



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

GRADYE PARSONS
STATED CLERK

December 15, 2014

Dear Presbytery Moderators and Executive Staff:

Advent greetings to each of you in this wondrous, yet often busy season. Before Christmas, but with Christmas very much in mind, I wanted to send this letter out (both in paper and online). It concerns that phrase, “Peace on Earth.”

One of the assignments given the Stated Clerk at the 221st General Assembly (2014) was the distribution of five affirmations on peacemaking to the presbyteries for a recorded, advisory vote. These affirmations are attached, along with short summaries of background material in the full report, “Risking Peace in a Violent World.” Like all other Assembly business, it is posted online with the link provided in the four-page resource that I encourage you to provide to your presbyters. The four-pager also summarizes the stages in the process of “Peace Discernment” approved by the Assembly in 2010, 2012, and 2014.

For your convenience, an Internet-based response form has been created to submit your votes and advisement electronically. You will receive an email with the link to the form or you may also find the link on the Peacemaking Program and Advisory Committee for Social Witness Policy websites. You may also use the attached one-page response form, if you prefer to complete the form manually. All responses will be read carefully by the Advisory Committee and the Peacemaking Program. Similar response forms are being shared with our Presbyterian seminaries and church-related colleges and universities, some of whose faculty have participated in prior discussion of the issues involved. The Peace Discernment Steering Team, a group of primarily younger Presbyterians with international experience, suggests that each affirmation be voted separately, although that would be your presbytery’s decision. Similarly, they would welcome your presbytery proposing your own versions of the affirmations, if you wish—the General Assembly made several changes of its own.

I am often asked by Christian leaders from around the world to address ongoing warfare and new military campaigns. Since 1980, we have been guided by *Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling* and subsequent statements building on that social witness policy. Massive amounts of US wealth have been spent on military operations, particularly since 9/11. More importantly, millions of lives have been lost and been damaged, including over 5,000 US military deaths, with thousands more wounded. As Reformed Christians, we own our part in our nation’s responsibility for this activity.

These five affirmations are NOT policy statements, but ways to test the thinking and feeling of our church in the key council of the presbytery. I encourage you to make time in your busy dockets, and also to provide time and background for thoughtful discussion and informed voting. The Peacemaking Program (peacemaking@pcusa.org) is prepared to offer assistance, as is the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (acswp@pcusa.org). Rev. Alonzo Johnson, Jr., new Peacemaking Program staff member, will be resourcing the discussions of the affirmations. He can be reached at Alonzo.Johnson@pcusa.org if you need any assistance.

In service of the Prince of Peace,

The Reverend Gradye Parsons
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)