Dear Committee on Race and Gender Justice,

Greetings from the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship as you prepare to serve at the 225th General Assembly. For Presbyterians, justice is a critical requirement for true peace. That’s why justice is essential for fulfilling our Christian calling to be peacemakers.

Throughout our country’s history, race and gender have been used to target attitudes, actions, and policies of hatred and oppression. Unspeakable violence has been inflicted by Americans upon other Americans of color, upon American women, and upon Americans of non-standard gender identity. Jesus stood alongside those who were most impacted by systems of oppression, and calls the disciples to do the same. Justice requires that the blessings of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness be guaranteed to all people, regardless of their race or gender.

The Committee on Race & Gender Justice has an opportunity, in giving prayerful consideration to the items of business before you, to lead the Presbyterian Church to fulfill more nearly our calling to promote justice and become instruments of peace.

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

The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship
SUPPORTS:

[RGJ-04] A Resolution for Trans Women of Color
[RGJ-04] calls on the General Assembly to recognize and honor the trans women of color from the United States whose murders were recorded in 2020-2021, and calls on the six agencies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to engage in a variety of actions designed to remove oppression of transgendered persons in the church and in the larger society. Because this overture was initially drafted for the 224th General Assembly in 2020, some edits are necessary. For instance, the overture calls for including the Transgender Day of Remembrance in the (PC)USA planning calendar, which is already now being done. With those minor edits in mind, PPF resonates strongly with this overture’s affirmation of trans women’s lives, dignity, and right to safety. PPF recommends approval of [RGJ-04] with appropriate editing for timeliness.

[RGJ-08] On Offering an Apology to African Americans for the Sin of Slavery and Its Legacy
[RGJ-08] offers an apology on behalf of the (PC)USA for the church’s complicity in the system of slavery within the United States. [RGJ-08] offers a number of helpful actions to extend the spirit of apology and reconciliation throughout the denomination, including preparing a curriculum to bring about the “spiritual change” needed for repentance and reconciliation. This overture will need thoughtful consideration to ensure the actions it brings about are meaningfully engaged across the denomination, and are not inadvertently delegated as more work for Presbyterians of color. If engaged prayerfully and thoughtfully, this overture has the potential to demonstrate recognition and repentance of the sin of racism. Such action has become especially necessary in a cultural climate that seeks to whitewash our national sins. PPF recommends approval of [RGJ-08].

CONT. OVER
[RGJ-10] Resolution on Race, Reparative Justice, and the (PC)USA
[RGJ-10] proposes the creation of a Task Force on Reparative Justice and the PC(USA) to study and make recommendations concerning the issues of restorative justice and reparations. This includes calling on Mission Responsibility through Investment (MRTI) to make antiracist policies a focus of corporate engagement with corporations in which the church has investments. The actions recommended within [RGJ-10] would lay the groundwork for incorporating antiracist commitment as a baseline for our professional actions as well as our theological reflections, a holistic embodiment the denomination’s antiracist conviction. PPF recommends approval of [RGJ-10].

[RGJ-12] Report and Recommendations from the Special Committee on Racism, Truth and Reconciliation

CALL TO REPENTANCE

The PC(USA) cannot move forward without looking back and cannot tell its history apart from White supremacy. Our denomination originated on this continent with colonization and provided theological justification for the Doctrine of Discovery and slavery. Our church buildings (some built with, funded by, or endowed from slave labor) inhabit stolen land. Our still largely-segregated worship services prefer liturgies of order and decency over liturgies of disruption, silencing those on the margins.[3] Our polity and structures privilege long-held power and institutionalize the elevation of White voices. Our wealth is inequitably distributed, regularly bypassing Black, Brown, and Indigenous pastors and churches. We are timid in joining voices of protest against injustice and resist dismantling our own institutional racism.

History always involves turning points—times of decision; opportunities for repentance, repair, and transformation. We listened to examples of when the PC(USA) missed those opportunities or turned away from calls for justice (“Middle Way” theology around slavery, lack of meaningful response to the Black Manifesto or the Report of the Committee on Reparations, and failure to confess at Reunion). Our wealth is inequitably distributed, regularly bypassing Black, Brown, and Indigenous pastors and churches. We are timid in joining voices of protest against injustice and resist dismantling our own institutional racism.

The challenge for the Church, at every level from pew to Louisville, is to interrogate its own history and its tools—structures, polity, process, institutions, liturgy, finances, worship, mission programs, curricula, theology, and so on—that history might regard our time as a turning point of repair and not resignation, of resurrection and not return. PPF supports [RGJ-12].

Who we are:
Founded in 1944, the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship is a nation-wide community of over 3200 Presbyterian households who believe that Jesus calls the church to help reduce war, violence and exploitation in the world. We are a non-partisan group, open to all Presbyterians, funded by our members, many of whom have been mission workers across the world, past General Assembly participants and activists on war and peace issues in our churches and communities.

Except for a small staff, we are volunteers whose time and participation in GA is given freely. We do not work for or represent any government or outside lobby group. We see divestment as a tool for peacemaking. And we see climate change as the greatest threat to peace ever. 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. To us, this is nonviolence at work, a movement of the spirit. Be Bold! Nonviolence Works.