

MODERATOR'S LETTER

January 23, 2018

Dear Fellow Commissioners,

What does it mean that Presbyterians are a connectional Church, and why should it matter? Aren't we connected because of like-mindedness, with people who agree with us and like each other? Isn't that what we mean when we talk of the "unity of the Church?"

Actually, it behooves us to have this discussion in our Presbytery because, not only does it matter, but it is essential to our faith and biblically rooted 2000 years ago. In John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." Paul uses another metaphor in Rome and also in Corinth, "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another" (Romans 12: 4-5). And in Corinth, Paul speaks of the "head" and the "body" as being one with Christ as the "head."

In Jesus's day, when he called disciples together, imagine what others might have thought about his invitation to Simon, the zealot, and Levi, the tax collector. Zealots were Jewish freedom fighters against the occupying Roman army. Tax collectors were in collusion with the Roman puppet governors who sold out their own people for a cut of the tax revenues. Few of the disciples shared a common past, nor necessarily liked each other, I suppose. They probably didn't feel comfortable just "*hanging out*" together. And, while they may not even have enjoyed each other's company, in Christ they were one. And that is what we mean by unity as Presbyterians. We are "one in the spirit and one in the Lord." And then, and only then, do we connect authentically with one another.

What does that mean for us in the Presbytery? Click on our website: <https://www.thepresbytery.org/about-us/vision-statement>. Our Mission Statement begins with the scripture verse from Isaiah 43:19: "God is doing a new thing, now it springs forth. Do you perceive it?" It calls us all to service collectively, not just in following past practices, but in doing "new things!"

The next line says, "*Sent by the Triune God to be agents of salvation, reconciliation and justice, we empower and challenge our congregations to be Missional, Pastoral and Prophetic.*" Notice that we have said by accepting this mission statement as our own, that we are not bystanders or passive in our service, but sent by the "*Triune God to be agents of salvation, reconciliation, and justice and empower our congregations to be more missional, pastoral and prophetic.*"

Finally, our statements say: "*We are a relational network, proclaiming the gospel, aspiring to unity in Christ, and celebrating our diversity in service to God's mission,*" and then names three goals your congregation and others might connect with in meaningful ways. I encourage you to read those goals carefully on your own before our meeting, and then, with fellow members, reflect on how your church is seeking to be more *connectional*, by "*branching out*" to them in deeper ways of becoming more *missional, pastoral and prophetic*.

The "New Things" subcommittee of the Church Development Committee (CDC) is continually exploring ways to help struggling churches discover new ways of reaching out to their community through community exegesis, partnerships with other churches and community organizations, and locating and employing people with gifts and abilities that match community needs.

So what might we connect about? Over these past two years, we have seen at our Presbytery meetings the fruits of a “mission video project” which our staff member, LaJuan Quander, coordinates about four times a year. These videos portray churches, like your own, who are actively engaged in the world, one which now more than ever requires greater compassion for one another and humility before our God of justice and mercy. Most certainly, you are doing these things, too, because I see an abundance of such evidence when I travel to your congregations and worship with you.

Members from three churches have recently gathered at Trinity Church in Arlington to view the film “The 13th” (amendment) and discussed the continuance of white privilege born out of slavery into the present day form of the mass incarceration of black and brown peoples. Participants left the room stunned by what they had seen and heard. Plans are afoot to take some actions in a connectional manner.

Within NCP, the Networks for Global Mission, Israel/Palestine, Refugees, and for the newly formed Task Force on “Confronting Racism” are examples of how we can not only be more connectional through our mission work, but also in our call to action for other social injustice issues close to the heart.

Our Presbytery meeting on January 23, 2018, will have as its theme: “Connecting our Congregations.” As you are seated around the tables at that time, perhaps with commissioners you might not know, and hear Rev. Beth Goss’s sermon about her Church’s partnership in the [Arlington Day Laborer Program](#) with a Spanish-speaking congregation in her community, you might even feel called to serve in a more connectional way in your own neighborhood than you had previously. We are one body, after all.

Finally, we have already informed you that our Executive General Presbyter, Rev. Dr. Wilson Gunn, has announced his retirement as we will hear from the chair of the Leadership Council at our meeting. Let me remind you that the state of the Presbytery is strong and vibrant, not only because of Wilson’s leadership, but because of the talented 118 people who serve on our various committees, and our dedicated staff. The work we are doing will continue without hesitation.

What a force we can be through our unity with the Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, with one another!

In gratitude, BiLL

Bill Plitt
Moderator,
National Capital Presbytery

Registration for Meeting

CALL TO THE STATED MEETING

National Capital Presbytery Tuesday January 23, 2018 @ 6:00pm
 National Presbyterian Church, Washington DC
 Open Space 4:00 – 5:15pm
 Dinner 5:15 – 6pm

“Connecting our Congregations.”

Stated Meeting Items:

- 1) Announcement of Wilson Gunn’s retirement as NCP General Presbyter
- 2) Bills and Overtures Report
- 3) Recognition of NCP Mission Networks

Registration Instructions

- 1) Use link below to complete your **meeting** and/or **meal** registration
- 2) **Member clergy:** to be excused, use registration link below
- 3) When registering online, you will receive an email confirmation. Print and bring the confirming e-mail with you and drop it in the registration box.
- 4) Questions, send email: scoe@thepresbytery.org or jmoody@thepresbytery.org

Registration link: <http://www.thepresbytery.org/presbytery-meeting>

*****Reminders*****

- ❖ Please print and bring this packet with you – paper copies will not be available at the meeting.
- ❖ Dinner is available for \$12.00 for those who reserve a meal online by Noon, January 19, 2018.
- ❖ Meals will not be available for sale the day of the meeting.

Directions to Meeting

NATIONAL PC

4101 Nebraska Avenue

NW Washington, D. C. 20016 202/537-0800

FROM THE BELTWAY FROM THE EAST: Take I-495 to exit #33 south, Route #185 south (Connecticut Avenue). Continue on Connecticut Avenue across the District line at Chevy Chase Circle to Nebraska Avenue. Turn right on Nebraska Avenue and go through Tenley Circle (at Wisconsin Avenue). Continue on Nebraska Avenue to next traffic light (Van Ness Street). Turn left on Van Ness Street to parking lot entrance on your right.

FROM THE BELTWAY FROM THE WEST: Take I-495 to exit #39 east, Route #190 east (River Road). Continue on River Road to its end at Wisconsin Avenue. Turn right on Wisconsin Avenue to Tenley Circle. Turn right on Nebraska Avenue and go to next traffic light (Van Ness Street). Turn left on Van Ness Street to parking lot entrance on your right.

FROM CHAIN BRIDGE: Cross Chain Bridge into D.C. Turn right on Canal Road at the end of Chain Bridge. Turn left on Arizona Avenue (this is the first left after the bridge). Continue on Arizona Avenue to its end at Loughboro Road. Turn right on Loughboro Road which becomes Nebraska Avenue. Continue on Nebraska Avenue past American University, through Ward Circle to church entrance on your right just after entrance to NBC. Continue past the church to parking in the rear.

FROM METRO: Take the Red Line to Tenleytown. Take the West exit onto Wisconsin Avenue Exit metro, turn right and walk south. At Tenley Circle turn right on Nebraska Avenue. Continue on Nebraska Avenue past Van Ness Street. Church is on your left in the block past Van Ness Street.

The Stated Meeting of the National Capital Presbytery
 January 23, 2018
 The National Presbyterian Church, Washington DC

6:00PM CALL TO ORDER WITH PRAYER	Elder William Plitt, Moderator
6:05PM OMNIBUS MOTION (p11)	Elder Sara Coe, Stated Clerk
6:10PM TRANSITONS	Rev. Dr. Wilson Gunn, General Presbyter

6:30PM CALL TO WORSHIP

Elder Bill Murphey

Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.

Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.

God is great!

There is no God but God.

The hour is now here, when true worshipers will worship God in spirit and truth

Let us worship God!

HYMN

Called as Partners in Christ's Service (p 9)

CALL TO CONFESSION

Rev. Sam Atiemo

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

CONFESSION

Holy One, You tell us to look not to our own interests, but to the interests of others. You tell us that in You there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female. You tell us that if we devote ourselves to You and the beloved community, we will have enough, and day by day You will add to our number.

But we behave like a zero-sum economy: More care for others means less care for us.

Diversity and inclusion are inconvenient. If we do not do for ourselves, we will not have.

Forgive our fear, Lord. Teach us to balance the needs of our own people with the needs of Your people. Send us Canaanite women to challenge our prejudices.

Embolden us to risk your abundant love.

Time for silent confession

ASSURANCE OF GRACE

Friends, believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

In Jesus Christ, you are forgiven! Alleluia! Amen.

ANTHEM

Despierta Mi Corazon—composed by Lorena Castellanos

PASSING OF THE PEACE

Greet one another with the words, “Peace be with you. **And also with you.**” or

“La paz sea con ustedes. **Y tambien contigo.**”

SCRIPTURE

Amos 5:21-24, Luke 18:2-13

Rev. Beth Goss and
Pastor William Velasquez

SERMON

Prophets Among Us

Rev. Beth Goss

Litany of Thanksgiving

Rev. Mike McNamara

L: Give thanks to the Lord who is good.

P: God’s love is everlasting.

L: Come, let us praise God joyfully.

P: Let us come to God with thanksgiving.

L: For the work of this presbytery’s Global Mission Network;

Inspiring connections of your love across the region and across the world;

Establishing congregational partnerships around Kenya, Cuba, Malawi, Haiti and Cameroon.

P: Thank you, God.

L: For the work of this presbytery’s Earth Care Mission Network;

Seeking to care for your holy creation, O God;

Providing the resources to congregations wishing to lessen their footprint on your great earth.

P: Thank you, God.

L: For the work of this presbytery’s Israel Palestine Mission Network;

Striving for healthy dialogue around lands in conflict;

Fostering peace in the land where your word was made flesh.

P: Thank you, God.

L: For the work of this presbytery’s Refugee Mission Network;

Welcoming those in need of a safe home;

Encouraging congregations to live into your call of deep abiding love.

P: Thank you, God.

L: For the work of this presbytery’s Sanctuary Mission Network;

Providing safety to those fleeing persecution;

Cultivating partnership in seeking your kingdom on earth.

P: Thank you, God.

L: For the work of this presbytery's Disaster Assistance Mission Network;
 Assisting those who face dire circumstances;
 Building long lasting relationships to provide endurance for the long road to recovery.

P: Thank you, God.

L: For the work of this presbytery's Peace and Justice Team;
 Upholding established relationships with trusted partners in service;
 Supporting the efforts of those seeking to organize as communities steeped in your power.

P: Thank you, God.

L: For the work of this presbytery's Young Adult Ministries Team;
 Nurturing the church's future leaders;
 Engaging the faith of college students across the region.

P: Thank you, God.

L: For the work of this presbytery's Urban Ministries Team;
 Facilitating difficult conversations around racism and its impacts;
 Empowering congregations that face the uniqueness of urban ministry.

P: Thank you, God.

L: For the work of this presbytery's Mission Coordination Committee;
 Kindling a vision of mission for the member congregations of National Capital Presbytery;
 Offering accountability for funds distributed to further the church's call to be your hands and feet.

P: Thank you, God.

L: For you Holy Spirit;
 Who guides our steps and brings us gifts of faith and love;
 Who prays in us and prompts our grateful worship.

P: We praise you, God.

L: Above all, O God, for your Son Jesus Christ;
 Who lived and died and lives again for our salvation;
 For our hope in him;
 And for the joy of serving him.

**P: We thank you and praise you, Eternal God,
 For all your goodness to us.**

L: Give thanks to the Lord, who is good.

P: God's love is everlasting. Amen.

7:00PM	Mission Video	LaJuan Quander
7:10PM	Bills and Overtures Report (Motions pp 13,15-20)	Rev. Dr. Quinn Fox
7:30PM	Announcement of Wilson Gunn's retirement as NCP General Presbyter	Rev. Ann Herlin
7:35PM	Report on General Presbyter Search Committee Process	Elder Rudy Cohen
7:40PM	Retention Amount from First Korean of Northern Virginia Motion (p14)	Elder Rudy Cohen
7:50PM	Garden Memorial Motion (p14)	Elder Rudy Cohen

8:10PM PRAYER	Elder William Plitt
8:15PM INVITATION TO THE LORD'S TABLE	Reverends Beth Goss and Mike McNamara
GREAT THANKSGIVING	
COMMUNION OF THE PEOPLE	
PRAYER	Elder Bill Plitt, Moderator
8:35PM HYMN	<i>May the God of Hope Go With Us</i> (p 10)
BENEDICTION and ADJOURNMENT	Rev. Beth Goss

Leading Meeting:

Elder William Plitt, Trinity-Arlington PC, NCP Moderator
 Rev. Dr. Quinn Fox, National PC, NCP Vice Moderator
 Rev. Dr. Wilson Gunn, General Presbyter
 Elder Sara Coe, NCP Stated Clerk
 Rev. Ann Herlin, Old Presbyterian Meeting House, Personnel Chair
 Elder Rudy Cohen, Burke PC, Leadership Council Chair,

Worship Leaders:

Elder Bill Murphey, Church of the Covenant PC
 Rev. Beth Goss, Church of the Covenant PC
 Pastor William Velasquez, First Church of the Nazarene Arlington
 Elder Romana Campos, Trinity-Arlington PC
 Rev. Sam Atiemo, Christ the King PC
 Rev. Michael McNamara, Adelphi PC and NCP Mission Specialist
 Elder Bill Plitt, Trinity-Arlington PC

Communion Servers:

Rev. Beth Goss, Church of the Covenant PC, Arlington
 Rev. Michael McNamara, Adelphi PC and NCP Mission Specialist
 Rev. Samuel Atiemo, Christ the King PC
 Rev. Carla Gorrell, HR
 Elder Nana Yaa Afriyie, Christ the King PC
 Elder Eric Akyeampong, Christ the King PC
 Elder Emmanuel Ankamah, Christ the King PC
 Elder Richard Safo, Christ the King PC

Music Leaders: Billy Kluttz, Beth Goss, William Velasquez

JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

Called as Partners in Christ's Service 761

1 Called as part-ners in Christ's ser-vice, called to min-is-tries of grace,
 2 Christ's ex-am-ple, Christ's in-spir-ing, Christ's clear call to work and worth,
 3 Thus new pat-terns for Christ's mis-sion, in a small or glob-al sense,
 4 So God grant us for to - mor-row ways to or - der hu - man life

we re-spond with deep com-mit-ment fresh new lines of faith to trace.
 let us fol-low, nev - er fal-tering, rec - on - cil - ing folk on earth.
 help us bear each oth - er's bur-dens, break-ing down each wall or fence.
 that sur-round each per - son's sor-row with a calm that con-quers strife.

May we learn the art of shar-ing, side by side and friend with friend,
 Men and wom-en, rich - er, poor - er, all God's peo-ple, young and old,
 Words of com-fort, words of vi-sion, words of chal-enge, said with care,
 Make us part-ners in our liv-ing, our com-pas-sion to in - crease,

e - qual part-ners in our car-ing to ful - fill God's cho - sen end.
 blend-ing hu - man skills to - geth - er gra-cious gifts from God un - fold.
 bring new power and strength for ac-tion, make us col-leagues, free and fair.
 mes - sen-gers of faith, thus giv-ing hope and con - fi - dence and peace.

This hymn is a celebration of mutuality and diversity as well as a challenge to the Christian community to live out a ministry of reconciliation and inclusion. This 20th-century text is set to a 19th-century tune named for the noted pastor and preacher Henry Ward Beecher.

TEXT: Jane Parker Huber, 1981
 MUSIC: John Zundel, 1870
 Text © 1981 Jane Parker Huber (admin. Westminster John Knox Press)

BEECHER
 8.7.8.7.D
 (alternate tune: EBENEZER)

May the God of Hope Go with Us 765

Song of Hope / *Canto de esperanza*

May the God of hope go with us ev - ery day, fill - ing all our
¡Dios de la es - pe - ran - za, da - nos go - zo y paz! Al mun - do en

lives with love and joy and peace. May the God of jus - tice speed us
cri - sis, ha - bla tu ver - dad. Dios de la jus - ti - cia, mán - da -

on our way, bring - ing light and hope to ev - ery land and race.
nos tu luz, luz y es - pe - ran - za en la os - cu - ri - dad.

Pray - ing, let us work for peace; sing - ing, share our joy with all;
O - re - mos por la paz, can - te - mos de tu a - mor.

work - ing for a world that's new, faith - ful when we hear Christ's call.
Lu - che - mos por la paz, fie - les a ti, Se - ñor.

This Argentine folk melody sets Spanish and English words, both created by a PC(USA) missionary with much Latin American experience. The two versions complement each other: the Spanish text offering a prayer to God, and the English one providing inspiration for the singers.

TEXT: Alvin Schutmaat, 1984
 MUSIC: Argentine folk melody

ARGENTINA
 11.11.11.11 with refrain

OMNIBUS MOTION FOR THE JANUARY 23, 2018 PRESBYTERY MEETING

From the Stated Clerk

- The Stated Clerk moves the approval of the minutes of the November 14, 2017 presbytery meeting.
- The Stated Clerk moves that presbytery receive the report of the following commissions and dismiss the commissions with thanks:
 - The commission to ordain Megan Klose, which ordination took place on Sunday, November 5, 2017 at Falls Church Presbyterian Church.
 - The commission to install the Rev. Adam Ogg as Associate Pastor, Burke Presbyterian Church, which installation took place on November 5, 2017.
 - The commission to ordain Minh Towner, which ordination took place on November 18, 2017 at Vienna Presbyterian Church.
 - The commission to charter Christ the King Presbyterian Church, which chartering took place on November 26, 2017 (see report in Presbytery Reports)
 - The Northwood Presbyterian Church Administrative Commission (see report in Presbytery reports)

From the Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee moves and recommends to the presbytery the following to serve on the indicated commission or committee:

- *Budget & Finance*
Don Humphries, Class of 9-1-19
- *Permanent Judicial Commission*
Cassandra Havard, RE, Redeemer, Class of 9-1-2023
Yena Hwang, TE, Fairfax PC, Class of 9-1-2023
Heemoon Youn, TE, Korean PC, Class of 9-1-2023
- *Stewardship Committee*
Karl Mattison, RE, Georgetown PC, Class of 9-1-2021

From the Session Records Review Committee

Based on reviews conducted on September 23 and November 18, 2017, the committee moves the approval of the following minutes and rolls and registers without exception:

Arlington	Bealeton	Brambleton
Brentsville	Bush Hill	Calvary
Capitol Hill	Catoctin	Centreville
Chevy Chase	Christ	Clarendon
Covenant Arlington	Covenant Woodbridge	Fairfax
First Annandale	First United Dale City	Grace Springfield

Greenwich	Heritage	John Calvin
Kirkwood	Leesburg	Manassas
New York Avenue	Providence	Trinity Arlington
United Christian Parish	Vienna	Westminster Alexandria

Based on the review conducted September 23, 2017, the following rolls and registers were approved with exceptions:

Wheaton Community

Based on the reviews conducted September 23 and November 18, 2017, the following rolls and registers were approved without exceptions:

Lewinsville
Little Falls
Mount Vernon
Pilgrims
Western

Based on the reviews conducted September 23 and November 18, 2017, the following minutes were approved with exceptions:

Lewinsville
Little Falls
Mount Vernon
Pilgrims
Western
Wheaton Community

From the Leadership Council

- The Leadership Council moves the following to serve on the Nominating Committee: Sara Parker, RE, Western, class of 9-1-21

ACTION ITEMS FOR THE JANUARY 2018 PRESBYTERY MEETING

From the Bills & Overtures Committee

Motion from the session of the United Christian Parish of Reston: that the presbytery concur with the Overture from the Presbytery of the Cascades (OVT-010) ON RESPONDING TO THE CURRENT SYRIAN CRISIS (pp. 15-18)

Concerning the request from United Christian Parish of Reston to concur with OVT-010, the Bills and Overtures Committee of NCP concurs with OVT-010 with comment.

Rationale:

The Bills and Overtures Committee enthusiastically supports OVT 010. There were clarification questions among the members of the committee with the realization that these questions would likely be addressed in the assigned committee at the 2018 General Assembly. Therefore, the "with comment" refers to communication with this year's NCP commissioners to be certain that they are aware of the clarification questions that came up in the Bills and Overtures Committee.

Motion from the session of Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church: that the presbytery concur with the overture from the Presbytery of Hudson Valley (OVT-006) ON DIRECTING THE BOARD OF PENSIONS AND THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH USA FOUNDATION TO DIVEST FROM FOSSIL FUEL AND ACTIVELY INVEST IN SECURITIES THAT FOCUS ON RENEWABLE ENERGY (pp. 19-20)

Concerning the request from Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church to concur with OVT-006, the Bills and Overtures Committee finds the overture in order.

Rationale:

While the Bills and Overtures Committee acknowledges the faithful and passionate response to the role fossil fuels place in climate change and its effect on the environment and God's gift of creation, we recommend neither for or against the overture, but find the overture in order.

At the 2016 General Assembly, the Immigration and Environmental Issues Committee recommended divestment by a vote of 31-25.

The commissioners voted on a substitute motion from the minority report calling for selective divestment. Members of the Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) Committee told commissioners that complete divestment would reduce Presbyterians' ability to persuade energy companies to act in environmentally responsible ways- one of the purposes of MRTI. MRTI members reported great strides in progress and commitment made by fossil fuel companies to find environmentally sustainable and renewable energy resources other than fossil fuels. The chair of MRTI, Elizabeth Dunning told the commissioners that MRTI's engagement with energy companies has been effective in calling them to account. MRTI members feel that complete divestment would cause companies to leave the table and end the conversation and efforts to hold companies engaging in the use of fossil fuels accountable.

Under the motion with an amendment that was approved by the commissioners, MRTI must report back to the 2018 General Assembly on what is being done in corporate practices to significantly reduce and, where appropriate, eliminate the use of fossil fuels, and to make recommendations to the assembly including divestment if MRTI found that

significant changes in corporate practices are not being implemented. Supporters of the divestment argued that this action of the assembly was not immediate enough and that complete divestment was the message that needed to be sent. The motion that came out of the minority report was passed by a vote of 460-91. More details are available at the PCUSA website under "GA turns back move to divest from fossil fuel."

From the Leadership Council

- The Leadership Council moves that the \$109,389 retention amount received from First Korean of Northern Virginia be allocated as follows:
 - \$16,859 to pay overdue per capita for 2014-2016
 - \$92,500 to reimburse General Directors funds tapped for Covenant debt service payments
- The Leadership Council moves that the Presbytery agree to pay the overdue taxes and fees owed by Garden Memorial Presbyterian Church (up to \$53,000) to the District of Columbia, along with other settlement costs (up to \$3,000) to alleviate the tax lien presently levied on the church property, with the following conditions:
 - a. Garden Memorial agrees in a Memorandum of Understanding (to be drafted by NCP's attorney) to repay the full amount at no interest in 120 equal monthly payments (10 years) delivered to the Presbytery office by the fifth of each month starting July 5, 2018.
 - b. That 4% annualized interest be assessed on a monthly basis (1/3 of 1%) on the whole outstanding balance if any payment is late after July 4, 2018.
 - c. If, after July 15, 2018, the church falls behind in its payments by three months or more, the Church agrees to transfer title to the property to the Presbytery to manage, sell or use in ministry as it sees fit.
 - d. This agreement requires the vote of the Session and the congregation as it involves real property decisions.
 - e. The funds necessary shall be from the DC Resurrection Fund balance and shall be repaid to the DC Resurrection Fund balance.
 - f. The Presbytery agrees to postpone the payment on the Ministry Crisis Fund loan (\$14,935) for one year, after which the ability of the Church to repay it shall be evaluated by the COM Ministry Relations Team.

[OVT-010] On Responding to the Current Syrian Crisis— From the Presbytery of the Cascades.

Recommendation

The Presbytery of the Cascades overtures the 223rd General Assembly (2018) of the PC(USA) to respond to the crisis in Syria focused on four principal goals: stop the killing; work for reconciliation; alleviate the suffering; and deepen PC(USA) partnership with Syrian Christians.

1. *Stop the Killing*

Direct the Stated Clerk of the PC(USA) to send a message to the President of the United States, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and to each United States Senator and Representative to use all diplomatic means, in cooperation with other major parties in the Syrian crisis, to bring about a durable ceasefire, in tandem with a cessation of military support to any participant in the conflict.

2. *Work for Reconciliation*

As a part of the necessary work of Syrian reconciliation, direct the Stated Clerk of the PC (USA) to communicate to the United States government and other parties involved the need to contribute fully to the humanitarian, human rights, and peace-building work of the United Nations. Encourage the United Nations to cooperate fully with these efforts, to involve civil society wherever possible, and to advocate measures to stabilize a more just world order in this region, encouraging nonviolent coexistence among religious and ethnic groups. Direct the Office of Public Witness in Washington, D.C., and the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations to support this witness in their work.

3. *Alleviate the Suffering*

a. Direct the Stated Clerk of the PC(USA), Presbyterian World Mission, and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance to call on congregations and presbyteries, nonprofit organizations, the United States government, and agencies of the United Nations, to provide robust financial support for organizations engaged in alleviating the suffering of Syrians, especially those displaced inside Syria and those now living as refugees in neighboring countries.

b. Direct the Stated Clerk of the PC (USA) to call on the United States government to reopen Syrian refugees' entry into the United States and substantially expand the number of refugees admitted. Encourage the United States to maintain a more generous policy toward refugees based on our identity as a pluralistic nation.

c. Direct the Stated Clerk of the PC(USA) to call on the United States Department of Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control, to review and revise the current program of economic sanctions on Syria so as to reduce their painful impact on ordinary Syrian families and on religious, civic, educational, and medical bodies unassociated with any form of terrorism.

4. *Deepen our Partnership with Syrian Christians*

a. Direct Presbyterian World Mission to provide an annotated list of media sources about events in Syria and the situation of PC(USA)'s Christian partners.

b. Encourage PC (USA) pastors and congregations to build personal contacts and partnerships with Syrians: covenant to pray regularly for congregations in Syria, make visits to Syria, and develop relationships with Syrians in the United States. Encourage congregations to work with Syrian refugees now in the United States, to help and encourage them in ways that express Christian love.

Rationale

The situation in Syria continues to be one of the worst humanitarian crises of the present time. Since the conflict erupted in 2011, more than 470,000 Syrians have been killed, many more than 5.1 million documented refugees have fled the country in addition to thousands of undocumented refugees, and 6.3 million have been displaced internally [2016 data]. More than half the population of Syria have been killed or displaced from their homes and 13.5 million are in need of humanitarian assistance.

The Christian community in Syria has roots stretching back to the first century. With the second largest number of Christians in the Middle East, this vibrant community, widely dispersed across the country, can play a significant role in the future of the country and the region. Over the past forty years, Christians, along with other religious minorities, have been protected from persecution by the secular policies of the Syrian government. In areas where the Syrian government is not in control, moderate Muslims, Christians from various traditions, and other minorities have often had their places of worship damaged or destroyed and their followers persecuted and forced to flee.

Today, that Christian community is significantly threatened by possible outcomes of the conflict in which control of the country could pass to Islamists intent on establishing a government that imposes a highly restrictive interpretation of Islam. The 222nd General Assembly (2016) of PC(USA) affirmed the need to support Christians in the Middle East. Similar concerns for an end to violence and work for community reconciliation underlie the Good Friday Agreement (Northern Ireland) and the Ta'if Accords (Lebanon).

Recognizing the real dangers of an Islamist state and the scale of violence and suffering already experienced by the Syrian people does not excuse the widely reported human rights abuses of the Syrian government. While the violent reaction of the Syrian government to peaceful protestors during the 2011 Arab Spring shocked the world, the swift militarization and escalation of the conflict thereafter has spawned a conflict where all sides have committed or condoned crimes against humanity. Restorative justice, rather than retributive justice, may be possible in post-conflict Syria. Faith in God's justice remains unshakable.

Stop the Killing

The first steps in the long process of reconciliation on all levels must involve shifting the focus away from efforts to gain an overwhelming military victory, dividing the country into separate states or other governmental outcomes that result in a weakened Syrian state. Concentrating on achieving a durable ceasefire would enable diplomatic discussions and negotiations, without pre-conditions, in which Syrians from all sides can play the central role in shaping their future and achieving their human rights as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Syria is a signatory nation. The examples of Libya, Yemen, and Iraq show the dangers of losing a functional central government.

The crisis has been made immensely more lethal and complicated as the numerous combatants have each found outside supporters ready to send in fighters, weapons, and money to bolster partisan efforts. The arrival of Islamic extremists with foreign backing has further complicated the violence that is taking place throughout Syria. As long as the supply of military resources continues to flow into Syria, the prospects for diplomatic progress remain severely limited. A diplomatic approach to achieve a durable ceasefire must be accompanied by an end to the flow of military support from all outside sources.

"Blessed are the peacemakers ..." (Mt. 5:9).

Work for Reconciliation

The work of reconciliation must be done by Syrians in the space created by a ceasefire and the demilitarization of the conflict. Both the U.S. government and the PC(USA) must affirm the Syrian commitment to maintaining a unified nation based on principles that affirm the rights of all minorities. The goal of a civil government, where all religions are respected without interference in the affairs of any religious group, is paramount.

The U.S. has an important role in bringing about a ceasefire and the demilitarization of the Syrian conflict. Christian understanding of the roles of faith and forgiveness has much to contribute to the process of reconciliation. In binding up the social and psychological wounds of war, reconciliation will have to address the long-standing grievances and aspirations of the Syrian people, in addition to the alienating consequences of war borne by individuals and communities.

“... in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us” (2 Cor. 5:19).

Alleviate the Suffering

With an estimated 11.5 million people displaced from their homes and with economic systems and social networks disrupted, the need for immediate assistance is immense. Refugees in neighboring countries, those farther afield, and those internally displaced within Syria, require urgent assistance. The World Bank estimates that more than a quarter of the housing and over half of the country's medical and educational facilities have been damaged or destroyed. It also observes that the breakdown of social and economic systems, and the destruction of trust among citizens, continues to have a greater economic impact than the destruction of physical infrastructure. Long-term help is needed for the reconstruction and rebuilding of the country's infrastructure. The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, PC(USA)'s partner denomination in the area, and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, require financial support for their effective programs, which respond to needs of people of all faiths impacted by this crisis.

The requirements for the tasks of rebuilding are so immense that a major international effort will be required. The U.S. government must increase its level of humanitarian and economic support for Syria and encourage international organizations such as the United Nations to do the same. All nations—including the United States—need to meet their financial obligations to the UN. Due to unmet pledges and obligations, the UN has been forced to cut back on its support of refugees and internally displaced persons. The continuing fighting makes immediate assistance more difficult, and sometimes renders it impossible. The longer-term task of rebuilding can begin in earnest only when some form of negotiated settlement is in place.

The United States has a moral obligation to participate in the worldwide response to the desperate flight of people seeking to escape the brutal situation in Syria. In response to such desperation, the U.S. government should reopen its doors to a significant increase in the number of Syrian refugees. All refugees admitted currently face rigorous screening and exhaustive vetting by five of the nation's top security organizations, following years of screening and vetting by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The number of Syrian refugees admitted to the United States to date—only 18,007, between October 2011 and December 2016—is far too low in terms of the numbers in need; the current freeze is unacceptable. The U.S. should accept its fair share of refugees looking for permanent resettlement. It is essential to continue to support the efforts of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and others engaged in working with congregations to facilitate resettling Syrian refugees in the U.S., as noted by the 222nd General Assembly (2016).

For those Syrians who have remained in their own country, internally displaced or living in their own homes, the sharp downward spiral of the economy has had an immense impact on their standard of living. A key factor contributing to this downturn has been the sanctions imposed by the United States. Those sanctions, enacted in order to punish the Syrian government for its support of terrorism, violence, and human rights abuses, have had a major impact on the welfare of all Syrian citizens. PC(USA) Syrian partners have reported that, as a result of the sanctions, it has been very

difficult for them to get permission to undertake international financial transactions or to import materials and supplies needed to establish or operate businesses, or for foreigners to provide assistance to support such activities. The licensing framework and export control requirements are complex, often requiring costly legal analysis, and acting as an impediment to international financing and trade.

The downward economic spiral has led to scarcities and price increases of everyday commodities while exacerbating difficulties in operating businesses. Syria's economic destruction has aided the recruitment of young men to fight for extremist groups in order to support their families. The current system of sanctions must be reviewed to make it more supportive of the needs of Syrian civilians so they can rebuild their economic livelihood.

"... 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?' ... And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me'" (Mt. 25:37b–40).

Deepen PC(USA) Partnership with Syrian Christians

PC(USA)'s Syrian Christian partners caution that U.S. perceptions of reality are misinformed by the fragmented, inaccurate, and often subjective reporting of Western media. Relying on more diverse information sources is crucial to a clearer understanding of the Syrian crisis.

Beyond accessing more balanced news sources about Syria, American Presbyterians can deepen their personal spiritual formation as they build contacts and partnerships with Syrian Christians, who are Christianity's elder sisters and brothers in the faith. Such opportunities are made possible through visits to Syria sponsored by Presbyterian World Mission's Syria Lebanon Partnership Network, and other denominational and ecumenical agencies such as the Outreach Foundation. PC(USA) partners on the ground can assist those seeking to understand the complexity of the conflict. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance materials offered to PC(USA) congregations working with Syrian refugees now in the United States greatly enhance community building. These relationships enable U.S. citizens to learn from Syrian refugees and also help ease the difficult transition that many of them face.

Prayer must undergird personal engagement with the Syrian conflict: prayer for Syrian people who suffer from the crisis, prayer for decision makers responsible for crafting and implementing just and compassionate policies, and personal prayer by each person as they seek the continual guidance of the Holy Spirit in search of ways forward in this complex situation.

"... 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself'" (Lk. 10:27b).

"... Pray without ceasing ... for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:17–18).

[OVT 006] 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—From the Presbytery of Hudson River.

Recommendation

The Presbytery of Hudson River overtures the 223rd General Assembly (2018) to

- 1. Commend the Board of Pensions and Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation for creating fossil-free options for participants, and the Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee for increased engagement with companies in the fossil-fuel industry—actions that embody the beginning of a faithful response to the devastating and urgent reality of climate change.**
- 2. Recognize that by continuing to hold investments in the fossil-fuel companies that most egregiously contribute to the climate crisis, the PC(USA) is complicit in harming God’s creation and “the least of these” who are disproportionately affected by climate change.**
- 3. Direct the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation to divest from the fossil-fuel industry.**
- 4. Direct the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation to actively seek out and invest in securities of companies whose predominant focus is in renewable and/or energy efficiency.**
- 5. Direct the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation to report to the 224th General Assembly (2020) about their progress in effecting Recommendations 3. and 4.**

Rationale

People on the front lines of climate change, particularly people of color, are disproportionately impacted by climate change. Countless individuals and organizations among “the least of these” have prophetically called upon the world to divest from fossil fuels. Earlier this year, for example, LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, one of the native water protectors at Standing Rock said, “We will be everywhere to let people know that there’s a better way to live, there’s a better way to live with the Earth, with green energy, and that it’s time for us now to start divesting from fossil fuel, because we must save the water. We must save the water.” We are thus called to take prophetic action in light of these voices and the imminent dangers on which they shed light.

The PC(USA) has debated divestment from the fossil fuel industry during the last two General Assemblies [221st General Assembly (2014) and 222nd General Assembly (2016)].

- In 2014, the Presbytery of Boston sent the overture “On Divestment from Fossil Fuel Companies” with eleven presbyteries concurring (*Minutes*, 2014, Part I, pp. 1013ff, Item 15-01).
- In 2016, the Presbytery of San Francisco sent the overture “On PC(USA) Fossil Fuel Divestment” with thirty-one presbyteries concurring (*Minutes*, 2016, Part I, pp. 511ff, Item 09-01).

Prior to the 222nd General Assembly (2016), nine former Moderators signed a letter urging the commissioners to support the overture to divest.^[1] Their reasoning included, “because of the grave and urgent threat of climate change and the fossil fuel sector’s well-documented and unyielding refusal to change, it is no longer morally or ethically right for the PC(USA) to profit from companies that are creating ecological destruction and human suffering on such a monumental scale.”

Our denomination has already recognized the moral mandate for humanity to shift to a sustainable energy plan in a way that is both just and compassionate, not least of which includes the support of carbon neutrality in 2006. These statements have all been founded on the biblical call to love and care for creation.

We have actively worked as a denomination to reduce our use of fossil fuels and shrink our carbon footprint in our congregations and individual lives. These biblical and denominational mandates compel us to look at our collective investments.

As a denomination, we have long held that we cannot profit from the companies whose policies are harmful to any living thing. For nearly a century, the church has not invested in companies producing alcohol, tobacco, gambling, the military, or those that contribute to violations of human rights. The General Assembly thus declared in 1968, “the [Church’s] power to spend and to invest includes the power to refrain from spending or investing. The church has not only the right but the responsibility to be selective in the use of its funds.”

The General Assembly reinforced this form of stewardship in 1992, affirming that it does not and will not invest in any “sin stocks.” In addition to these broad industries, General Assemblies have also divested from the Duke Energy coal mining company because of its treatment of its workers; Chevron after it sold fuel to the South African apartheid government; Talisman Energy for building a pipeline in Sudan that threatened human rights; and Hewlett Packard, Caterpillar, and Motorola for profiting from human rights abuses in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Some of these divestment actions came after a long process of corporate engagement by the church’s Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) committee. Other divestment decisions were made outside the realm of MRTI.

Climate change represents deep harm to the whole biosphere, including especially marginalized people, so it is imperative that we would divest from the industry most responsible for that harm, as outlined in the Carbon Underground 200[2] list.

And already as a denomination we are taking some steps. The PC(USA) Foundation has introduced financial products that provide comparable return on investment without supporting fossil fuel companies, and the Board of Pensions has a fossil-free option for their 403-B plan. Synods, presbyteries, congregations, and individuals have moved their investments to such funds, and we commend them for doing so.

But while these actions among individuals and various Presbyterian entities are faithful responses to the growing crisis of climate change, they fall far short of the institutional actions necessary to make a significant difference. It is time for fossil-free investments to be the norm instead of the option.

[1] <http://www.fossilfreepcusa.org/moderators-letter/>

[2] <http://fossilfreeindexes.com/the-carbon-underground/> The Carbon Underground 200 is an annually updated listing of the top 100 public coal companies globally and the top 100 public oil and gas companies globally, ranked by the potential carbon emissions content of their reported reserves. The list is produced and maintained by Fossil Free Indexes, LLC.