

... BRIEFLY

Be Bold: Nonviolence Works

Vol. 77 Spring 2021

presbypeacefellowship.org @presbypeace

COVID Global Cease Fire Ends Violence Erupts in Israel and Palestine, Colombia, United States

In 2020 PPF's Peace Church Working Group promoted the Global Cease Fire called for by the Secretary General of the United Nations: "There should be only one fight in our world today, our shared battle against COVID-19." That cease fire has certainly broken with unprecedented violence in Israel and Palestine, brutal government violence against Colombian civilians and the highest level of US gun violence in many years.

As we go to press, a cease fire is holding in a bleeding and battered Israel and Palestine. Certainly the efforts in Congress to halt approval of U.S. military sales to Israel played a part in pressing Israel to agree to a cease fire. In the 11 day war, the Israeli military killed 248 Palestinians in Gaza and Hamas killed 12 people in Israel. Many of the dead are children. In the U.S. a substantial level of anti-Jewish violence has erupted.

According to the nonpartisan Gun Violence Archive, there have been 225 mass shootings in the U. S. in 2021 so far, each killing four or more people. Meanwhile key Republicans in the Senate plan to close ranks against universal background checks on gun sales.

See page 3 for an update on the violence in Colombia.

PCUSA Mission Co-Worker Douglas Dicks, who has lived and worked in the Holy Land for more than 20 years, said the level of violence is unprecedented, compared to anything he has seen there before.

"The sheer hatred and outright rage that both peoples are visiting upon one another, especially in what was considered the 'mixed cities,' where Arab and Jewish co-existence was by and large accepted and tolerated, has been shocking," Dicks said. "But the thin veneer of tolerance and co-existence has now been exposed. Individuals and gangs have been taking the law into their own hands, carrying out extreme acts of hatred and violence towards the other. It's as if a civil war has erupted in the streets. People are shocked and frightened as this situation continues to unfold and play out."

Act Now: Background Checks

Please, if you only take one action today, call on your US Senators of either party to support the Gun Background Check bills that have been stalled in the Senate for nearly 3 months. Reach Senators at www.senate.gov

While these bills have been stalled, approximately 10,000 US citizens have died from gun violence. ***Now is the best chance for gun reform in a generation. Please act now and encourage others to act.***

These life-saving bills are:

--**HR 8 The Bipartisan Background Check Act of 2021**, requires background checks on all gun sales, including online and gun shows. HR 8 has already passed in the House of Representatives.

--**S 529 The Background Check Expansion Act**, introduced in the Senate with the same goals as HR 8.

--**HR 1446 The Enhanced Background Check Act of 2021**, closes the "Charleston Loophole," which now allows gun sales to proceed unchecked if a background check takes over 3 days. HR 1446 has passed the US House. It is essential to preventing domestic abusers from buying guns during risk protection orders.

Gun Violence Awareness Days June 4-6, 2021 Wear Orange!

1. Post Photos to #WearOrangePPF & #WearOrange
2. On Sun. June 6, share PPF's new Minute for Mission on Gun Violence Prevention.

See presbypeacefellowship.org/gvppmm



3. Write letters June 4-6 to support Gun Background Check bills above.

4. Find local June 4-6 events at momsdemandaction.org

From Our Director

As I write this, it has been one year since George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis Police. Since then, the US has seen people in small towns and large cities pouring into the streets day after day to demand change. The central demand: defund the police.

Led by Black organizers and visionaries, this call to defund police and invest in community has taken root in the United States. It has been challenging to some, confusing to others, inspiring to many, and a combination of those things for a lot of us, PPF included. That's why PPF committed to a six-month deep focus to learn and act on defunding the police.

From July 2020 thru February 2021, PPF engaged hundreds of Presbyterians across the US in a book club, action circles, and praxis circles. Here are just a few reflections we've had through the deep focus and the evaluation of that deep focus:

1. Many of us--especially white folks--want to feel like we fully understand a topic before we take action on it, especially if it feels controversial. But we also all recognize that the Gospel calls us to act, and doing that in community and with support from each other makes us more courageous and creative. PPF can continue to serve as a network for people to support each other as we seek to be courageous and act for change in our communities. *(Cont. Page 8)*

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A Peacemaker's Calendar

May 30-June 6 PPF Co-sponsors the Alternative Migrant Trail Walk. AZmigranttrail.com

June 4-6 Gun Violence Awareness Sabbath.

Wear Orange and take action for Background Checks!

Share PPF's **June 6** Gun Violence Prevention Minute for Mission, a message from PPF's Deanna Hollas, at

presbypeacefellowship.org/gvpmm

Special thanks for the Minute for Mission idea go to Riviera Presbyterian Church in Miami, FL.

June 5-8 PPF and Fossil Free PCUSA Delegation to #STOPLINE3. Led by indigenous groups, this interfaith nonviolent action seeks to stop the construction of a tar sand pipeline in Northern Minnesota. For info, contact abby mohaupt at awmhaupt@gmail.com Amplify this action on social media! Use **#StopLine3**

June 25 at 1PM ET Virtual Coffee Hour with PPF's Colombian partners. Register for this unique opportunity at presbypeacefellowship.org/events

June 16, 8pm ET Virtual Report from the Stop Line 3 Delegation. Register at <https://tinyurl.com/2fduhbah>

Aug. 6 & 9 Hiroshima and Nagasaki Days.

Aug. 16-23 In the Aftermath of Catastrophe.

Presbyterian Peacemaking Program Travel Seminar to Puerto Rico, on the political, social and racial dynamics exposed by catastrophes and how the church responds. Presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/travel_study/

Sept. 1 Barstow Driver Award. PPF honors Cheryl and Doug Hunt, activists for gun violence prevention, Colombia and more. presbypeacefellowship.org/events

Sept. 24-Oct. 18 International Peacemakers Tour.

In person and virtual, with global mission partners from Nigeria, S. Sudan, Fiji, Rwanda, Madagascar, Palestine, Mexico, Malawi, Cameroon, and Greece.

presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking

Sun. Nov. 28 Keep Awake: A Call to Preach Palestine. PPF encourages pastors to "preach Palestine" on the first Sunday of Advent. Find sample sermons, music, art, litanies, prayers and more at fosna.org/keepawake

March 20-April 1, 2022 Mosaic of Peace 2022.

Presbyterian Peacemaking Conference in Israel/Palestine, focusing on witnessing for peace and wholeness in a land called "holy." Register at Presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/travel_study/

June 18- July 9, 2022 225th General Assembly.

Three weeks, some virtual and some in Louisville, KY. See pages 4 and 7.

Violence in Colombia

Colombia Updates:

The best way to find weekly news and actions you can take on the strife in Colombia is through the Washington Office of Latin America at wola.org

WOLA

Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas

You can also follow Colombia news on the PPF Facebook page facebook.com/presbypeace

PPF will host a virtual Coffee Hour with our Colombian partners on Fri. June 25, 1pm EDT. This is a rare “face to face” opportunity to hear directly from the Presbyterian Church of Colombia and other human rights leaders. Register at presbypeacefellowship.org/events

As reported by the Presbyterian News Service and others, peaceful protests against a multi-billion dollar new tax on food and other necessities in Colombia in April were met with excessive and violent military action against civilians. In cities from Cali to Barranquilla, many of the dead and wounded are students and youth.



Protesters take to the streets in Medellín, Colombia. (Photo: Edwin Dávila)

“Although [President] Duque has withdrawn the tax plan, people continue to protest the government’s failure to implement the peace accords or address the killing of community human rights leaders, and its general disregard for the needs and well-being of

average Colombians,” says PPFer and PCUSA World Mission Co-Worker Rev. Sarah Henken. Sarah serves as peace initiative promoter with the Presbyterian Church of Colombia (IPC).

“They are now also protesting the violent repression,” Sarah Henken continues. “The world is rightly outraged at the brutal repression unleashed by the Colombian government on its citizens as they exercise their right to protest. Presbyterians in the United States and around the world are asked to join with our partners” in the IPC “to speak out as people of faith to renounce the violence of the Colombian state, urge meaningful dialogue and negotiations with concerned sectors of society and defend the sacredness of life.”



A protest sign in Medellín reads, “Neither terrorists nor delinquents, students with awareness.” (Photo: Edwin Dávila)

PPF received this statement from Rev. Diego Higuita, General Secretary of the Iglesia Presbiteriana de Colombia:

In the name of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia we raise our cry, together with the Colombian people, in support of the Peace that does not only mean the rejection of the use of force and arms. We cry out for justice for the people whose lives have been taken, who have been disappeared, raped, or jailed for demanding their rights. We plead that the Colombian government stop these violent initiatives and by dialogue fulfill their obligation to care for and protect the population in their legitimate right to protest. We cry out in support of a people who resist a further load of unjust taxes and who see in the political and ruling class scandalous acts of corruption that go unpunished.

Fossil Free PCUSA

Join a Working Group for Divestment from Fossil Fuels in the PCUSA!

It's time to start organizing for the next General Assembly, June 18 – July 9, 2022 ----and for those important months leading up to the Assembly when commissioners are studying the issues.

In a partnership with PPF, Fossil Free PCUSA has three teams working throughout the denomination to get our beloved church to put our treasure where our hearts are. Those teams are:

1. Organizing in presbyteries
2. Organizing in the Board of Pensions
3. Organizing in communications.

Choose your team here:
<https://tinyurl.com/4sdatp4s>.

Learn more at fossilfreepcusa.org

Questions? Contact FFPCUSA Co-Moderator
Liv Thomas at livthomas2512@gmail.com



Have You Joined the PPF Activist Council?

The Activist Council gathers virtually and in person to encourage one another in the work of nonviolence in our local churches and communities and to set the direction of PPF's work. We don't act alone. We help one another.

We have grown in our ability to be in community through virtual technology. Activist Council members live all over the United States. We are all ages, with many backgrounds and areas of interest and expertise. **You** are needed to help us move forward toward a world of nonviolence.

The ABCs of the Activist Council are: **A**ffirm the nonviolence of Jesus, **B**e active in PPF, **C**ontribute each year as generously as you are able.

We welcome you!

More info at presbypeacefellowship.org/activistcouncil

Barstow Driver Award 2021 Cheryl & Doug Hunt

Each year PPF celebrates the witness of peacemakers through the Anne Barstow & Tom Driver Award for Excellence in Nonviolent Direct Action in Retirement. This year the award honors Cheryl and Douglas Hunt of Stockton, CA, both retired educators. Cheryl and Doug inspire us all with their determined activism on gun violence prevention, Colombia Accompaniment, action against fossil fuels and for a world healed and renewed.



Their gun violence prevention work began after the first school mass shooting in 1989 in their town of Stockton, CA. With an automatic assault rifle, a gunman killed five Asian-American children and wounded 32 others in three minutes. The shooting led to a

state ban on assault weapons and a national ban from 1994-2004. Today Cheryl and Doug serve on PPF's Gun Violence Prevention Working Group. They participated in PPF's 2020 Walk for a Fossil Free World and are active in partnerships in Colombia for water wells, COVID relief and more.

The top photo shows Cheryl and Doug at their church, First Presbyterian Church of Stockton, CA, a community of activists in partnership with communities in Colombia. Photo below: Cheryl, center, and Doug, right, at GA with other PPFers.



Named for longtime PPF activists Anne Barstow and Tom Driver, the Barstow Driver Award virtual event will be held on **Wed.,**

Sept. 1. The keynote speaker will be Kathryn Fleisher, Executive Director of Not My Generation, which empowers young, diverse activists in the work against gun violence and for youth advocacy.

Register, contribute and find an interview by Tamara Razzano with the Hunts on their activist journey at presbypeacefellowship.org/events

Defunding the Police

by Alison Wood, Tucson, AZ

As we close our deep focus on defunding the police, PPF Accompaniment Coordinator Alison Wood reflects on a world without policing. Alison is a facilitator, advocate and educator rooted in the U.S./Mexico borderlands. In addition to coordinating PPF's Colombia and border-area Accompaniment, she coordinates the Tucson Borderlands Young Adult Program. See other reflections at presbypeacefellowship.org/blog

ACCOMPANYING EACH OTHER INTO A WORLD WITHOUT POLICE



Three months into pandemic I stood up from a Zoom meeting and headed to the back porch to take a sunshine break. Just outside the

back door, I interrupted a man in the process of stealing my housemate's bike. Locking eyes with him over the handlebars, we both froze. "Uh, can I help you?" I asked, my brain totally blank. He started talking to me, still holding onto the bike. In that moment, all I could think was *oh crap – this is it – if I don't support policing, I can't call the police – what do I do? What do I do?*

For white folks, this might sound familiar. Calling the police is the easy way to answer the persistent *What do I do?* that can echo in our heads in dangerous or uncertain circumstances. There are very few accessible institutional alternatives to policing in most places. White women like me often call the police because we're uncomfortable and afraid. I know that calling the police does not actually make me safer (since police do not prevent harm, only respond to it), and the involvement of police actively harms my Black and Latinx neighbors.

Not having any idea what to do as an alternative to policing, I fell back on what I know: accompaniment. I used what I've learned in accompaniment training to calm my body and try to take action with my best self instead of my panicked lizard brain. I took deep breaths

and focused on how my feet met the ground. Still talking to the man on my porch, I slowly pulled out my phone and called as many people as I could think of who I thought would be nearby, available, and understanding of why I was choosing to respond to this moment without police.

Accompaniment with PPF takes place in spaces where safety has been disrupted or destroyed. Our accompaniment partners in the Presbyterian Church of Colombia (IPC) and Agua Prieta, Mexico have practiced keeping their own communities safe for decades (for some, generations). They know intimately what it costs to choose not to meet violence with violence. The leaders who allow us to accompany them have made commitments to nonviolence, to building peace both in the "what" of their work and how they carry out that work, building peace for the long term and refusing violence now. In building alternatives to policing in our own communities, and seeking to abolish the police in the United States, PPF has a chance to live up to their example.

It is clear that total system change is needed, to build a world in which many worlds fit. But what do we do in the meantime? What do we do in the now, on our back porches, while we're working to compost the current world and grow something new?

I believe we can relearn old lessons from accompaniment to help us in this new purpose:

- A critical first step in knowing how to respond to uncertain situations is being able to deescalate ourselves – redirect our energy away from lizard-brain fight/flight/freeze responses and into calm, values-driven, strategic responses. When we are centered and grounded, we can stay in the uncertain moment and make choices from a place of clarity and care instead of panic. This is especially important for white people; most of us have been taught that police = safety, and have been trained for decades to call 911 as a first response. When we embrace abolition and nonviolence, we need clear space in our hearts and minds to counteract that programming and actively, intentionally choose nonviolent responses.
- There is power in community. Accompaniers are trained to stick together, to support each other. Sticking together – the buddy system – being part of a group – however we think about it, being with other people who share our commitments helps us feel supported in our active choice of nonviolence. Being with someone else can help us feel safer, can perhaps keep us safer in certain circumstances, and can allow us to process feelings with each other (which, again, helps us make good choices!).

- While our grounding values and strategies are the same, the practice of safety will look different in different places. Accompaniment as carried out by PPF is rooted in antiracism, non-violence, partnership, physical presence, and the prioritization of local leadership. That local leadership means that the specific practice of accompaniment in each place is different depending on the context. Listening to local experts, responding to local needs, making the most of local resources – all of these things that shape accompaniment responses are key to shaping alternatives to policing, too. We can learn from other places (like PPF learned from our accompaniment experience in Colombia to begin accompaniment in Agua Prieta), but the new structures and communities we grow to keep each other safe will look different in different places.
- Direct action is important in the now, and fuels advocacy for a better future. Accompaniers are asked to share their experiences with legislators and change makers, to support moving the world toward safety for all. It's a both-and: we need something different now, this moment, even as we create a new system.

This is true for the church leaders in Colombia who ask for accompaniment to deter day-to-day violence while they are building peace with justice after 70 years of civil war;

for human rights defenders on the US border in Mexico who ask for accompaniment to keep violence away from where they are freely giving abundant hospitality to people in transit and advocating for policy changes;

even for me, standing on my back porch in the first pandemic summer, committed to abolishing the police in favor of alternatives and needing help in the meantime.

Within ten minutes of making phone calls, three other people were standing with me on the back porch – accompanying me in an uncertain situation. I didn't feel magically safer, or protected; my friends didn't say much or stand between me and my visitor. Instead, I did most of the talking. Standing with other people helped me slow my breathing and stay present in the hardness. I felt supported in working through what was happening to a safe end for everyone.

The most important thing we can learn from accompaniment is the simplest: another way is possible. It is possible to manage uncertain, precarious-feeling situations without falling back on militarized responses (carried out by armed guards, perhaps, in our partners' contexts – carried out by armed police or armed neighbors here in the US). It is possible to train ourselves to respond differently in a specific moment, to get a different kind of help, and to create a different world.

It is much easier, for a white person, just to call the police. Even in this magical accompaniment experience I'm writing about now, I kept thinking, *Oh God, this is so hard. This is so hard. This is taking so long. How do we make this work? This is so hard.* Some alternatives exist already (here's a non-comprehensive list of things communities are trying); many many more will need to be created. We will need to practice staying in our bodies during discomfort, hanging in for the hard work of creating the world we want to live in. Accompaniment offers one way for us to live into that new world before it exists. To truly create safety for all, we must create a world in which it is easier not to call the police, in which the easy answers do not rely on violence.

Special thanks to Ashley Bair

Ashley completes her work this month in coordinating PPF's deep dive and Praxis Circles on defunding the police. Thank you, Ashley!

See the Pentecost Bible Study that Ashley led for PPF at <https://youtu.be/CF65NDVmz9k>

Teresita Bustamante Ospina

¡Presente!



PPF grieves the loss of Teresita Bustamante Ospina, who died in early May in Colombia. Teresita was a leader in the Iglesia Presbiteriana de Colombia and great friend of the Colombia Accompaniment Program, often hosting accompaniers in her home in Barranquilla. We join the chorus of prayer for her family--her husband Germán Zárate and her children

Laura and Alejandro especially--and we celebrate her life as we grapple with the news of her death. May we all be blessed by her memory and witness.

2022 GA News

by Marilyn White, Austin, TX

Many Presbyterians were disappointed when the 224th virtual General Assembly referred almost all overtures and reports to the 2022 GA. When COVID-19 made travel and large gatherings impossible, online plenary sessions were planned quickly to process only essential business such as budgets and elections.

The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA) has approved a docket for the 225th GA with a hybrid model: in-person committee meetings and online plenaries held over a three week period from **June 18 - July 9**. Once planned for Columbus, Ohio, the in-person meetings will now be held in Louisville. The GA will open with online worship, moderator election, and organizing business. Then four committees will meet in-person for three days. This will be followed by three more groups of four committees meeting sequentially for three days. The final week of the assembly will be online plenary sessions to act on the committee reports. In the past, GA committees held open hearings. Next year there will be a process allowing for views of "interested parties" to be considered, possibly by recorded messages. We hope that the voices of people with traditionally less access to the General Assembly (working people, youth, impacted communities) will be heard.

If your presbytery submitted an overture to the 224th General Assembly, it will now be considered by the 225th GA next summer. Many of the issues raised in these overtures have become even more critical during the months they have gone unaddressed. **The time to plan for strong advocacy is now! Consider contacting your presbytery's nominating committee and asking to be nominated as a commissioner.**

See the referred business at pc-biz.org. Search for items for the event "224th General Assembly." The referred items begin with the numbers "02." The numbers will change as they are assigned to 2022 committees.

PPF sees several overtures that can be strengthened with support from more presbyteries: **Fossil Fuel Divestment** (02-126), **Israel/Palestine** (02-116), **Colombia** (02-004), **Nonmilitary Conflict Resolution** (01-115), **United Nations** (02-006), **Gun Violence Prevention** (02-025), and **Sanctuary & Accompaniment** (02-111). If your presbytery has not yet concurred, your session can ask that one or more of these be passed in an upcoming meeting. You can update them with additional rationale or rewrite to include new actions.

If your session or presbytery acts on these or any other overtures to the 225th GA, please let PPF know at info@presbypeace.org, so that we can include them in our peacemakers' guide to General Assembly, coming to the PPF website later this year.

Gun Violence Prevention

Testimony at the Texas Senate in May by PPF's Deanna Hollas

Good afternoon, my name is the Reverend Deanna Hollas and I am representing myself and over 90 faith leaders from across Texas who have come together in opposition to House Bill 1927.

We are part of the 81% of Texans who oppose permitless carry. As faith leaders, we are the ones who bury the dead, who pray with, console, and counsel grieving families, and who are present everyday in the communities that are shattered by gun violence and ***we have had enough.***

Our houses of worship are often targets, yet we know that more guns won't make us safer. In fact, laws like HB1927 that dismantle our permitting system and allow anyone to carry a gun in public with no regards for a background check or training, threaten ***our right*** to safely gather for worship and to practice our nonviolent religions.

This law will do nothing for safety. It will put more money in the hands of those who profit from the blood and trauma of families who are needlessly impacted by gun violence.



Senators, you have the opportunity to show moral courage - to show that you truly are pro-life - that you care about the people of Texas - including the children - children who are now more likely to die from gun violence than any other cause of death. You can show the people of Texas that you care more about their lives and their right to life than you care about gun industry profits by voting against HB 1927.

In the Bible, the prophet Isaiah says in chapter 32 that a righteous government will usher in an era of justice and prosperity while those that are wicked and deceive the people with lies will suffer curses. As governmental leaders, the choice is yours if Texas will be blessed or cursed. Thank you

Permitless Carry in Texas is expected to become law.

(Director, Continued from Page 2)

2. If we're serious about changing systems of violence--and we are!--our goal is not to learn, then act, then reflect. Our goal is to learn, act, reflect all at the same time, adapting and changing as we go.
3. The call to defund the police and invest in community intersects with all the issues PPF has been intimately involved in for much longer, including gun violence prevention, accompaniment, ending war.
4. While the call to defund the police is a national one, the specifics of how that happens are unique to each local context, and include moving funding away from policing and to other systems and programs that support real care and safety.

One year after George Floyd's murder, the call to imagine and create something different is still urgent. Over 1,000 people have been killed by police since May 25, 2020. As a group that has been committed to the abolition of war and militarism for over 80 years, PPF comes to this work of abolishing and defunding the police with a history of working to create safety that doesn't rely on violence or the threat of violence.

We come to this work seeking to follow the lead of the people who are most directly impacted by police violence, knowing that people of faith are called to be part of social movements that demand something new, something closer to what we call the Kingdom of God. We come knowing that the US spends billions of dollars supporting militarized police here, just like we spend billions of dollars supporting police and military in Palestine and Colombia and other places. We come knowing that none of this makes us safer. We also come knowing that part of our work is self-reflection and learning new ways of being that are antiracist. We come ready to change, ready to risk, ready to support and challenge one another, ready to pay attention to what is emerging and how we are being called to help create the Kingdom even when we cannot yet fully imagine it.

In Christ, Rev. Emily Brewer, Executive Director



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Defund the Police
Deep Dive Reflection

Gun Background Checks
Act Today! See p. 1

Write your Senators at
US Senate Washington DC 20510