

Be Bold: Nonviolence Works

Volume 73 Fall 2017

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MRTI Continues to Resist Categorical Divestment from Fossil Fuel Industry

By abby mohaupt
Moderator of FFPCUSA

I went to Houston on October 9 to meet with Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI), the denominational committee that does shareholder engagement with publicly traded companies in which the Presbyterian Church (USA) holds stock.

As a committee, they have repeatedly resisted categorical divestment from the fossil fuel industry for several reasons, even as they believe that climate change is real. In broad strokes, there is a sense on MRTI that they must be careful to follow their mandate from General Assembly. Some members of the committee think we can't lump the worst actors in the industry in the same category as companies who are "better." If we divest categorically from the fossil fuel industry, some members of MRTI say, we will be shaming members of the PC(USA) who work for the industry, and other members and friends of MRTI have said we might push wealthy congregations in Texas (only Texas?) out of the denomination.

This was my fourth or fifth time attending an MRTI meeting, and I was prepared for at least a deep and complicated conversation that could pit us against each other—and I was exhausted just thinking about it. In the cab from the airport after my early morning flight, I could already feel my need for more coffee growing. I said a prayer to be open-hearted.

But then I stuck my head into the room at the church where the committee was meeting, and my heart leapt. I saw the faces of the people gathered around the table, and I remembered that we each had come to the table with a deep faith in Jesus, a deep hope in the church, and a deep call to respond to climate change.

Members of Faithful Action (a group of Presbyterians opposed to divestment) and I joined members of MRTI at the table. A member of MRTI asked me to talk more about FFPCUSA's recent joining with the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, and I talked about our commitment to working in solidarity with people on the front lines of climate change. A member of MRTI wondered if categorical divestment from the fossil fuel industry



would cause another painful schism in the denomination in which wealthy donors (and faithful Presbyterians) would leave, and I wondered if we could serve both God and money. We talked about the metrics for engaging with companies in the 2017-2018 engagement year, and I said I love them and that I wished they meant MRTI would recommend at least a

few companies for divestment at the 2018 General Assembly. (Instead, MRTI believes they need to give companies a chance to see the metrics and respond to them.) We talked a little bit about why individual action to respond to climate change isn't enough, and that we need to raise our collective voices in addition to doing all the things that the denomination already promotes for caring for creation. I talked about who we're accountable to as a church—that we must be accountable to the lives of people who are already suffering because of climate change.

After the roundtable, we heard from staff at Conoco Phillips (including about their climate change policy)... and I wondered aloud just how little time we have left to respond to climate change. A member of MRTI wondered aloud how long it would take us to wake up and realize that we belong to each other.

It is urgent that we remember that we belong to each other—that we are called by God to love each other and to speak out on behalf of people who suffer. We have so little time to respond, so little time to wait for the fossil fuel industry to change their policies and business model.

As I hugged members of MRTI and Faithful Action goodbye, I said a prayer of gratitude for our shared commitment to work to respond to climate change. And then I said a prayer for courage for our denomination—that we would divest from an industry that has supplied our addiction to fossil fuels. The time is now.

To start the process of concurring with the overture, visit <https://www.fossilfreepcusa.org/overture-2018/>.

A Peacemaker's Calendar



PPF Activist Council members put on FFPCUSA T-shirts to celebrate new partnership.

Fossil Free PCUSA Now A Project of PPF

Fossil Free PC(USA) and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship (PPF) are pleased to announce a formal partnership in recognition of the crucial link between environmental justice and peacemaking. FFPCUSA will now operate as a project within PPF. In this new relationship, PPF will offer FFPCUSA more support in nonviolent direct action, and FFPCUSA will bring a large body of work for environmental justice to PPF—a matter that is closely related to many of the other justice and violence-prevention issues PPF addresses.

The move comes at a crucial time for Presbyterians. The next few months will determine whether several important environmental issues will be on the agenda when the 223rd General Assembly meets in 2018, including whether the denomination as a whole should divest from the fossil fuel industry.

...BRIEFLY is the newsletter of the

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship 17 Crickettown Road Stony Point, NY 10980
presbypeacefellowship.org @presbypeace info@presbypeacefellowship.org

Aric Clark and Shannan Vance-Ocampo, Co-Moderators

Len Bjorkman, Moderator Emeritus

Rick Ufford-Chase, Secretary Dylan Rooke, Treasurer

Ben Heimach-Snipes, Assistant Treasurer

Emily Brewer, Executive Director 929-251-3277

emily@presbypeacefellowship.org

Art Hunt, Deputy Director art@presbypeacefellowship.org

Kathy Dean, Bookkeeper

Lora Burge, Colombia Accompaniment Coordinator

lora@presbypeacefellowship.org

Sarah Prager, Web Content Manager sarah@presbypeacefellowship.org

...BRIEFLY is funded entirely by gifts from our readers, members & friends. Send donations, address changes, and subscription needs to 17 Crickettown Road, Stony Pt NY 10980 Contact the editors at: Jan Orr-Harter PO Box 930, Aledo, TX 76008 JanOH4@aol.com 817-291-3952 & Marilyn White 2705 Edenwood Dr., Austin, TX 78745 marwhite@igc.org 512-450-2766

Nov. 10-12 – School of the Americas Annual Vigil, now at the US-Mexico border south of Tucson. As we protest the militarization of the border, we also call for an end to state-sponsored terrorism and violence against our communities inside the United States. Mobilizing at the border in Nogales is one more way to fight for the closure of the School of the Americas/WHINSEC and put an end to U.S. intervention in Latin America. See soaw.org for schedule. To join other PPFers who will be participating, contact Marilyn White at marwhite@igc.org

Nov. 16-18 – Presbyterian Peacemaking Program Study in Madagascar on Creation Care and Reconciliation.
presbymission.org/ministries/peacemaking/travel_study/

Dec. 14 – Gun Violence Awareness Day and the 5th anniversary of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings in Newtown, CT. Download our free Gun Violence Prevention Toolkit at www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence/resources to access educational, worship and pastoral resources; local organizations to partner with; an order of service for a vigil and for an "Offering of Letters" service; and much more.

April 20 - 23 – Ecumenical Advocacy Days. Join us in Washington for "A World Uprooted: Responding to Migrants, Refugees and Displaced People." As we witness historically high levels of migration, we also find that racism, sexism, Islamophobia, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination are also on the rise in our communities and used for political gain. At the root of this global upheaval and migration are the push factors of violent conflict, climate change, and corruption which often intersect with one another. (advocacydays.org)

April 29 - May 12 - Presbyterian Peacemaking Program Mosaic of Peace Conference in Israel/Palestine.
(presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/mosaic/)

June 16-23, 2018 223rd Presbyterian General Assembly, St. Louis. See page 3 for information about overtures and volunteer opportunities.



We celebrate the awarding of the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) "for its work to draw attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and for its ground-breaking efforts to achieve a treaty-based prohibition of such weapons."

Looking Ahead: The 223rd General Assembly

Join Our G.A. Volunteer Team in St. Louis

Can you join us at General Assembly in St. Louis, Missouri June 15 - 23? We have opportunities for all skills and interests. Help host our two breakfasts, provide testimony on peace and justice issues to committees, or monitor a committee to track overture progress. Photograph our breakfasts and other special events. Help us with our twitter stream, facebook or instagram updates, and blog posts. Help write our issues updates throughout the week. Join us and our progressive partners in planning vigils and other witness events to call attention to the important issue of climate change and fossil fuel divestment. There will also be fellowship events and opportunities to get to know each other better as we work together to strengthen the peace and justice witness of the PC(USA). Contact us today at GA@presbypeacefellowship.org

Young adult Presbyterians who would like to attend the 2018 General Assembly to volunteer with the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship are invited to apply for one of our G.A. Internship positions. Visit presbypeacefellowship.org for more information and an application form.

Overtures: Your help is needed Now!

The actions of the General Assembly provide the foundation of the Social Witness of the Presbyterian Church. Many of these actions are taken in response to overtures from presbyteries, which in turn are generated by the sessions of congregations. PPF is supporting several important overtures to the 223rd General Assembly. Every overture must receive the concurrence of a second presbytery to be considered by the G.A. The process of getting an overture onto the docket can be lengthy, therefore it is urgent that sessions begin to consider these overtures now. Deadlines for presbytery action: overtures with constitutional changes - Feb. 16; overtures with financial implications - April 17; all other overtures - May 2, 2018.

What you can do: Visit the PPF website for the texts of the proposed overtures (presbypeacefellowship.org). Download one or more of them and take them to the Clerk of Session at the Presbyterian Church where you worship. Ask that they be put on the agenda of the next session meeting. Attend the session meeting to answer questions. If approved, your clerk will forward them to your presbytery, where they will be placed on the docket of a presbytery meeting. Let us know if you need information and tell us how the votes go in your congregation and presbytery. (Contact ga@presbypeacefellowship.org.)

Overture on Fossil Fuel Divestment

In July, Hudson River Presbytery passed unanimously "On Directing the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation to Divest from Fossil Fuel and Actively Invest in Securities That Focus on Renewable Energy," an overture wholeheartedly endorsed by both Fossil Free PCUSA and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. In mid-September, San Jose Presbytery concurred with the overture, officially putting it on the docket of the 223rd General Assembly in St. Louis.

PPF and FFPCUSA are urging many more presbyteries to concur and to send overture advocates to St. Louis. The fossil fuel industry considers church divestment to be a serious threat and will try to influence commissioners to oppose this vital next step in preserving the earth for our children's future.

Overture on Syria

This overture calls for a cease-fire, and providing Syrians the time and space to negotiate an end to the conflict that has become one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. It also asks for reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure, assistance and welcome for Syrian refugees, and a deeper partnership with Syrian Christians.

Overture in Support of Peace Churches in the PC(USA)

The Peace Discernment Process, initiated in 2010 and completed in 2016, engaged the work of four General Assemblies and dozens of congregations, and resulted in "Five Affirmations" from the 222nd G.A. At least three congregations have declared themselves to be "Peace Churches" after completing the discernment process and studying the affirmations. One of those churches has drafted this overture to encourage other congregations to become peace churches and to make the study of conscientious objection to military service part of their educational program.

The full texts of these overtures are available on our website, presbypeacefellowship.org. We will be adding additional overtures for you to consider as we learn about them. Did you know that the "Rationale" section of an overture can be different from each concurring presbytery? Feel free to alter the rationale or create your own!

2017 Interfaith Delegation to Israel/Palestine

A landmark Interfaith Peace-Builders delegation co-sponsored by the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, Jewish Voice for Peace, and American Muslims for Palestine visited Israel/Palestine in July-August 2017.

They ran into some challenges. Five members of the delegation were denied entry to Israel, not even permitted to board or check their luggage for their Lufthansa flight from Dulles airport in Washington, DC. Subsequently, ministers in the Israeli government confirmed that the reason for their exclusion was their vocal support for Palestinian human rights.

“Israel denied me the ability to travel there because of my work for justice for Palestinians, even though I’m Jewish and a rabbi” said Rabbi Alissa Wise. “I’m heartbroken and outraged. This is yet another demonstration that democracy and tolerance in Israel only extends to those who fall in line with its increasingly repressive policies against Palestinians.”

“As a person of faith, Israel’s denial of my right to visit the Holy Land doesn’t dampen, but rather, emboldens my pursuit of justice and peace for Palestinians and long overdue freedom for Palestine,” said Shakeel Syed, a human rights activist & national Board Member, American Muslims for Palestine.

“All five of us are well-known for our commitment to nonviolent direct action on behalf of Palestinians living under the grinding daily reality of military occupation in Gaza and the West Bank,” former PC(USA) Moderator Rick Ufford-Chase said. “We suspect that we were the first to feel the impact of the Knesset’s recent declaration that they will deny entry for anyone who has supported nonviolent strategies to force Israel to end the occupation.”

Although other members of the delegation were subjected to hours of interrogation at the airport after arriving, they were eventually allowed to enter Israel. During the following two weeks, they met with dozens of faith-based organizations, grassroots activists and human rights groups in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Please visit www.ifpb.org/del62/ to read reports and reflections and to see photos from delegation members whose purpose was to learn, witness and co-resist Israeli occupation, displacement and siege with Palestinian and Israeli partners on the ground. Here are brief excerpts from some of the reports.



Welcome to Israel

Just before finally giving us our visas to enter Israel, the security guard warned me, as the leader of the group: “Your whole group is flagged, and if you do anything political we will deport all of you. You shouldn’t go anywhere in Palestine especially not to Bil’in or Bethlehem or Hebron. Don’t associate with Palestinians or leftist Israeli groups while you’re here or you’re going to have a big problem.”

Here’s the funny part: All the places he told us not to go and people not to talk to were highlights on our itinerary, an itinerary with the goal of visiting and learning from Palestinians and Israelis who are resisting the illegal Occupation of Palestine through various nonviolent methods. The Israeli soldier told me those places were dangerous. They are not dangerous. Israel’s Occupation of Palestine is dangerous. The only danger in those places is the danger caused by the Israeli military; the Occupation has already killed one of the Palestinians we met with in July and jailed another. (Emily Brewer, New York NY)

Questions

“We know about the Gaza protest in 2014. Aside from that, what other protests were you a part of?” “Why do you hate us?” “How are you today?” “Do you think we’re stupid?” “Do you know any BDS supporters? What are their names?”

These are just some of the many ridiculous questions I was asked while being questioned for thirty minutes and detained by Israeli border security for five hours after arriving in Tel Aviv Monday. In comparison to many others detained for questioning every day by Israeli border security because they are perceived as Arab or Muslim, I didn’t have it too bad. I was questioned only once, and had to wait in “the room” for no more than five hours after traveling for over eighteen hours. And I was let in. (Farah El-Jayyousi, Columbia, MO)

The Bicycle

A young Palestinian boy chased off his bicycle by a white Israeli man in a white skull cap runs into our crowd crying. The man tries to take off with the bike. He clearly believes he has the right to do so. He doesn't know that arch defender of human rights, Issa Amro, is our guide and Issa immediately calls out and demands the bike. In no time the Israeli army shows up and so does a religious Israeli man appearing out of a passing car to defend the perpetrator, an Orthodox Jewish Israeli, who admitted that it wasn't his but because the boy was riding on a Jewish only road it "might belong to a Jewish kid". We were all filming. I felt utter outrage for the abuse. (Melissa Nussbaum, Dorchester MA)



The Delegation

My Homeland

I've had the privileged opportunity to travel back to my homeland - Palestine. Walking through the streets of Hebron was the most traumatizing experience in my life; not being able to walk on specific streets due to the fact that I am a Palestinian. Other experiences include being stripped searched multiple times on my way to prayer and spending the night at the home of a Palestinian who showed us how the apartheid wall cuts through his olive farm, how his oldest son is now disabled after being shot by an Israeli soldier while protesting the apartheid wall, and his other son was shot in the head by an Israeli soldier and lost the ability to move his left hand. (Osama Ahmed, Santa Clara CA)

Art as Resistance

Perhaps the most ubiquitous example of art as resistance in Palestine is the art you can find all over the apartheid wall that cuts through and annexes Palestinian land. Everyone wants to leave their mark on this most blatant form of oppression and mass imprisonment. Qaawim, qaawim. (Resist, resist). (Farah El-Jayyousi, Columbia MO)

Re-Alignment

Since I got home, I've been thinking a lot about Jews. For me, this isn't anything new. I am a proud Jewish person and spend a lot of time in Jewish communal spaces. I think that the occupation exists in part because of the Jewish community's historically-justified fear of annihilation. That fear has led the Jewish community to align itself with empire, militarism, and white supremacy. Those tendencies and ideologies have never been safe havens for Jews. We need a movement that will allow Jews to feel safe, that will recognize their fears, and that will show them how much we have to gain by realigning ourselves with our values and with oppressed communities around the world, starting with our Palestinian brothers and sisters. (Eric Eingold, Brooklyn NY)

Al Aqsa Mosque

We had just boarded our bus when we heard the voice on the radio: Israeli soldiers had just stormed the mosque, firing rubber bullets and injuring 40 people. (That number has since surpassed 100 following more violence.) What? How is this happening? No more than five hours ago had we cheered upon hearing that people had begun entering the mosque. Our Muslim siblings on the delegation could go after dinner! Allahu Akbar! God is great! Plans had been made, hearts gladdened. And then this. Devastation. Desecration. (Sophia Har, Washington DC)

Understanding Maryland through Palestine

The call for justice in Palestine echoes onto the shores of my homeland when I think of our shared struggles against police brutality. The Baltimoreans who protested the police murder of Freddy Gray, a young Black man killed in 2015, were met with the same blinding US-manufactured tear gas that our Palestinian neighbors in Jaffa breathed last week. My friend Amed was arrested for protesting the shooting of a young unarmed Palestinian man, his life taken by militant policemen with seven bullets to the chest. We also learned that Jews of color are heavily policed within the state of Israel using similar tactics of racial profiling as we see targeting our minority communities. It is no coincidence that the United States and Israel have exchanged police trainings and surveillance technologies for fifty years, strengthening the logic of the occupation in US cities and counties. In funding a police state, both governments steal critical education funding: Jerusalem currently lacks 2,000 classrooms for its Arab citizens while Baltimore City Public Schools has a \$130 million dollar deficit. While I do not see the remnants of destroyed Palestinian villages or the segregation wall jutting through Maryland, I do see the oppressive systems that operate in both contexts and the collective struggle for freedom we share. I remember the words of a Palestinian host who told us: "You are resistance fighters, too, when you work for the liberation of Palestine." (Elizabeth Welliver from Westminster MD)

December 14, 2017 is Gun Violence Awareness Day

By Margery Rossi, Peekskill NY

It is also the 5th anniversary of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings in Newtown, CT. Large and small-scale shootings have taken place every single day in our nation these 5 years. And yet, while hundreds of thousands of American men, women and children have been killed, injured and traumatized by gun violence, our legislators have done virtually nothing to make us safer, and gun violence remains "taboo" in public discourse. This must change.

As a church, as people of faith, as followers of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, we grieve, we pray, and we hope for change. Join Presbyterians across the nation in prayer and action during the second week of Advent; the week the prophets cry out in the wilderness for us to prepare a way for God's presence to come among us and bring us comfort.

Order a printed version (\$12) or download a free electronic copy of our Gun Violence Prevention Congregational Toolkit at www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence/resources to access educational, worship and pastoral resources; local organizations to partner with; an order of service for a vigil and for an "Offering of Letters" service, and much more. You may also download free "No Guns in God's House" signs. If your congregation chooses to post these (or similar) signs, host a vigil or take action against gun violence, please let us know! Email us at info@presbypeacefellowship.org.



The Gun Violence Prevention Toolkit, now 76 pages, has been downloaded 137 times. Ninety printed copies have been distributed. Here is a sample prayer from Worship Resources, found on page 46 in the Toolkit, appropriate for inclusion in worship on Sunday, 12/10/17:

Litany of Remembrance

Leader 1: Let us remember all who have been harmed by violence. We acknowledge the strength of those who survived and of those still struggling to heal. For their sake and for ours, we commit ourselves to building each other up and to healing – together.

Leader 2: *Let us remember the families and loved ones of those who have died from gun violence. We acknowledge their pain and their deep grief. They too, are part of our community, and need our love and help towards healing.*

Leader 3: Let us remember the perpetrators, and the families of those who commit violence. We acknowledge that their lives, too, are devastated and their hopes dashed. For their sake and for ours, we remember that pain goes in many directions from each act of violence.

All: **We will stand up to violence. We stand together expressing our unity, our connection to each other and to the divine; our hope for healing and for transformation. Let the Spirit of our Creator move through us. Help transform and heal our communities. And let us begin by transforming ourselves.**

Amen.

(Written for Vigils Against Violence by Pat Long and Vandy Bradow)



Individuals (other than active law-enforcement officers) are prohibited from carrying guns onto this property.

By Action of the Session Date:
Church:

pcusa.org/peacemaking

Studying the Churchwide Antiracism Policy

By Mary Hunt, Hamden CT

At the Fall PPF Activist Council Meeting, The Challenging and Dismantling White Supremacy and White Privilege Working Group pledged to study the PCUSA Antiracism Policy and to understand and promote the Antiracism Training developed by the church-wide Antiracism Policy Team. The 222nd General Assembly(2016) approved the revised Church-wide Antiracism Policy – “Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community” as recommended by the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board.

The Rev. Shannon Craigo-Snell serves on the church-wide Antiracism Policy Team. I quote from Shannon:
“This is not a time for timidity. The current struggles over racial justice in the United States mark a kairos moment. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has long held strong convictions regarding the sinfulness of racism and the need to struggle against it. Speaking our own convictions now, with clarity and power, could make a tangible difference in the current struggle. Furthermore, it is required of us, as the church is called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.”

“Facing Racism: A vision of the Intercultural Community Churchwide Antiracism Policy” tells us:

“Racism is the opposite of what God intends for humanity. It is the rejection of the other, which is entirely contrary to the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ. Racism is a lie about our fellow human beings, for it says that some are less than others. Because of our biblical understanding of who God is and what God intends for humanity, the PC(USA) must stand against, speak against and work against racism.”

To help us with this important work, The Antiracism team has made the revised Antiracism policy and six study guides accessible to the whole church: Biblical Imperatives to Antiracism, Envisioning a New Way of Life Together, PC(USA) and Racial Reconciliation, Racism 101, Enduring Legacy of Racism in the U.S., and Responding as a Community of Faith.

The Antiracism policy and study guides are available on the Presbyterian Mission Agency’s Racial Justice web site, www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/racial-ethnic-and-womens-ministries/gender-and-racial-justice-ministries/. Our team encourages congregations to prayerfully consider incorporating these study guides into their Christian Education program. First Presbyterian Church, New Haven is currently engaged in presenting this curriculum during Adult Education, with sessions 1-3 in October 2017 and 4-6 in January 2018. The Antiracism Team is also recommending that congregations read and discuss *“Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race”* by Debby Irving.



A Veteran’s Thoughts about the National Anthem

By Tom Williams, Whitefish Bay WI

This morning(10/16/2017) on NPR a Seattle Seahawks player was interviewed. He didn’t kneel or sit during the national anthem but bowed his head and prayed during it. He prayed for himself, his teammates, his community, and the country. And he supported those who dared to kneel or sit. And, I must say as I think about it, daring to sit or kneel by those who make empty bucks for playing a game takes real courage and is truly an act of patriotism to me.

Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis, Rosa Parks, and so many others were not sweet folks who sought to make us (you know, us white folks) comfortable. Their goal was to cause us to pause in our everyday lives and think about what we take for granted and what they and so many others were denied. Things such as good schools, the right to vote, the possibility of advancing in one’s career or even having a career. And they had the courage to stand or sit or kneel and remind us so courageously that we, this country, could do better. We could insure all had the right to vote and all had the right to good schools, etc. They made us uncomfortable and angry and then sad and then energized and then hopeful that we could change. But they never made us comfortable in our white skins because they continually reminded us, “WE CAN DO BETTER”.

And now Colin Kapernick and so many others make us uncomfortable by reminding us even when we just want to see the Pack kick the ever living #\$\$%^* out of the Bears that not everybody is this lucky. Not everybody gets to sit on their couch and watch these games because they’re at the local mortuary picking out a casket for their son or they’re moving into a homeless shelter with their kids or they’re piling into their bath tub with their kids to seek safety from the drug war happening on their block. Those who kneel are the courageous patriots who make us uncomfortable. Try to remember George and Betsy and Thomas and so many others who made those Brits uncomfortable as they built this place! If we want comfort, maybe a democracy isn’t for us!

So from one who went war and survived to those who dare to kneel or sit, I say “thank you,” but it does and probably should make me uncomfortable!



Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

17 Cricketown Road
Stony Point, NY 10980

www.presbypeacefellowship.org
@presbypeace

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FALL 2017

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Thank You, President Donald Trump

For
Banning our transgender sisters and brothers from the USA
military!!

Now

We beseech you, oh mighty man, who knows how to hate

Please, we say:

Ban heterosexuals from the USA military.

Ban bi-sexuals from the USA military.

Ban African Americans from the USA military.

Ban lesbians from the USA military.

Ban Latinos from the USA military.

Ban gays from the USA military.

Ban white people from the USA military.

Ban women from the USA military.

Ban Asian Americans from the USA military.

Ban U.S. citizens from the USA military.

Ban non-U.S. citizens from the USA military.

Ban neo-Nazis from the USA military.

Ban white supremacists from the USA military.

Ban Muslims from the USA military.

Ban Jews from the USA military.

Ban Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, mindful folk from the USA military.

Ban Buddhists from the USA military.

Ban men from the USA military.

Ban all human beings from the USA military.

Ban dogs from the USA military.

Ban members of the Armed Forces from the USA military.

Ban yourself as Commander in Chief from the USA military.

Now, Oh Man of the Twitter, Oh, White man of the Lie,

Again I petition you, in all the hopefulness that Truth can empower:

Listen attentively to John Lennon's "Imagine."

Now is the hour. Together, let us put Lennon's "Imagine" into
practice,

In the name of the Black Human One who is the Peacemaker from
Heaven on Earth.

— Ed Loring

Eduard Nuessner Loring is an Activist/Advocate/Ally at
the Open Door Community in Baltimore.