance of differing points of view. Picking any one of the current contenders, seeking to provide them with the authority and power they would need to “win” in that conflict, is a fool’s errand. It is precisely the attempt by various outside powers to do that, especially through the provision of massive amounts of military force, that has led to the escalation of the conflict. In that framework, the conflict could only be ended by one faction vanquishing all the others on the battlefield. That is an invitation for us to participate in Armageddon.

An alternative approach is built around the idea that our goal as Americans must be to stop the conflict through an escalation of diplomatic efforts to achieve a cease-fire, combined with the withdrawal of all outside military engagement. This combination is what is needed to provide the space needed for Syrians to engage in the serious work of finding the compromises required for a political solution. It is not for outsiders – and in particular, not for us – to seek to impose our vision on that process. Additionally, alongside these efforts to influence US government policy in the region, we must:

- Provide direct assistance to those suffering as a result of the conflict – those displaced within Syria and in the region. We must work to increase the

numbers of refugees admitted to the United States and the support for them.

- Build contacts to encourage and learn from those in the region who are doing the hard and dangerous work of reconciliation.
- Do the hard work of informing all Americans, especially those in the pews of our churches, about the true nature of the conflict.

Here is some of the background and reasoning that leads to these conclusions:

1) The regime first of Hafez Al-Assad and then of his son, Bashar, established a secular state which has generally been tolerant and supportive of Christians and of a variety of different interpretations of Islam, as long as they did not challenge the Assad regime itself. But for those who did challenge the regime’s absolute power, it has been vicious and brutal, using intimidation, torture, mass killings, and barrel bombs on civilian concentrations and hospitals.

2) While the opposition to that regime at the start of the “Syrian spring” included many moderate voices, those voices were quickly joined and overwhelmed by others who were much more radical. Many were from outside the country, and hold a goal of imposing a narrowly defined understanding of Islam on all those under their rule.

3) Another factor has been the Kurds, whose military has been among the most effective in fighting the various groups opposing the Assad government, particularly the Islamic State. But the Kurds also have their own goal of establishing control of land where they could operate as a separate Kurdish state, a goal which is strongly opposed by many Syrians (as well as by the Turkish government).

4) In this situation, there has been much talk in the American media about “moderate” voices. While such “moderate voices” surely exist in Syria, they have had very little influence either in national political dialogs or on the battlefield, and some of them have come to support the Assad government, since they see the alternatives as being even more dangerous and intolerant.

5) The foreign-fueled militarization of the conflict has moved the society sharply away from any outcome based on toleration of diversity. In the field of battle, the on-going availability of weapons feeds the dream

of each group that, with enough military clout, they would be able to gain a knock-out victory. There is also the parallel fear that, if they are the losers in such a battle, someone else would impose their own version of truth on them, so they feel they must build their own military strength to prevent such an outcome. It is this military-based struggle, depending heavily on foreign arms and foreign fighters, which is imposing such major suffering on the people of Syria, while also disrupting other countries around the world through the influx of refugees and the civil strife that ensues as others are drawn into the conflict on their own soil.

The first goal for all friends of Syria must be to exert every effort to STOP THE FIGHTING. The most realistic way to achieve that objective is to work with other regional and international actors to establish a cease fire. This work should include not only the Americans and the Russians but also representatives of Iran, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States, Turkey and other European countries. Such a cease-fire should not be made contingent on resolving all differences, but should be understood as a “halt-in-place” of all hostilities, while negotiations continue about the long-term future.

Realistically, a cease fire is not likely to be achieved as long as outsiders pour large amounts of military resources into the fight, so there must be a parallel commitment to de-escalate military support. Again, this must involve many different countries, of which the United States is a major one. If we were to make a firm commitment to cease our military support and make a strong effort to block all transfers of our weapons to others, that would seriously weaken the justification that others have to match our supplies.

The main goal in taking these two steps together – a halt to the fighting, and a cessation of outside military support to all participants in the conflict – is that together they would provide the space for Syrians to undertake the negotiations to resolve the conflict. It is clear that those will be difficult negotiations, involving people who have been bitter enemies on the battlefield and who have sharply differing visions. Yet it is not for outsiders – including the United States – to seek to impose particular outcomes. Outside intervention has been the path which has led to years of conflict. Many Syrians have said that they can work through such negotiations, if they are given the opportunity to do so among themselves. Difficult as this path may be, it is hard to see any other that will not simply perpetuate the suffering.



Middle East Working Group Focuses on Israel/Palestine and Syria

By Jessie Light, Austin TX

The Middle East Working Group continues to help PPF engage in issues

surrounding the Occupation of Palestine. Several members are coordinating a delegation to Palestine and Israel this summer. PPF has taken delegations to Palestine and Israel several times before (most recently in January 2014), and each one has been transformative for the individuals and for our work. Through our delegations and our work to support the Palestinian call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS), we have learned that this work can only be done in collaboration and relationship with people of other faiths. The delegation this summer will be with Jewish Voice for Peace and American Muslims for Palestine. About 30 delegates from the three faith traditions will travel, learn, build community, and plan for advocacy together.

Last summer, the General Assembly passed a resolution to prayerfully study the call for BDS. We plan to work with the Israel/Palestine Mission Network as well as the Presbyterian Office at the UN to host conversations and dialogues to study this call.

We have also been spending significant time and energy learning as much as we can about the situation in Syria. The human rights crisis, perhaps the worst since World War II, has caused thousands to flee as refugees. PPF helped organize a Global Day of Action and Prayer for Syria in September and has posted items on ISIS and Syria on our online blog. Several members of our group have read *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War* by Syrian authors Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila Al-Shami, and others are planning to read it together.

Would you like to read along with us? Can you host a conversation about BDS in your faith community? Would you like to learn how to support the interfaith delegation to Israel/Palestine? We invite you to join us in this listening for God's call to be peacemakers in this moment.

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PPF Hosts Sanctuary Webinar and Training

By Emily Brewer, New York NY

In these times, we must be "relentlessly imaginative and bold," says Rev. Alison Harrington of Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona. Alison spoke these words to about 100 people who attended a webinar in December called "How to Become a Sanctuary Community 101" that was hosted by PPF, the Synod of the Northeast, the National Sanctuary Movement, and the Community of Living Traditions at Stony Point Center. Alison was a panelist along with Rev. John Fife, former pastor of Southside Presbyterian Church and a co-founder of No More Deaths / No Mas Muertes; Amy Beth Willis, an organizer with the National Sanctuary Movement; and Rev. Jim Rigby, pastor of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Austin, Texas.

The webinar was followed by an in-person training at Stony Point Center in February with over 50 people in attendance. We hope to do more of these, so please check our website for further training. The webinar is online for anyone to watch and use. It can be found by searching for "how to become a sanctuary community 101" on YouTube.

This webinar features panelists who have wisdom and experience in the theological, political, and logistical aspects of offering sanctuary to undocumented migrants. John Fife, who was a part of the movement in the 1980's, speaks of the way that a congregation becomes spiritually transformed through the experience of offering sanctuary, saying that the congregation of Southside may have saved the lives of the families who took sanctuary in their church, "but they saved our souls."

The Presbyterian Church has a history of offering sanctuary to protect the people who our society has deemed "the least of these." And now, in a time when the new president has threatened to deport even more undocumented immigrants than his predecessor did and a time when we have seen escalating violence against migrants, Muslims, LGBTQ people, Jews, and people of color; many Presbyterians are turning to that prophetic legacy for courage and practical advice about how to enact sanctuary in their own contexts.

Alison reminds us in the webinar that "Sanctuary is local," and that work is grounded in relationship with the people who are most affected by US policy – undocumented immigrants. For those of us who are not

undocumented and want to prepare our hearts and our buildings to be more open to our immigrant siblings, we must begin with building relationships and listening to what immigrants say they need.

Organize, Resist, and Mobilize!

By Lora Burge, Chicago IL



Friends, activists, and peacemakers: these are troubled times. The headlines are heartbreaking, policy out of Washington, DC is an abomination, and it seems every day brings up another order or policy needing an immediate response of direct action, calls, and letter writing. The most recent order and direct action has been in regards to the ban on refugees, especially targeting our Muslim brothers and sisters.

I found a t-shirt in the bottom of my drawer recently. In Spanish, the front says: "Organization, Resistance, Mobilization!" The back of the shirt goes on to denounce the then-being-negotiated Central America Free Trade Agreement. I eagerly bought the shirt from a unionized garment shop in El Salvador as an undergrad student over a decade ago. A number of years ago, I tie-dyed it to hide some of the wear and tear.

It hit me this week that this shirt has a renewed challenge and meaning in these chaotic and distressing times. And peacemaking programs like the Colombia Accompaniment Program, born out of a close relationship and partnership with our friends in the Presbyterian Church of Colombia, are absolutely the things we must be doing right now. It's a historic time in Colombia. And these are historic times for our country and communities as well. I hope some of the wisdom and time shared with our Colombian brothers and sisters can inform our newer actions of organization, resistance, and mobilization.

Whether at an accompaniment training, the upcoming Activist Council, or other gathering, I very much look forward to meeting you! And I'm glad we're in this together.

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Gun Violence Toolkit Gets Update

By Margery Rossi, Peekskill NY

The Gun Violence Prevention Working Group has renewed energy and leadership after our September Activist Council meeting. In 2012, PPF created a Gun Violence Prevention Toolkit for use in congregations and communities who want to learn and talk about gun violence and how to prevent it. The toolkit included: statistics and policy information about gun sales and ownership; facts about gun suicides; a theological grounding; and resources for supporting people who are grieving after gun violence. Dozens of people and congregations have downloaded and used this toolkit, and the Gun Violence Prevention Working Group is working now to update it. These updates will include: current statistics, expanded worship resources, and resources for advocacy and activism.

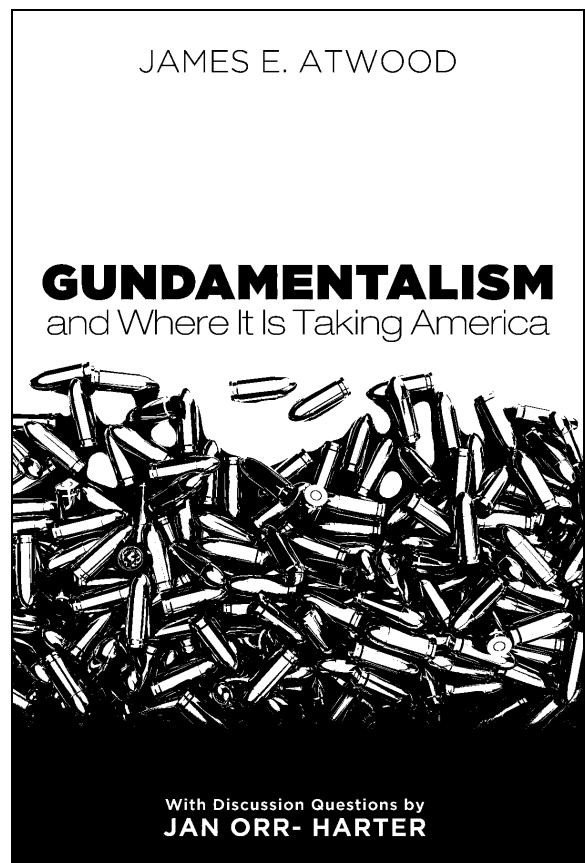
This toolkit will be ready for the spring Activist Council Gathering April 27-29 in Chicago, and we will also have "No Guns in God's House" signs for churches and communities to post on their property. These signs were created as a result of the 2014 General Assembly overture "On Gun Violence Prevention." The GVP Working Group is currently working to make these signs available to Presbyterian congregations, along with strategies for congregations to engage in conversation about gun violence and why a congregation might decide to post these signs on their buildings. We plan to continue these conversations in person at our Activist Council gathering in Chicago (join us!) as well as learn from community organizations in Chicago who are actively responding to the gun violence in their city, and supporting people who have experienced gun violence.

The GVP Working Group is also happy to promote the new book of one of our members, James "Jim" Atwood. Jim's second book, *Gundamentalism and Where it is Taking America*, was just published in January of this year and includes discussion questions, written by another GVP group member, Jan Orr-Harter. Jim is available to come and speak to churches, presbyteries, or other groups, as are other members of this working group who have experience working with congregations around the issues of gun safety and gun violence prevention.

We know that the National Rifle Association is an influential group in national policy. We also know that a majority of people in the U.S. favor more stringent regulations on gun sales and background checks,

and that there are more people who are part of groups like Moms Demand Action than there are in the N.R.A. Although at times it may feel like an overwhelming task to enact safer gun laws in the United States, especially under this new administration, we know that much can be done in local communities, and that churches and people of faith are poised to push for these local reforms. Our new toolkit will offer congregations a variety of "entry points" into the conversation about gun violence, depending on their interest: pastoral care, local activism, political advocacy. We invite all congregations to engage in this critically important issue. In the words of 1 James 3:18: "Let us love, not just in words or speech, but in truth and action."

Gun Violence Prevention Working Group contact person: Margery Rossi, margery0830@gmail.com.



"Jim Atwood continues to challenge our nation's obsession with guns and violence. His critiques offer an opportunity for all of us to reclaim God as an agent of love rather than fear, power, and domination. This book is a must-read for theologians, pastors, activists, seminarians, congregations, and community and lay leaders." – J. Herbert Nelson II, Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Order from wipfandstock.com.



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WINTER 2017

Special Issue: PPF Working Groups
Understanding the Conflict in Syria - p. 4
Register now for Spring Activist Council Gathering
April 27-29, Chicago (see calendar - p.3)

Online Resistance Seminar

By Aric Clark, Portland OR

Every Wednesday, at noon EST, I am hosting an online gathering intended to encourage and prepare you for resisting what Walter Wink called "the Domination System", what Paul called "the Powers and Principalities", what we might simply call "Empire". To begin these seminars we will study Rick Ufford-Chase's book *Faithful Resistance: Gospel Visions for the Church in a Time of Empire*. Each week I will be joined by the various contributors to that book as we examine everything from the Sanctuary movement, to Ecological Theology, to Black Lives Matter, and more. Be sure to purchase a copy of Rick's book here:
<https://unco.us/faithfulresistance/>

To participate in these discussions, all that is required is a device that can watch YouTube videos. The best way to get involved is to join this group on facebook and you'll receive invitations and updates about each week's meeting:
www.facebook.com/groups/ResistanceSeminars/



3/1 - "Resisting the Seduction of Silence" with Alex McNeill
3/8 - "Learning Nonviolence in a Multifaith World" with Rick Ufford-Chase
3/15 - "The Local Congregation As The Locus of Resistance" with Brian Merritt
3/22 - "Theological Education As An Act Of Subversion" with the founders of Underground Seminary
3/29 - "Mission As A Move To The Margins" with Linda Eastwood
4/5 - "Institutional Church As An Expression of Solidarity" with Rick Ufford-Chase
4/12 - "Dismantling The Corporate Church As a Step Toward Liberation" with a guest TBD