Dear Committee on Environmental Justice,

Greetings from the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship as you prepare to serve at the 225th General Assembly.

The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship and Fossil Free PC(USA) have been collaborating since 2014. Working together, we are advocating for the church to do everything we can for creation care and climate justice at this General Assembly. It has been a long road to get to this General Assembly!

Your Committee on Environmental Justice has received several similar overtures, many of which urge the denomination to divest from fossil fuels in some way. Your task is historic. Commissioners will want to be watchful of conflicting language and actions. Many of these overtures will require quite a bit of amending in order to agree with one another. We are praying for the energy and stamina of the Environmental Justice Committee and the General Assembly as you consider creation!

Any action to reduce the impact of climate change is also an action to reduce the human violence that will result from a less habitable world. Because reducing violence is the focus of our work, we offer a few comments here. Thank you for reading.

As you act, have courage! And have a great experience in this hybrid GA. Please call on us if we can help or join the Facebook community: presbys following GA225

Sincerely,
Rev. David Ensign, PPF Interim Executive Director
info@presbypeacefellowship.org

PPF SUPPORTS the following items of business:

[ENV-02] “Investing in a Green Future” Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy Report. This ACSWP report commemorates prior environmental justice work of the General Assembly through the 1990 “Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice” action, and provides additional intersectional discussion regarding environmental justice and racism as well as economic justice. PPF supports this item.

[ENV-07] “On Fossil Fuel Divestment” is the overture written by Fossil Free PC(USA). This overture has the support of 30 presbyteries and other mid-council bodies and represents nearly a decade of grassroots witness in the PC(USA). It calls upon our denomination and its financial institutions to: immediately stop new investment in the fossil fuel industry (including exploration, extraction, and production of coal, oil, and gas); categorically divest any current holdings in the same; and encourage the Board of Pensions and Presbyterian Foundation to invest in renewable and/or efficient energies. It is time to put our treasure where our heart is and stop investing in our own destruction and devastation of God’s creation. PPF has long supported this item.

[ENV-10] “Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) Response to 223rd General Assembly Directive on Environmental Policy” can be passed alongside [ENV-07]. This report explains the careful and methodical work of MRTI and specifically adds five companies to the General Assembly Divestment list: Chevron, ExxonMobil, Marathon Petroleum, Phillips 66, and Valero Energy. PPF supports this item.
ENV-11 “On Protecting the Diversity of Creation” sets goals for protecting lands and waters, mitigating the effects of climate change, and supporting biodiversity, all while acknowledging the harms of colonization and industrialization. It lifts up the sovereignty and wisdom of indigenous peoples and encourages our denomination to do this work as individuals, congregations, and through agencies like Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Office of Public Witness. PPF supports this item.

These four business items contain conflicts/concerns that can be best resolved by passage of the four other previously supported items:

ENV-01 “On Learning About and Starting the Process of Divestment” asks individual congregations and presbyteries to divest from fossil fuels. This does not conflict with [ENV-07] or [ENV-10], but we note that it does not replace or answer the call for categorical divestment at the denominational level.

ENV-05 “On Reducing the PC(USA) Carbon Imprint” raises the important work of reducing waste and impact, and invites different councils and agencies to develop their own best practices. Some of this can certainly be accomplished by reducing our investments in and use of fossil fuels; the Presbyterian Mission Agency recommendation to survey our denominational carbon impact would contribute to the actual measurement and enforcement of this work. Nonetheless, this important work does not replace or answer the call for categorical divestment at the denominational level.

ENV-08 “…Cherish Creation, Cut Carbon, and Speak Up” can be answered with action approving [ENV-07], which represents the voices of many presbyteries and other governing bodies over many years, and [ENV-10], which has been affirmed by other denominational offices and advisory committees.

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns and the Racial Equity Advocacy Committee all offer comments on [ENV-08]. They suggest acting on [ENV-02] as well as [ENV-10]. PPF suggests passing [ENV-02] and [ENV-10], which can be done alongside approving [ENV-07].

[ENV-09] “On Actions in Support of an Energy Transition” While there are many good aspects of this overture, such as intentional support from the General Assembly to presbyteries where fossil fuel industry jobs are prevalent, this overture conflicts with many of the other overtures. PPF agrees with the comments from the Presbyterian Mission Agency, the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns and the Racial Equity Advocacy Committee: this overture does not adequately answer several others in this committee. It complicates the approach of Mission Responsibility through Investment (MRTI), which is more clearly stated in [ENV-10]. PPF recommends answering overture [ENV-09] with passage of [ENV-07] and [ENV-10].