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What do we want to spread?

By: Lucy Waechter Webb, Traverse City MI

"Where are we right now? What time are we living in?" This is the question Prentis Hemphill asks every guest on their podcast *Finding Our Way*.

In the height of the pandemic, the racial uprisings of 2020, and increasing fervor around the election, Sonya Renee Taylor, an author and activist, answered: "*We are in a time of infection. A contagious time, where things are spreading, and spreading fast.*" And then she lifted this potent inquiry: "**and so the question is: what do we want to spread?**" This is a critical question for us inside a time of collapse, which is to say, a time of great possibility. What do we want to spread? What do we need to grow and tend so that new ways of being can emerge?

The convergence of collapse inside of 2020 is not burning as hot as it was almost three years ago. And yet the embers of the firestorm of the last few years continue to seethe as we find our way toward what comes next. The fireweed is a plant that thrives after a burn. Its rhizomes can withstand the heat of a forest fire. And after the fury, in the barren ashen soil, this plant spreads quickly, each single plant containing over 80,000 seeds! The pink flowers create a brilliant spread that stretches over the land that is healing.

Our call to abolition as praxis for all we do inside of PPF compels us to offer our attention to what we spread, what we build, what we imagine, what we seed. We know that our work is not only to tear down systems of violence and cultures of power-over, but it is also to build up a world that designs itself around interdependence, collective care and power-with.

For the first time in three years, in the smoldering of this time, the PPF community will gather in person. And when we gather outside Kansas City in May, we will gather around these principles. We will explore our commitment to consensus decision making, learn more about abolition, recommit to organizing for change, and ground all of this in the resilience of relationships and beauty of the land. We will weave strong roots, provide shelter and care, access resilience, allow for beauty and awe, anticipate transformation, embrace emergence and invite cross pollination.

We will...be like fireweed. We hope you join us!

**Activist Council Gathering May 7-10, 2023
The Heartland Center Kansas City, MO**

You can register at: bit.ly/PPF-in-person

All are welcome whether you have joined the Activist Council or not

See COVID protocols on the registration page

A Peacemaker's Calendar

March 2 - 30 – Guns to Gardens Action Circle on Zoom. Learn how to intervene in gun violence by turning unwanted guns into garden tools. Thursdays 12:30 pm ET. (See p. 7) Register at www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence

March 16-18 – Just Creation Conference: Shalom for Our Common Home. Focused on environmental justice, theologians, scientists, artists, and activists will reflect on how the church moves forward in a time of precipitous climate change. Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur GA. Info at ctsnet.edu/about-us/the-columbia-conference/

April 1-7 – Nevada Desert Experience Sacred Peace Walk, an interfaith journey of approximately 60 miles from Las Vegas to the Nevada National Security Site (NNSS, formerly the Nevada Test Site, still used for nuclear weapons testing) through the Great Basin Desert in Nevada, on the beautiful traditional lands of the indigenous Western Shoshone and Paiute peoples. Info at nevadadesertexperience.org

April 9 – Easter Sunday – He is risen indeed!

April 22 – Earth Day 2023 – “Invest in Our Planet”

April 25-27 – Ecumenical Advocacy Days 2023, a virtual conference to worship, educate, and advocate for the innovative and courageous policies needed to realize God's promise of peace. Our theme is "Swords into Plowshares: Achieving Enough for All & Pursuing Peace." Info at advocacydays.org

April 28-May 7 – Native Lands of the Southwest: The Doctrine of Discovery and its Legacy Today. Presbyterian Peacemaking Program Travel Study Seminar to New Mexico and Arizona. Info at presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/travel_study/

May 7-10 – Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Activist Council Gathering. Join us as we recommit to organizing for change at the Heartland Center in Kansas City, MO. Register at bit.ly/PPF-in-person (see p. 1)

June 2-4 – Wear Orange for Gun Violence Awareness Sabbath

June 10 – Guns to Gardens National Safe Surrender Day. If your church or presbytery plans to participate or if you need assistance, please contact Deanna Hollas deanna@presbypeacefellowship.org



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A Peace Agreement for Korea

By Linda Russell, Presbyterian Peace Network for Korea Co-convener

The Korean War has not ended. The armistice agreement signed in 1953 by the United States, North Korea and China, established a ceasefire but no resolution to the conflict and division. The Korean Peninsula has remained in a war-readiness posture ever since.

While tensions have waxed and waned over the past 70 years, the current geo-political situation finds North Korea on the one hand, and South Korea and the US on the other, engaging in increasingly provocative actions following increasingly hardline and inflammatory rhetoric. Joint US/South Korea military exercises and the deployment of additional US military personnel and weapons to the peninsula were met by increased missile launches from the North. This might seem like a less than optimum time for successful peacemaking efforts. Yet, this is exactly the time that world leaders most need to hear strong voices from grassroots organizations and individuals.



How you can help:

- Educate yourself and others about the Korea situation. Share the story of no peace agreement, the potential for ever-escalating tensions and reactions, and the need to replace the armistice with a peace agreement. For a comprehensive rationale visit <https://koreapeacenow.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Path-to-Peace-WEB.pdf>
- Participate in the global **Korea Peace Appeal** (KPA) signature campaign as unanimously approved by action of the 225th General Assembly. This campaign seeks to influence world leaders to establish a peace agreement in the Korean Peninsula to replace the current armistice. The goal for PC(USA) is 30,000 signatures. Sign the appeal and ask others to sign. For information on the KPA visit <https://en.endthekoreanwar.net/>
- Ask your session/mid-council/or other judicatory for an opportunity to introduce the KPA. Secure permission to gather signatures. An English brochure can be found at <https://en.endthekoreanwar.net/posts/84>
- Gather signatures of friends and colleagues outside of church connections.
- Post the KPA campaign on social media accounts with an invitation to sign the appeal.
- Pray, and include prayers for peace on the Korean Peninsula during worship services.

Note:

- Signatures may be submitted on-line or via a special PC(USA) signature sheet. Visit www.presbyterianmission.org/koreapeaceappeal for information and instructions. When submitting online, be sure to indicate PC(USA) in the "Affiliation" line. Signers do not have to be members of a Presbyterian church.
- To hear from our mission co-worker in South Korea, visit <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/missionconnections/letter/appealing-for-peace/>

The Presbyterian Peace Network for Korea (PPNK) invites and encourages readers to join us in heeding the gospel call to be peacemakers and to sign and promote the Korea Peace Appeal. Thank you. (Contact PPNK at peacenetworkforkorea@gmail.com)

Report from Ukraine: “Victory is a word of politicians and pundits.”

By Ellen Smith, PCUSA Regional Liaison for Central and Eastern Europe

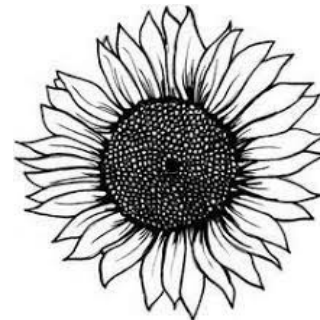
In the months before February 24, 2022 and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, I watched the many ‘specialists on the region’ predict with certainty what would happen and increasingly in the days moving up to February 24, argue the need to supply weapons. A few still argued that diplomacy was an avenue. The statements from the press, the think tanks and even the White House seemed provocative, forgoing any chance for further diplomatic efforts. The war struck me as madness. None of the partners I was speaking to in either Ukraine or Russia believed that an invasion would take place. The war is madness and the ‘pundits’ were correct.

I have spent the last two weeks traveling between partners in Hungary, Czechia, Ukraine and Poland. Traveling in a group representing both World Mission and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, we were exploring the response of our partners in each country to the massive movement of peoples, both refugees and IDPs. At nearly a year into the war, the efforts have shifted from emergency response to integration, focusing on education (including language acquisition), job prospects, and psychosocial care. For the government of Ukraine, they do not want their people integrated, because they want them back. With the damage to infrastructure in Ukraine, however, online education from Ukrainian schools is proving very difficult without electricity and living in limbo is impossible, so some level of integration is essential.

For me, personally, I also needed to hear our partners’ thoughts on the weapons being sent from the West. From the beginning, I have been troubled by this, because more weapons mean that more soldiers die. The ugly reality is that it is not just the soldiers that are dying. The number of civilian casualties is shocking. A Ukrainian partner commented early on that soldiers don’t bring peace, politicians do, but the brutality of Russia’s invasion has moved the conflict beyond diplomatic solutions. There is no trust in Russia’s words and there is no diplomatic solution without trust.

In each country, in private conversations with partners, the answer was the same. For now, the weapons are absolutely needed. Ukraine is fighting for its survival and if Ukraine loses, every-

one wonders who will be the next victim of Russia’s aggression. One partner, who enjoys westerns, compared the situation to an old west film with the sheriff as the good guy, the peacekeeper, protecting his town from the outlaws. Without his pistol, he could not protect the people of his community. Driving from the border of Ukraine to Lviv, I asked our driver his thoughts. He was very clear. They will not survive without the weapons being sent. He did add that he thinks the military industrial complex will maintain war someplace, whether in Ukraine or another country, indefinitely. I was most interested in hearing from a long time Ukrainian partner, who I have always known as a peacemaker. I shared my struggles with him as a pacifist. As another pacifist, he shared that he is doing those things he hates, supporting the soldiers defending his country – supporting them with food, medicine, and other needed supplies (though not weapons). He sees their sacrifice and knows that there is no alternative. In further reflections, he added that the West has sent millions of dollars in weapons, expended on the battlefields in just moments. Ukraine needs food also. The situation is dire.



I hear many comparing this war to World War II, watching for signs of Russia’s utter defeat and humiliation. I watch, concerned that the end of this war (not yet in sight) could be more like World War I, with Russia regrouping to attack again. Our partner in Czechia said it is very important at the end of this war, that we help Russia, help them to move toward democracy and inclusion in the global community. May we not forget the quality of mercy.

I have come away from Ukraine angry at the silence of our Russian partners. I know why they remain silent. The crackdown in Russia against anyone who would speak out against the war has been brutal. Soviet times taught them what it takes to survive –

silence. Nothing is new. The German people largely chose silence in World War II. Fear is a powerful tool for a regime, as is propaganda. It is easy for us to judge. It helps nothing. We cannot choose a sacrifice for others. Many have chosen it for themselves and ended up in prison or in exile. The Russian people are victims too, but their homes are not being decimated. I hold on to words shared by a Ukrainian psychologist, Alla Soroka, who did a webinar for Presbyterian youth early in the war. Questions were sent in ahead of time to be translated. The last question was from a young woman in California who asked how she could pray for Alla, beyond prayers for peace. Alla's response was, "pray that our hearts remain soft." Anger and hate are destructive. May we hold on to our capacity to feel, to care and to respond with love, even when it hurts and it would be easier to be angry and to condemn. I do condemn the war, but who am I to condemn the individuals caught up in this nightmare, all the victims of Russia's aggression, including the Russians themselves. More wisdom from our Ukrainian partner: victory is a word of politicians and pundits. It has no meaning in the reality of war. May there be peace.

Towards an Abolitionist Future

By Dexter Kearny, Longview WA

Presbyterians are called "to be a community of love, where sin is forgiven, reconciliation is accomplished, and the dividing walls of hostility are torn down." (F-1.0301) We are told to pursue the Great Ends of the Church where we "[exhibit] the Kingdom of Heaven to the world." (F-1.0304) With this call in mind, Presbyterians for Abolition (PFA) formed to help dismantle systems of oppression, such as policing and prisons, and build up new systems of community care, addressing harm, and reconciliation. This is the call of abolition.

Presbyterians for Abolition began in 2021 after a group of us participated in the Defund the Police and Abolition learning and praxis circles hosted by PPF. We wanted to continue to invite others with connections to the Presbyterian tradition into conversation and action around abolition. We have continued to meet on a regular basis to dream of ways we can accompany those who are incarcerated and provide energy and resources to those who have been on the front lines of prison ministries and abolition organizing for decades.

We took our first public action in 2022 when we organized a fundraiser to support three organizations – Solidarity Building Initiative, Voices of Jubilee, and Hagar's Community Church – which work with people affected by incarceration (both on the inside and outside of prisons). We accomplished our goal of raising \$10,000 through our event, An Evening of Abolition Art and Testimony, and ongoing engagement of Presbyterian institutions and mid councils.

As a new group, we are continuing to organize and plan our goals and future actions. We currently have a strategy/leadership team that meets monthly to discuss our purpose and actions. Our goal is to create a space of belonging for people of faith seeking abolition by moving minds, moving people, and moving money. In the near future, we hope to have regular gatherings for people interested in asking questions about abolition as well as an educational series to help increase individual and communal knowledge and actions towards an abolitionist future. Finally, we hope to have more fundraisers in the future as we attempt to shift institutional wealth towards frontline abolitionist work.

To learn more about us and get engaged check out our LinkTree at: <https://linktr.ee/presbyteriansforabolition> where you can sign up for our mailing list, Facebook page, and find a short worksheet for educational purposes.

We are so grateful to be part of the larger PPF community as we engage in dismantling systems of death and oppression and work together to build up new ways of thriving and living.



What does it mean to be a PC(USA) Peace Church?

By Scott O'Neil, Presbyterian News Service

The Presbyterian Mission Agency's Militarism Working Group held its first Connecting the Dots webinar in 2023 on January 25, discussing what it means to be a Peace Church within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Moderator Ben Daniel, pastor at Montclair Presbyterian Church in Oakland, California, opened the session by noting that talking about what it means to be a Christian in a time of war is an important conversation to have.

Tongue in cheek, Daniel shared his personal experience with a "brilliant" sermon he preached to his congregation back in 2003 opposing the invasion of Iraq by U.S. forces. He came to realize after the fact that his timing was poor. "In the fallout of that experience, I realized that regardless of how good the sermon was, it was too late for me to start talking about the war when our country was already at war. So, I am glad we are having this conversation whether or not your congregation decides it wants to be a Peace Church or you're just here to listen and share," said Daniel. "Let's start having these conversations while our country is not formally at war."

Mark Davidson, pastor emeritus at the Church of the Reconciliation in the Presbytery of New Hope in North Carolina, provided background on the denomination's discernment process between 2010 and 2016, which spanned three General Assemblies beginning in 2012. In 2018, commissioners approved an overture to recognize and commend those churches who had declared themselves Peace Churches.

Marilyn White, a ruling elder at Faith Presbyterian Church in Austin, Texas, shared her congregation's journey to becoming a Peace Church, noting that the church did not have a curriculum to follow like there is currently. "We were kind of on our own, but we emphasized sharing personal beliefs about militarism and nonviolence. Our goal was to create our own statement of what we believe and then see if that made us a Peace Church or perhaps something else," said White.

Daniel also shared his congregation's experience becoming a Peace Church, which began in 2016 and culminated on Sunday, November 11, 2018, marking the 100th anniversary of the end of WWI.

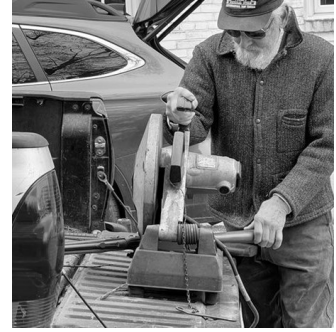
"It took us two years of really rich conversations and I'm grateful those remain important discussions," said Daniel. "I don't think we (as a congregation) are 100% in agreement and have members who just see things differently. The idea of being a Peace Church is a living thing for us. The conversation did not stop in 2018."

Before delving into a Q&A session from participants, Geoff Browning, a retired campus pastor and parish associate at First Presbyterian Church in Palo Alto, California, shared a survey he developed called the Inventory of Conscience. According to Browning, the survey was an outgrowth from confirmation classes for young people.

"As young people going through confirmation class, talking about Jesus, nonviolence and justice are all concerns. But how can we really know what we believe about the use of violence if nobody has done anything to help us discern?" asked Browning. Through the Inventory of Conscience process, about six young people have declared themselves conscientious objectors in the PC(USA). "This is not a process whereby we force them (young people) to believe one thing or another," said Browning. "It's to help them identify what they believe and encourage them to follow their conscience."

The Connecting the Dots webinar series examines militarism from a variety of perspectives through a lens of Christian faith. Prior webinars have covered topics such as national security in Colombia and Korea, gun violence, violent conflict and climate change, and militarism and moral injury. Future webinar topics include Colombia and Militarism and The Economy. Previously recorded sessions can be viewed on the Connecting the Dots webpage. The Presbyterian Mission Agency's Militarism Working Group includes the Compassion, Peace & Justice and World Mission ministries and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship.

Reprinted with permission. View the article and listen to the recorded webinar at presbyterianmission.org/story/what-does-it-mean-to-be-a-pcusa-peace-church/ Learn about Peace Churches at presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/becoming-a-peace-church/



Gun Violence Prevention News

By Jan Orr-Harter, Aledo TX

Winter was no match for Americans who are weary of gun violence and determined to do something about it. On December 3 to December 10, from a frigid church parking lot in Cambridge, WI to a rainy day in Decatur, GA, church members and others fired up their chop saws to join the new Guns to Gardens movement. Above, members of Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church in Shepherdstown, WV offer a "Blessing of the Saw" liturgy before the chop saw operator dismantled unwanted guns. Safe Surrender events were held in Albuquerque, NM, Cambridge, WI, Decatur, GA, New Haven, CT, Shepherdstown, WV, Sandy, UT, Worcester, MA and Louisville, KY. Additionally, the Tulsa, OK Metropolitan Ministry held their first Guns to Gardens event on Nov. 12 and the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany in Euclid, OH offered an art show of works created by blacksmiths with gun parts.

Altogether, 542 unwanted firearms were dismantled. Many were semiautomatic weapons. "It was so good to feel that we could do something," said Presbyterian Soni Castleberry at the Safe Surrender event at Douglass Blvd. United Church of Christ in Louisville, KY. "In our city, there has been a murder almost every day in the last month. Guns to Gardens is something we can do to make a difference." The Louisville event united many congregations: Baptists, AME, UCC, Presbyterian churches, the Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky --- and a Jewish blacksmith who will turn the dismantled gun parts into garden tools and jewelry.

**June 10 Next National Guns to Gardens Day
PPF Action Circle March 2-30**

Join PPF's Guns to Gardens Action Circle on Thursdays March 2-30 at 12:30 ET. So far, PPF has shared Guns to Gardens with 175 Action Circle participants from 88 congregations and 9 denominations. Explore Guns to Gardens!

See www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence

3 Hours on Zoom!!! GVP Working Group Annual Planning Day

On Dec. 29, the Peace Fellowship's Gun Violence Prevention Working Group held a 3 hour Zoom planning "retreat" with activists from NY to CA, plus a Texas leader of MOMS Demand Action and PPF's Interim Executive Director David Ensign. We reviewed our work over the last year, especially efforts to grow the Guns to Gardens Movement and successful advocacy for the first federal gun violence prevention legislation in over 30 years. At last year's planning retreat, we had noted that "the gun violence prevention movement seems paralyzed." This year we noted a huge growth in activism. One member said, "It's becoming more main-stream to want to reduce gun violence." Of course that surge in activism came in a year of 620 mass shootings and over 47,000 gun deaths in 2022. We must do more.

Plans affirmed for 2023, inspired by the new PPF Vision Statement:

- 1. Continue to support Gun to Gardens*
- 2. Continue to encourage congregational action through our E-News, Congregational Toolkit and the witness of Rev. Deanna Hollas*
- 3. Participate in the PCUSA "Presbyterian Decade to End Gun Violence"*
- 4. Infuse all our advocacy and action with a greater spirit of imagination and humanity through these themes: art, music, youth, survivors, gardens, tools, healing and alternatives to violence.*

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Winter 2023

Podcasts for the Journey

The Chris Hedges Report Podcast: Covering US foreign policy, economic realities, and civil liberties in American society.

Recent Episode: "There Are No Permanent Allies, Only Permanent Power"

If we do not build left-right coalitions on issues such as militarism, health care, a living wage and union organizing, we will be impotent in the face of corporate power and the war machine. chrishedges.substack.com/podcast

Benders of the Arc: A podcast about adventures in bending the arc of social justice by Rev. Geoff Browning, Peacemaking Advocate of the Presbytery of San Jose and a member of the PPF Executive Committee.

Recent Episode: "Christianity, Nonviolence & War"

A reprise of a webinar that the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship produced in March of 2022 in response to and out of concern for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. bendersofthearc.com

A Matter of Faith: A collaboration between the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program and Unbound, the Interactive Journal on Christian Justice. Hosts Simon Doong and Lee Catoe address issues of faith, social justice and church life.

Recent Episode: "Migration Accompaniment"

With special guests Susan Krehbiel, Associate for Migration Accompaniment Ministries, and Emily Wilkes, Mission Specialist for Domestic Refugee Ministries, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. amatteroffaith.buzzsprout.com.

CodePink Radio: Robust conversation with global grassroots peacemakers, from Yemen to Venezuela to Iran to right here in the U.S.

Recent Episode: Ukraine & China: Diplomacy Now! codepink.org/radio