



... BRIEFLY

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

Vol. 70 Winter 2014

www.presbypeacefellowship.org ppfwitness@presbypeacefellowship.org
Trusting the Nonviolence of Jesus Christ Today

PPF Delegation Backs MRTI Call for Divestment

By Rick Ufford-Chase, PPF Executive Director

Twenty-eight Presbyterians - artists, musicians, students, church leaders and activists - spent twelve days in January traveling in the Holy Lands and meeting with nonviolent activists from Israel and Palestine. The trip was organized and led by the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship.

Omar Barghout, a leader in the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement, called on the Presbyterian Church to divest itself of stock in companies that support or benefit from the Occupation "What we are asking for is hardly heroic," Barghout said. "We just want your church to stop paying our oppressors to oppress us."

WallRami Elhanan is an Israeli who lost his fourteen-year-old daughter in an attack by a suicide bomber. He is also the son of an Auschwitz survivor and he lost his grandparents in the Holocaust. Reflecting on the madness of the conflict between Israel and Palestine, he beseeched the delegation: "Please don't stand idly by... I am asking you not to be pro-Israel, nor pro-Palestine, but to be pro-Peace."

Moments later, Bassam Aramin, his Palestinian partner in the Parents Circle of the Bereaved Families Forum, whose ten-year-old daughter was killed by Israeli border guards reminded the group of the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

Over and over, among young Israeli Jews, Palestinian Christians, Israeli Palestinians, and Palestinians in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank, the refrain was the same. "You have the power to force the State of Israel to make a change of direction it will never make on its own. Please support our nonviolent struggle by engaging in boycotts and divestment and supporting strategies that will force Israel to be a country that conforms to basic standards of international law and respect for human rights."

Palestinian businessman Sam Bahour asked Presbyterians to commit to investing in the Palestinian



economy and also to provide leadership in the movement for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions. "Investing in our economy is an act of resistance that helps Palestinians not to give up," he said. "But don't be fooled into thinking that it will help us to end the occupation. BDS is an important tool for that."

At the Tent of Nations, just southwest of Bethlehem, Amal Nasser repeated the refrain over and over again. "Help us to break the cycle of violence," she said. "Help us to break the cycle of violence."

The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship stands with Israelis and Palestinians who are committed to nonviolence. We call on the Presbyterian Church (USA) to show leadership in the international movement for Boycott and Divestment from companies that are supporting or benefitting from the Occupation of Palestine.

The Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has found three corporations—Caterpillar, Hewlett Packard and Motorola Solutions—not in compliance with General Assembly policy on socially responsible investing and will recommend to the 221st General Assembly this summer in Detroit that these corporations be added to the denomination's divestment list until such a time as their corporate activities are found in accordance with policy.

...BRIEFLY is the newsletter of the

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...**BRIEFLY** is funded entirely by gifts from our readers, members & friends. Send donations, address change/ subscription needs to MaryAnn Harwell at our Stony Point office. Write to the editors at: Jan Orr-Harter PO Box 930, Aledo, TX 76008 JanOH4@aol.com 817-291-3952 and Marilyn White 2705 Edenwood Dr Austin, TX 78745 marwhite@igc.org 512-450-2766.

A Peacemaker's Calendar

March 13 - 17, 2014 – Colombia Accompaniment Training at Stony Point, NY. Contact Jess Hunter-Bowman at colombia@presbypeacefellowship.org

March 13-16, 2014 – National Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath Weekend. Participating is as easy as incorporating a prayer, hymn or homily into your regular service. Find resources and pledge your church's participation at <http://marchsabbath.org>

March 21, 2014 – Compassion, Peace and Justice Training Day, Washington DC. Sponsored by the Washington Office of the PC(USA) at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. Register online at presbyterianmission.org/ministries/washington

March 21 - 24, 2014 – Come to the 12th annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington DC and join hundreds of other Christians in "Resisting Violence, Building Peace." Keynote speakers will include John Dear and J. Herbert Nelson. See the list

of 50 workshops and register online at advocacydays.org

March 30 - April 4, 2014 – SOA Watch Days of Action, Washington DC. For schedule and organizing packet, see www.soaw.org/take-action/april

April 28 - May 10, 2014 – Presbyterian Peacemaking Conference in Israel/Palestine. A few spaces are still available - call (800) 728-7228 x8700

June 13 - 21, 2014 – 221st Presbyterian General Assembly in Detroit, MI. Celebrate PPF's 70th anniversary at the Peace Breakfast on June 18 with Medea Benjamin! For information about volunteer opportunities, email ga@presbypeacefellowship.org

Conflict resolution class developed in Texas

The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, in partnership with Mission Presbytery, continues working on the development of a seven week course on the constructive handling of conflict. Last year (2013) working with three pilot congregations in the Austin-San Antonio, TX area, PPF organized and structured a curriculum. This year, in a second phase of the Project, PPF is recruiting and involving an expanding cadre of instructors as the project moves into another three congregations in the Texas Hill Country. Two members of Mission Presbytery who are both on PPF's national committee, The Rev. Phineas Washer and Elder Marilyn White, Peace Advocate for the presbytery, are taking the lead in engineering this promising project. As you read this, an estimated one hundred and twenty-five Presbyterians have participated in this course.



Germán Zárate and Jairo Barriga of the IPC (Colombian Presbyterian Church) working with Jess Hunter-Bowman of PPF on plans for the Colombia Accompaniment Program in 2014. They send "muchos saludos" to former accompaniers and others that care about Colombia.

Presbyterians Attend Meeting in Beirut, Lebanon, Called by the Synod of Syria and Lebanon

By Pauline Coffman, Oak Park, IL

About twenty Presbyterians from the U.S. attended a Consultation called by the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL), January 14 – 16. The meeting was followed by a bus trip to a Syrian Refugee Camp near Zahle, Lebanon, and to Damascus, Syria.

Why? Because the Synod churches are in a crisis situation, generated by the conflict in Syria. They asked their church partners and friends to help them review their planned response to the needs of displaced persons inside Syria and refugees that have flooded Lebanon (and Jordan, Turkey, and other countries).

We met at the Dhour El Shweir Conference Center in the hills above Beirut. Joining us were delegates from the Outreach Foundation, USA, Sweden's Uniting Church of Sweden, Action Chretienne pour l'Orient, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and the Free Churches of England, plus Lebanese and Syrian pastors and Synod leaders.

We heard from many voices, including Dr. Ahmad Musalli, political science professor at A.U.B. who specializes in Islamic fundamentalism. Although Wahabi and Salafi militants are a small percentage of Islam, they pose a major threat in countries like Syria where their aim is to destroy the state and rebuild it as an Islamic state, he said.

Another voice was that of Mohammad Sammak, veteran leader in the Christian-Muslim Dialogue group, started in Lebanon in the late 1990's to bring together laypersons from many faith groups to get to know each other and to support interfaith dialogue and friendship. They now work to establish such groups in every Arab country in the Middle East.

We heard the pastors from Syria and Lebanon describe their frustration with the pledge of nonviolence. "Is it right to advise our communities not to defend themselves?" asked one pastor. He later agreed that non-violence is the only Christian response. All the churches pour their efforts into serving the needy. They provide money for rent and fuel to encourage Christians to remain in Syria, and do what they can to serve the hungry, the widows, the orphans, and the needy.

We visited a Syrian Refugee Camp near Zahle, Lebanon, where about 12,000 people live in UNHCR dwellings. As we walked among them, children and their parents poured out to greet us. We saw the inside of their dwellings and heard their frustration of living in the camp, many since 2011.

Our planned visit to Damascus took another turn as we heard that President Bashar Al-Assad of Syria had invited us to meet with him. After consulting with the Synod lead-

ership, we accepted the invitation and were ushered into his presence on Saturday morning where he invited us to "dialogue" with him. We thanked him for protecting minorities, including Christians, in Syria, and pressed for peace and a strengthening of democratic institutions. He has not heard from anyone claiming responsibility for kidnapping two Bishops of the church (Bishop Boulos Yazija, head of the Greek Orthodox Church in Aleppo, and Youhanna Ibrahim, head of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Aleppo). He does know where the 18 nuns from Maaloula are being held, along with some girls from the home there, but does not want to press for their release until he has news of the Bishops. Maaloula, a Christian village high up in the hills above Damascus where Aramaic was still spoken, is completely empty since rebel forces invaded the city, looted its churches, and kidnapped some of the residents.

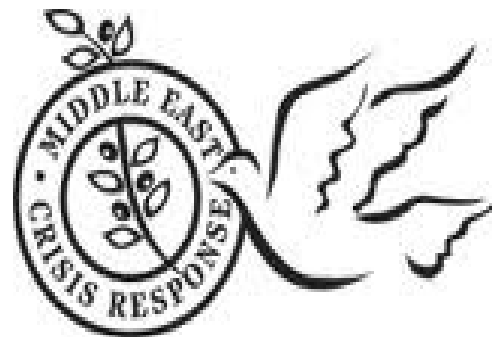
When asked about the Palestinian refugees who are starving in the Yarmouk camp south of Damascus, he claimed that an aid convoy two weeks earlier was fired upon. We heard later that aid convoys did reach the camp that afternoon.

The situation in Syria is complex, with 18 militia groups fighting both the government and each other. If you are following the peace negotiations currently underway in Geneva, this is not surprising news.

The Consultation friends and partners issued a statement that summarizes what the Synod considers its priorities in the continuation of its relief work.

PC(USA) folks present at the Consultation included World Mission and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance staff, as well as representatives of the Presbyterian Foundation and the Outreach Foundation. To restart the Syria Lebanon Network, a meeting is scheduled for April 3 – 5, 2014, at Louisville Theological Seminary for all those interested in participating. Contact Pauline Coffman, at p.coffman@sbcglobal.net if you want to receive information about the meeting or would like a copy of the Consultation statement.

Pauline Coffman is Temporary Convener of the Syria Lebanon Mission Network of the PC(USA).



Presbyterians Participate in Vigil to Close the SOA

By Marilyn White, Austin, TX



Communion service at the gates of Ft. Benning

For the 17th straight year, the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship participated in the November rally and vigil at the gates of Fort Benning to call for closing the School of Americas/WHINSEC. The weekend was filled with vibrant witness as the gathering of thousands participated in both traditional and creative new actions.

On Friday evening Father Roy Bourgeois, SOA Watch founder, was honored at special gathering marking the 30th anniversary of his first action at the SOA. After learning that Salvadoran soldiers were being trained at the school in 1983, Father Roy and 2 other activists dressed in military uniforms, drove onto the base, and climbed a tree near the SOA housing unit. High in the branches of the tree, they turned on a boom box and played a recording of the last sermon of Oscar Romero. The words of Romero, in Spanish, rung out in the night, pleading with the soldiers to stop the killing. To mark the anniversary, Roy was presented with a tree and a short play about the creative act of civil disobedience was performed. Following the presentations, a concert by the SOA Watch Musicians Collective paid tribute to the late singer-songwriter John Fromer, who had performed annually for many years at the vigil.

For the first time, a Peoples Movement Assembly (PMA) was held on Saturday morning. As part of the PMA, hundreds of movement activists gathered in small groups and discussed questions about the role of nonviolent direct action in the context of an increasingly militarized prison system. SOA Watch activists are taking the

discussion back to their communities. The questions that we are focusing on are: is there a need to shift to other creative ways of continuing the tradition of direct action? What are your thoughts on nonviolent direct action and prison witness considering both our movement's history and today's context? The other main question focused on our grassroots organizing strategies. The conversations will continue in local communities around the country.

Dozens of workshops were offered on Saturday evening. One of the best-attended was the one offered by the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship on "Moral Injury: When a soldier betrays his or her sense of what's right, under orders." PPF National Committee member Bill Galvin and Maria Santelli, Executive Director of the Center for Conscience and War, led a discussion that was attended by about 50 people who were eager to learn about moral injury and its consequences for individuals, families, congregations, and communities.

On Sunday, November 24, thousands walked in a solemn funeral procession and commemorated those who have been killed by SOA/ WHINSEC graduates and U.S. militarization. The procession transitioned into an upbeat celebration of life and resistance, after Oscar Romero's last sermon was blasted through the stage speaker system, and a banner with our message and thousands of soap bubbles crossed over the barb-wired fence. None of the bubbles were arrested for crossing onto the base.



Pete Seeger performed often at SOA Watch vigils at Ft. Benning. (Photo by Tom Bottolene)

The seriousness and importance of the Sunday morning witness was underscored by the news that two Honduran campesinos were killed the previous evening as they returned from an election training. Both victims had official electoral duties for Sunday's election. They were ambushed by masked gunmen with high caliber weapons as they returned home on foot. They died immediately from the shootings. The incident occurred between 7:30 and 8:00 pm, in the community of Carbon, in the Cantarranas Municipality. Maria Amparo Pineda Duarte was the elected President of the Cooperative. Julio Ramon Maradiaga was an active member. The community is the site of an ongoing land struggle in the area, and both victims were active members in the LIBRE party.

Following the Sunday morning memorial vigil, activists continued to enjoy performances by musicians and puppetistas and to network with the many peace groups who were tabling at the vigil site. The Reverend Christine Caton led a moving communion service at the gate, which has been a PPF tradition for several years. As we returned - from the gate to our information table, we noticed a helicopter flying very low directly overhead. In fact, there were three very low flyovers by the Columbus police department helicopter. The first of the three flyovers brought little more than some dirt and papers being raised into the air. However, flyovers two and three caused disruption and damage. The aircraft flew low enough to raise and upturn tents, scattering books, information papers, food, and merchandise all over. This incident joins a long history of harassment by the Columbus police, which in the past has included unprovoked arrests, metal detectors and searches, and fencing the permitted gathering area. Since the City of Columbus profits from tax revenue by the annual SOA event, PPF brings its hotel dollars to the nearby community of Phenix City, Alabama.

Why do we participate in this event every year? The SOA/WHINSEC is a U.S. taxpayer-funded military training school for Latin American soldiers, located at Fort Benning, Georgia. At least 11 Latin American dictators have attended the SOA, and leaders of infamous Central American death squads are among its graduates. SOA graduates are currently involved in the repression campaign against Honduran social movements, which started in 2009, following the SOA graduate-led military coup.

*Ain't Honna
Study War
No More*

Don Beisswenger receives Coffin Award

By Christine Caton, Waterford, CT

I recently had the privilege of attending the award ceremony for the William Sloane Coffin Award for Peace and Justice at the Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut. This year's recipient was the Rev. Donald Beisswenger, a 1957 graduate of the divinity school and a long time National Committee member of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. Also in attendance was Don's wife, Judy, and his daughter, as well as another National Committee member, Jean Marie Peacock.

The Coffin Award is given in honor of the life and ministry of William Sloane Coffin, former Chaplain of Yale University and one of the 20th century's most significant religious leaders. The recipient of the Coffin Award is to be someone who shares Coffin's passionate and prophetic witness, a courageous devotion to the dignity and worth of all persons, and who has made a notable contribution to the work of peace and reconciliation.



Don Beisswenger (right) with National Committee members Jean Marie Peacock and Christine Caton.

Don Beisswenger certainly fits that description. Don has, throughout his life and ministry, taken very seriously the Gospel of Matthew's charge to take care of the poor, the hungry, the stranger, the sick, and those in prison. Don's courageous stand took him to prison for six months for crossing the line onto the grounds of Fort Benning, Georgia, while advocating for the closing of the School of the Americas.

He and Judy reside in Nashville, where he worked in theological field education at Vanderbilt Divinity School for almost thirty years.

Don has and continues to be a tireless advocate for those with no voice in our society. It was a joy to be with him to celebrate with him as he received this prestigious award.

Will Your Presbytery Send a Peace Overture to General Assembly?

By Marilyn White, Austin, TX

The 221st General Assembly in Detroit will decide the fate of a substantial list of overtures and reports on peace and justice issues. As peacemakers concerned with the positions the church will take, our advocacy work has already begun. While there is still time to generate new overtures, some important deadlines are approaching. As long as an overture does not amend the Book of Order, it must be submitted from your presbytery to the General Assembly by **April 15** if there are financial implications and by **April 30** if there are no financial implications. (These are postmark dates). The same dates apply to concurrences with overtures that have already been submitted by another presbytery.

The Peace Fellowship's GA team has reviewed and endorsed several overtures which would strengthen the peacemaking work of the PC(USA). If your presbytery will meet before April 15, please take one or more of these overtures to your session or presbytery peacemaking committee to forward to your presbytery. To concur with an overture, use the exact text and title as found on pc-biz.org, Explorer section, with 221st General Assembly selected as the Event. The texts for overtures not yet submitted by any presbytery may be found in the General Assembly section of the PPF website – go to presbypeacefellowship.org, click the “General Assembly 2014” tab and then click the “Overtures” tab.

Concurrences are important! All overtures need at least one concurrence with the originating presbytery. Additional concurrences are very helpful because they will allow multiple overture advocates to assist in presenting the overture to General Assembly. Overtures to support:

1. Drones - Call on all countries to halt the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles as weapons of war for all military, paramilitary, and surveillance activities whether by state-sponsored armed forces or by private groups or paramilitary units or contractors (OVT-044 on PC-BIZ). Additional concurrences are desired.

2. Peace Discernment - Recognize God's call to the church to embrace nonviolence as its fundamental response to the challenges of violence, terror, and war (OVT-031). Additional concurrences are desired.

3. Gun Violence Prevention - Oppose “stand your ground laws,” laws that protect gun manufacturers from legal and financial responsibility for misuse of weapons, and laws that prohibit churches from banning guns on their property (OVT-38). Additional concurrences are desired.

4. Affirming Occupation-Free Investment in Palestine - Affirm our intention to invest in ways that do not contribute to the continuation of Israel's occupation, annexation, or blockade of those areas, with specific attention to the illegal Israeli buildings, settlements, and barriers built on Palestinian land in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. **This important overture still needs originating and concurring presbyteries.** You may find the full text on the PPF website.

5. Reviewing the Two-State Solution in

Israel Palestine – Ask ACSWP to make a recommendation about whether the General Assembly should continue to call for a two-state solution in Israel Palestine, or take a neutral stance that seeks not to determine for Israelis and Palestinians what the right “solution” should be. The rationale is that many Israeli and Palestinian peace activists no longer believe a separate Palestinian state is viable or achievable and now advocate for a single secular state with full democratic citizenship rights for all (OVT-13). **This important overture still needs concurrences.**

6. On Divestment from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions – Recognize that while the 220th General Assembly (2012) called upon the church to pursue only nonviolent investment in Palestine and Israel, we still profit from companies engaged in violent pursuits in Palestine, by providing equipment and materiel supporting illegal occupation, contrary to our church position (OVT-14). Additional concurrences are desired.

There is at least one overture that should NOT be supported. Titled, “Supporting Middle East Peacemaking,” this overture would reject any proposed divestment and economic sanctions against the state of Israel. If you see a motion on your presbytery docket to concur with this overture, please oppose it.

Plan now to volunteer with PPF at General Assembly.

We are looking for committee monitors, people to provide testimony at open hearings, helpers for our Wednesday breakfast, bloggers, photographers, and people who just enjoy running errands. We have information on inexpensive housing for our volunteers! Please contact our General Assembly Witness planning team at generalassembly@presbypeacefellowship.org.

Hardly Heroic

by Aric Clark, Fort Morgan, CO

Sitting in the top floor of the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center in Ramallah we listened to Omar Barghouti incisively dismantle our apathy. "In 2012 at the Presbyterian General Assembly we heard again and again how you have enough problems close to home to be dealing with and how can you possibly make a big impact on Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine? We're not asking you to come here and fight the occupation for us. We're only asking you to withdraw your support for oppression. It's hardly heroic."

Heroism is what they're doing in the West Bank village of Bil'in. The Popular Committee of that community has been organizing weekly nonviolent direct action for years. Every Friday they creatively demonstrate against the separation wall which cut their historic village land in half, confiscating arable land for Israeli settlers. They have dressed in costumes as historical figures known for their nonviolent resistance. They have assembled mock-barricades to impede Caterpillar bulldozers from tearing out ancient olive groves. They have put themselves in harm's way again and again despite the fact that they are met every week by violent military suppression. People are severely injured, even put into a coma or killed by "rubber" bullets that are actually steel balls coated in a thin layer of rubber. They are sprayed with noxious chemicals that ruin clothing, beaten with batons, and bombarded with tear-gas. Even outside the demonstrations they are harassed in every conceivable way: nighttime raids, arrests without charges, detention without trials, steep fines, and curfews.

The community paid a high price in 2009 when one of their most beloved members, Bassem Abu Rahma, was shot in the chest by a metal tear gas canister designed to be launched over 500 meters through the air from about 20 meters. It tore a hole in his chest and killed him. Using these weapons directly on civilians in this manner is against international law, but no soldier has ever been convicted in Israeli court and no one in the international community is doing anything. That weapon, like all the others used to maintain the occupation, was made in the U.S.A..

No, divesting from the corporations that are profiting from the occupation isn't heroic. It's the minimal requirement.

Divesting won't make us heroes but it will make a difference. One thing Omar Barghouti stressed in that interview in Ramallah is how effective the Boycott, Divestment, Sanction campaign (BDS) is proving to be. When boycotts started causing international security firm G4S to lose several major contracts in Europe they sold all their operations in the occupied West Bank. The Israeli government has acknowledged that BDS is already damaging their reputation and limiting their trade options and it is still a young movement. Every voice that joins the chorus

helps build the momentum like a snowball rolling downhill.

Some will tell you that the PC(USA) is too insignificant to matter in this discussion, but Palestinians we are meeting in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Nazareth and all over the West Bank repeatedly assure us they are watching. Our denomination was the first religious organization in the world to begin exploring divestment as a strategy making our actions symbolically significant to the movement. There is a great deal of money and energy being spent by Zionist groups to keep Presbyterians from divesting, which wouldn't be the case unless our decision could have an impact. Boycotts ended Jim Crow. Boycotts and divestment brought down Apartheid. We could have a role in ending this occupation.

We just have to stop supporting oppression. It's hardly heroic. But it is an excellent beginning.



The Prison You Have Created

By Mindy Vande Brake, Saint Cloud, MN

What has led us here?

We are pushed aside

We are separated from our land, houses, and even family

You isolate me from everything I have ever known

This is the prison you have created for me

Walls are being built to keep me out like a prisoner in jail

You have created laws to take away my freedoms and now

I'm being made to go through checkpoints, as if I was a hardened criminal.

This is the prison you have created for me

You tell me where I can travel and when I can harvest my land

This is the prison you have created for me

Why do I deserve this?

I'm just trying to live a normal life but at every turn there is another road block that you have set up for me

Will this pain and suffering ever end for us?

This is the prison that you have created for me.

Arik Clark and Mindy Vande Brake visited Israel-Palestine with a delegation organized by PPF in January 2014.

PPF Announces Grants for Peace Communities

The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship (PPF) has always taken seriously its call from God to be movers and shakers within the PC(USA) and beyond, encouraging one another to participate in God's nonviolent work of love, peace, and justice in the world. Therefore, we are happy to announce our new Peace Communities Partnership initiative.

PPF is seeking out diverse intentional peace communities across the country willing to share our passion for peace and justice. We will fund up to 7 community grants of \$500 per month for one year. Each community will be expected to send two or more members to a national gathering so that we can build our partnership by learning from one another, sharing experiences, and supporting one another. Existing communities, communities soon to form, or communities still being dreamed are welcome to apply. PPF will be accepting applications until March 7, 2014 at www.presbypeacefellowship.org/communities, and will announce the chosen communities at the 221st PC(USA) General Assembly in June.

As we work to strengthen our witness, we are clear that we do not intend to replace local congregations, but to revive our ability to live a vibrant witness to the power of the gospel. We now broaden that understanding by recognizing the many ways to live in Christian community outside of traditional congregational life. We hope to connect with and support intentional peace communities involved in inspiring peace work across the country. So join us in partnering with the many faithful people living in intentional communities, witnessing to the gospel for peace and justice on earth!

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Inside: PPF Delegation returns from
Israel-Palestine committed to work for
Divestment at Detroit General Assembly