

Report from Puerto Rico

By Ben Shaw, Ottawa OH, Member of the Summer 2019 PPF Delegation to Puerto Rico

Lorna G. Jaramillo Nieves, Ph.D. is a geologist and lifelong Presbyterian. She is also the interim assistant dean of research in the Office for Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras. Lorna has recently published a book about the 1918 Puerto Rico earthquake and subsequent tsunami, which caused major damage in the western part of the island. Around 120 lives were lost and more than \$4,000,000 in damages were incurred in 1918 dollars. The repairs were financed largely through municipal bonds and a trip to Wall Street, a foray that isn't unconnected from the Commonwealth's \$70 billion public debt today. Hurricane Maria struck as Lorna finished the book. The lessons of the earthquake hadn't been learned, and now Puerto Rico was devastated by another disaster it hadn't been prepared for.

Puerto Rico is not a resilient society right now (and, to be clear, neither are most other places). The island is dependent upon imports of nearly everything...and is due for a major earthquake, is prone to tsunamis, and is periodically hit by hurricanes. Its electrical grid is based on coal and petroleum, with electricity traveling long distances on easily downed wires. Years of economic depression, corruption, and public indebtedness have left the infrastructure in a pretty sad state. Even if climate change weren't a major issue—and Lorna says it is the most important issue of our day—Puerto Rico still needs to build resilience. As it is, the island is barely able to bounce back from crisis, let alone bounce forward.

Our delegation talks for a long time with Lorna. She asks us about the environmental issues our own congregations grapple with. I think about the Maumee River and the whole Lake Erie watershed, of which I am a resident, and the toxic algae blooms that show up most years now. I think about how this year an unusually rainy spring prevented farmers from planting one third of the fields they usually would in the most fertile region of Ohio. And I think about my own community's experience of natural disaster with the floods of 2007 and 2008. When it comes to the environment and climate change, we are all in frontline communities. We are all in need of resilience today.



After meeting with Lorna we meet with José González-Colón and Michelle Muñoz-Vega. Both have, in an official capacity, helped manage the Presbyterian response to Hurricane Maria. There are 70,000 houses across the island with tarps on the roof and there is still a lot of work to do. Estimates are that it will take Puerto Rico 15 years to recover, and we are now two years in.

Because of the experience of the hurricane, Puerto Rican Presbyterians have been connected to the wider Presbyterian world in new and exciting ways. And in other ways Puerto Rican Presbyterians have learned new ways to show the love of God to their neighbors. In Country Club, the Presbyterian Church began using its sanctuary as a warehouse for food. As we saw in Bayamón, the church used its location near a hospital and mall to provide necessary electrical services to people. José wants a resilience center at Hato Rey Presbyterian Church, a place where solar power and pastoral/psychological care enable the church to help people in disasters. Is Puerto Rico currently resilient? No. But are churches, community centers, etc. building a more resilient island? Absolutely. Is the wider church an ally in this process of building resilience in Puerto Rico? This is our challenge.

Fossil Free PCUSA and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship were invited to Puerto Rico by the Rev. José González-Colón as a follow-up to the Fossil Free PCUSA 2018 'Walk for a Fossil Free World.' Reports from the July 2019 delegation members may be found at fossilfreepcusablog.org.

A Peacemaker's Calendar

Winter 2019 and Spring 2020 – Endowment Campaign Phase II. Thank you to everyone who has supported the Endowment 75 Campaign! So far, we have received pledges and gifts of \$211,000 toward our \$400,000 goal. Thank you!

The Endowment Campaign takes a break this fall in respect for the PPF Advent/Year End Campaign. Watch for news in 2020 on completing the campaign to honor PPF's 75th year by undergirding the work of nonviolence now and for years to come. Learn more at presbypeacefellowship.org/endow75

November 15 - 17 – Close the School of the Americas. A Commemorative Gathering: Bridging the Past and the Present will be held at Ft. Benning, Georgia on the 30th anniversary of the Central American University massacre. Visit soaw.org for more information. Contact Marilyn White at marwhite@igc.org to connect with others from PPF who will attend.

February 17 - 28, 2020 – Presbyterian Peacemaking Program Travel Seminar to Central America. The focus will be “Central American Migrant Trails: Exploring the Journeys to and from the United States and Why We Must Act.” To apply, call 888-728-7228 x 5805.

March 15 - 28, 2020 – Presbyterian Peacemaking Program Mosaic of Peace Conference in Israel/Palestine. The focus will be “Witnessing for Peace and Wholeness in a Land Called ‘Holy.’” To apply, call 888-728-7228 x 5805.

April 24 - 27, 2020 – Ecumenical Advocacy Days. PPF will be there! Join us in Washington D.C. for “Imagine! God’s Earth and People Restored.” We will explore the intersection of climate change and economic injustice. This will galvanize our advocacy on behalf of policies and programs to chip away at the systems of oppression that keep people in poverty and push all life on earth to the brink of destruction. (advocacydays.org)

May 1 - 15, 2020 – Presbyterian Peacemaking Program Travel Seminar to Philippines and Hong Kong. The focus will be “Root Causes and Current Challenges of Forced Migration and Labor Trafficking.” To apply, call 888-728-7228 x 5805.

June 20 - 27, 2020 – 224th General Assembly of the PC(USA), Baltimore, MD. Join our planning team to help bring peacemaking, social justice, and climate change issues to the top of the GA agenda. Contact PPF GA chair Timothy Wotring (timothywotring@gmail.com).

...BRIEFLY is the newsletter of the

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

17 Cricketown Road Stony Point, NY 10980

presbypeacefellowship.org info@presbypeacefellowship.org

Aric Clark and Shannan Vance-Ocampo, Co-Moderators

Len Bjorkman, Moderator Emeritus

Rick Ufford-Chase, Secretary Whitney Palmer, Treasurer

Emily Brewer, Executive Director 929-251-3277

emily@presbypeacefellowship.org

Art Hunt, Deputy Director art@presbypeacefellowship.org

Christa Galvin, Financial and Administrative Assistant

christa@presbypeacefellowship.org

Katie Blanchard, Communication Manager katie@presbypeacefellowship.org

Deanna Hollas, Gun Violence Prevention Ministries Coordinator

deanna@presbypeacefellowship.org

Alison Wood, Accompaniment Coordinator alison@presbypeacefellowship.org

abby mohaupt, Fossil Free PCUSA Moderator awmohaupt@gmail.com

...BRIEFLY is funded entirely by gifts from our readers, members & friends. Send donations online or to our Stony Point office. Send address changes to christa@presbypeacefellowship.org or mail to the Stony Point office.

Contact the editors at:

Jan Orr-Harter JanOH4@aol.com & Marilyn White marwhite@igc.org

Act Now for a Fossil Free PCUSA

We believe in a Presbyterian Church that does not profit from climate change.

Presbyterians, and all people of faith, are always called to serve the earth. This is God’s call for all humanity from the very beginning (Genesis 2:15). While fossil fuels have allowed us to create a better world for many, we now know its impact on creation and future generations is threatening the life we know and cherish. As we confess that failure, we must listen to and engage with the people in frontline communities who are already experiencing climate change in order to better understand the human toll climate change has taken and will continue to take on God’s children. Support the overture to divest from fossil fuels.

Can you do these three things?

Download the overture to divest from fossil fuels at <https://www.fossilfreepcusa.org/overture-2020/>.

Present it to your session and have them approve it.

Work with the churches in your presbytery to have other sessions approve it and the presbytery concur.

Please let abby mohaupt, moderator of Fossil Free PCUSA, know that you’re taking these actions by emailing her at awmohaupt@gmail.com.

Help Us Spread the Prophetic Witness of Becoming a Peace Church

By Geoff Browning, Campbell CA

Our goal is nothing less than the PCUSA declaring itself a “Peace Church” denomination. As you may recall, in 2010, on the 30th anniversary of Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling and the formation of the Peacemaking Program, the PPF sponsored and the 219th General Assembly authorized the creation of a six-year discernment process to take a new and fresh look at peacemaking in the church’s life.

One of the results of these decisions and reports was study materials that congregations and mid-councils could use for their own discernment. After using these study materials, some churches found their conversations about scripture, war and violence evoked in them a deeper sense conviction and awakening.

While most of Christianity has adhered to the theology of Just War for more than a millennium, these churches began to question whether such a theology is consistent with the scripture and the ministry of reconciliation to which we are called. Further study and conversation has led a few of these churches to declare themselves Peace Churches.

In 2018 the 223rd General Assembly in St. Louis voted to recognize those churches that declare themselves Peace Churches within the Presbyterian Church (USA). And we believe that many more churches will be interested in entering into a process of discernment and commitment to being a Peace Church. But we need your help.

Is your church or a church near you interested in exploring what it means to become a Peace Church? Do you know of a pastor or elder who would be interested in introducing this discernment into their congregation?

This is what it means to be a Peace Church, we hope you’ll help us spread the Good News:

A Peace Church is a church that recognizes that war and militarism are inconsistent with the Gospel of

Christ that calls us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us;

A Peace Church is a church that recognizes that, as Dr. King said, “darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that, hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that;”

A Peace Church is a church that recognizes the harm that violence and war have done to soldiers and their families, to civilians, to the poor, to women and children, to society and to the environment;

A Peace Church is a church that recognizes that the business of war drains our country of the resources needed to feed, clothe, educate, and house our own citizens;

A Peace Church equips people as they discern their opposition to war, affirms that conscientious objection is a faithful response to war, and supports those who have declared themselves to be Conscientious Objectors;

A Peace Church is a church that is ready to take a stand and say no to violence and war in the name of the Prince of Peace.

If you would like more information about becoming a Peace Church, including why becoming a Peace Church is so important, visit our PPF Peace Church webpage: presbypeacefellowship.org/peace-church

In 2018, The 223rd General Assembly of the PC(USA) voted to:



Acknowledge that many churches have continued their own process of discernment and some have declared themselves “Peace Churches,” while others continue to study, pray, reflect, and explore this subject in their own church community.

Recognize and commend those churches who have declared themselves “Peace Churches” and encourage all churches interested in peace to continue their own discernment and further encourage the Peacemaking Program to maintain a list of churches who declare themselves “Peace Churches” on the Peacemaking Program website when they are notified by said churches.

2019 Peaceseeker Award!

Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church & First United of Oak Park

PPF Honors 2 Chicago Congregations for Gun Violence Prevention



By Jan Orr-Harter, Aledo TX

At its fall gathering, the PPF Activist Council voted to honor two Chicago congregations with the 2019 Peaceseeker Award for their work on gun violence prevention. Every year since 1970 the Peaceseeker Award lifts up examples of peacemaking Presbyterian-style to give thanks for courageous witness and to celebrate an example for all of us. The 2019 Peaceseeker award will be presented at the PPF Peace Breakfast at the PCUSA General Assembly in June 2020.



(above) Along the route of the Chicago Marathon, Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church organizes an annual Vigil Against Violence and a photo memorial to young gun violence victims on marathon weekend. (left) First United of Oak Park created a scroll with the names of murder victims each month over an entire year, unrolling it on Maundy Thursday with 462 names.



Located about an hour apart, the Lincoln Park and Oak Park churches have embraced the pain of Chicago's gun violence with the compassion and passion of Jesus Christ. The 2019 Peaceseeker Award lifts up two churches to honor the **hundreds of other Presbyterian congregations** that are praying and acting to end the epidemic of gun violence that claims nearly 40,000 lives each year. If your congregation is among them, congratulations to you too! If not, join us in learning about their journeys as a way to encourage us all.

Almost 40 years ago, a member of Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church led an effort for churches to receive handguns that people would surrender with no questions asked. She went on to found the Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence. Today the 65 member Lincoln Park Church sponsors a vigil and memorial to young gun violence victims along the Chicago Marathon route. They work to undo the impact of racism in the lack of jobs and housing that contributes to gun violence. And Lincoln Park urges its members to advocate for the issue of gun violence in election campaigns and to encourage everyone to vote.

Across the windy city, First United of Oak Park is a large congregation on the edge of a neighborhood with a gun violence epidemic. After an education series on gun violence, First United joined coalitions to work on issues from urging gun makers to use smart technology to prevent the use of stolen guns to pioneering new ways to talk together about race and racism. Following the ideas of Mr. Rogers (PPF 1994 Peaceseeker Awardee), they help the children of the church to process feelings about gun violence and to participate in actions. On Palm Sunday, following the March for Our Lives, members processed not just with palms, but with the March for our Lives signs and orange t-shirts: Palm Sunday as protest procession, standing up to gun violence as Jesus stood up to the violence of the Roman Empire.

Both Lincoln Park and Oak Park supported efforts by Illinois Senator Don Harmon to provide for state registration of gun dealers in order to enforce existing gun laws that the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms lacks funding to do. *It took 16 years to get the bill passed.* Now Illinois state police inspect gun dealers to prevent straw purchases and other guns sales that try to skip background checks.

When asked what advice they would give to congregations just starting out on gun violence prevention ministry, Lincoln Park and First United of Oak Park both gave the same answer: “Don’t be afraid.” God is on your side. We all need to move ahead on this issue. One member of First United added: “If you can’t get out of being afraid, do it anyway and bring others with you.”

Look for in-depth interviews with members of each congregation in upcoming issues of the PPF Gun Violence Prevention E-News and at www.presbypeacefellowship.org/peaceseeker-award2019

More Gun Violence Prevention News

Rev. Deanna Hollas, PPF’s new Coordinator of Gun Violence Prevention Ministries, was recently asked, “How has your life changed?” In one week after her ordination, she was interviewed by *The New York Times*, The Trace, CNN, and NPR’s Morning Edition. Then came a live on-air interview with ABC News in their coverage before the Presidential debate that took place in Houston, TX ...a day as a guest lecturer at Princeton Theological Seminary ...an upcoming book endorsement and an op-ed in *The Hill* where she responded to Texas Rep. Matt Schaefer’s comment about his God-given right to own a gun.

According to Deanna, “All this attention is great, but the deeper question is why - why did my story go viral?” Both the media and ordinary Americans seem to be drawn to Deanna’s work to find ways for people who have different views on gun violence prevention to talk to each other about them. “What I have found is that people want to talk about gun violence but are afraid of the energy such a conversation can produce. I provide congregations with tools such as a breathing exercise and a ‘Conversation Agreement’ that allows them to safely manage the difficult energies that arise. Not everyone is able to talk about gun violence and that is fine; participation in the conversation is always optional, but don’t let the few who have difficulty control the narrative. The key to having courageous conversations is creating space for the Spirit by learning how to listen and hold whatever is said with compassion. I encourage folks to use the book *Common Ground* by Donald V. Gaffney. Once you finish the six sessions in the book, you can discern how you feel the Spirit is leading you to action.” To learn more about this approach to gun violence conversations, contact Deanna Hollas at deanna@presbypeacefellowship.org or 214-702-2265.

15 States: AZ, CO, FL, IN, MN, MT, NC, NH, NV, OH, OR, PA, TX, VA, WA

According to Christian Brooks at the PCUSA Office of Public Witness in Washington DC, these are the key states to impact in order to enact common sense federal gun legislation like universal background checks. If you live in one of these key states, reach out to Deanna Hollas and let her know how we can best support you to take action in your church or presbytery.

Organizing Against Drone Warfare

By Pamela Brubaker, Austin TX

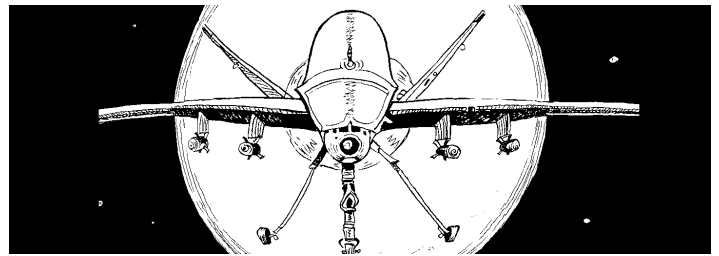
The Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare (INDW) was organized by The Peace Action Education Fund in Princeton, N.J. in 2015 to study and act for change of U.S. drone warfare policies.

"Our concerns center on the nature of lethal drones as a weapon, namely their use in targeted killings of specific individuals most of whom are Muslims, their impact upon targeted communities, their operation by remote control, and the consequences that drones increase hostilities. As people of faith, we advocate the rigorous pursuit of Just Peace, based on upholding dignity and human rights for all, with resources dedicated to this alternative at a level matching that spent on the current drone warfare program."

The first conference was held in January of 2015 at Princeton. Since then 13 regional conferences have been held, and five 30-minute films produced for use by congregations. The Interfaith Working Group on Drone Warfare, which meets monthly, aims to "raise awareness about the moral concerns and consequences of the U.S. government's increasing use of drone warfare." All of this good work has yet to lead to a change in U.S. drone use.

The Interfaith Network held a "National Training Conference" at Princeton Theological Seminary the last weekend of September. Its purpose was "to equip people of faith interested in organizing on this issue within the faith community on ways to advocate and educate against drone warfare." This work can also be done by national denominational organizations. (The event was funded by a grant from Open Society Foundations, founded by George Soros.) Over 80 people from 24 states and 15 faith traditions participated. Carl Horton, coordinator of the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, was one of the moderators of the event.

We learned about the harmful impact of lethal drones on civilian victims and on some of the drone operators. We were warned about the possibility of a future of cyber warfare with drones, armed robots, and weapons using artificial intelligence as part of the



mix. Algorithms, rather than humans, may determine who will be killed.

The Interfaith Working Group on Drone Warfare, a partner in the INDW, asks three things of the US Government:

- End the CIA's authority to carry out drone strikes; if there must be drones, they must be under the more transparent Dept of Defense control.
- Maintain meaningful human control over lethal weapons; no autonomous, algorithm-based targeting.
- Study the long-term impact of drone warfare on social stability in target countries and perceptions of their civilians about the US role. Are we creating more terrorists?

Participants engaged in lively discussions as to whether a focus on lethal drones and advocacy is adequate, although the conference organizers had asked us to put aside differences and focus on the aims of the conference. One person asked why we focus on how to kill, rather than whether we should kill. A few other participants agreed with her. Several activists who engage in vigils at drone bases argued for the importance of nonviolent direct action, including civil disobedience. Some participants of color pointed out that it is safer for white people to engage in such activities, and that this needs to be recognized in making demands for action. We all agreed, though, that we must expand our advocacy and action, in our congregations, communities, and movements. We ended our time together with a moving worship service, and spontaneous singing which brought us together as we departed.

The full conference report, resources for education and action, and 5 downloadable free films are available at www.interfaithdronenetwork.org.

Border Accompaniment: Seeking Peace that is More than Safety

By Bill Branch, Little Rock AR and Beth Newell, Phelps NY

The town of Agua Prieta seems peaceful. Driving around in our '96 Saturn, trying not to miss the faded and often hidden stop signs, or go the wrong way down unlabeled one-way streets, Bill points out a difference from other places we each have traveled in Latin America: there are no security guards outside businesses and very few walls topped with broken glass or razor wire as a security measure. Based on these observations, you might assume that there's no crime in Agua Prieta. You'd be wrong.

To ensure their money-making ventures run smoothly here and across the border, the local cartel makes sure there is no crime that might draw the attention of authorities or social media. Violators of the cartel's rules face consequences that ensure everyone submits to their authority. Thus while there is very little "unorganized" or petty crime here, there is the constant threat of running afoul of the local cartel.

Migrants approaching the US border are targets of the cartel. Far from home, migrants can be abducted or become victims of extortion. In the case of many Mexican migrants, cartel violence is why they left behind all that was familiar to seek asylum in the United States.

The first order of peacemaking in this situation is to keep people safe, and the folks at CAME (Centro de Atención al Migrante "Exodus") and the Migrant Resource Center (CRM) are doing just that, as are we when we escort refugees. But as we know, the peace that God wants for each one of us is much more than just safety. The Hebrew word "shalom" and the Arabic "salaam"



PPF Accompanier Barbara Clawson comforts a young migrant.

capture the fuller essence of this peace: wholeness, fulfillment, and harmony.

We try to imagine what it must be like for asylum seekers to step through that border entry post after waiting so long here in Agua Prieta. We've heard stories about what can happen in detention centers along the border, and they have too. Knowing what we know about current US immigration policies, Bill and I worry that decisions made by US authorities about the future of these brave people won't bring them much closer to the shalom they seek. Three mothers we've talked with recently, from Michoacán, Guerrero, and Russia, each nervously told us the night before they entered the US that they were both scared and excited. Neither Bill nor I have ever been in a situation in which agents of our government have had such power over our lives. Our prayers go with these mothers and all the other asylum seekers who enter our country.

The fullness of shalom is in the hands of God, but we as God's people are called to do all we can to help people live into this peace.

Volunteer accompaniers are needed in Agua Prieta and in Colombia. For more information, contact Alison Wood (alison@presbypeacefellowship.org).

Blessed are the peacemakers...

Thank you, **Barbara Smith**, for donating your Prius to the Agua Prieta Accompaniment Program and **Emma Warman**, for driving it from Nashville to Arizona!

Congratulations to **Merilie Robertson**, recipient of the 2019 Barstow-Driver Award for Excellence in Nonviolent Direct Action in Retirement. Sara Pottschmidt Lisherness, Director of Compassion, Peace, and Justice of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, says, "It is very fitting that Merilie receive this award. Like Ann Barstow and Tom Driver, Merilie has been relentless in her advocacy and witness for justice and peace. One of the most remarkable things about Merilie is that she has an uncanny ability to be present to others in a spirit of love and peace, even when engaging with people who disagree with her. Her commitment to justice and peace is deeply tied to the many ways she expresses her faith, in interpersonal relationships, in people she works with and communities she serves – with dignity and respect for all."

We celebrate the life and witness of **Lois Kroehler**, who died August 4. A lifelong peacemaker and recipient of the PPF Peaceseeker award in 2000, Lois served as a mission coworker in Cuba for more than 40 years, remaining with the people through the revolutionary decades after most U.S. Christian workers had left. ¡Presente!



Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

17 Cricketown Road
Stony Point, NY 10980

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

www.presbypeacefellowship.org
@presbypeace

CELEBRATING 75 YEARS!

FALL 2019

Inside: Honoring 2 churches working to prevent gun violence (p.4)

NON PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 6
VALLEY STREAM NY 11580

*In the days to come, God's justice will extend
beyond the heavens encircling galaxies, borders, and flags.
All peoples and creatures shall recognize such love.
They will say, "Have you heard? The Not-Yet has become the Now-Is!
People who once lived on the streets, now have roofs over their heads.
Bellies are full of food and joy. Prisons are empty!
Fossil fuels are no longer necessary!"
God has given us all these beautiful resources
and imparted in us how to use them.
World peace agreements will be immediately signed
with God overseeing that they are enacted.
Warheads, drones, tanks, and guns shall
be melted into communion tables, playground equipment,
glasses frames, railroad tracks, and bridges.
The people of nations will learn gardening skills,
design new musical instruments, and neighbor will care outrageously for neighbor!*

(By Timothy Wotring, from Isaiah 2:2-4)

