



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH USA

Advocacy Report to Presbyterians:

News from Washington DC and The United Nations



A Special Message from Rev. Jimmie Hawkins, PC(USA) Interim Unified Agency, Advocacy Director and Assistant Stated Clerk

The summer of 2025 was one of our best ever! We are always blessed with young adults who are talented, faithful, and creative. This team was no exception as our eleven students and seminarians demonstrated high levels of commitment and competency to the work of OPW and PMUN. They were a joy to work alongside and added laughter, innovation, and passion to our community. Each one brought something unique and qualitative in their ability to further the advocacy work of both offices. Throughout the summer, they each to each one of you! wrote Action Alerts, produced video clips on a moral budget, led a webinar and a chapel service, designed a prayer walk, and fully participated in the life of the church's advocacy ministries. Mostly, they shared their faith in the Lordship of Jesus as the Prince of Peace who charges us to be actively engaged in the work of peacemaking. They made the connection between discipleship and advocacy as they proclaimed the love of a God of justice for all people. This summer was one we won't soon forget. Blessings and Peace to each one of you!

Advocacy as Ministry with Young Adults

Ivy Lopedito, Mission Associate for Young Adult and Constituent Engagement Office of Public Witness in Washington D.C.

On a bright and early June day in Washington, DC, ten young adults gathered in the Office of Public Witness conference room alongside our staff members. Together, we spent the next few days teaching, learning, and dreaming about what faith-driven advocacy could accomplish and imagining how they might bring justice and hope to the pressing issues both here and around the world.

By the end of July, those early dreams had become a reality: developing vital resources to support individuals and congregations in grassroots advocacy for just public policies, finalizing worship materials and plans for chapel services, sending out Action Alerts to Presbyterians, editing a video that shared the story of their summer, and so much more.

This work happened all summer long not only in DC, but also at the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations in New York City. For eight weeks, our fellows dived right into the work of faith-based advocacy and theological reflection. They weren't just learning about justice, they were living it.



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.....Ministry with Young Adults

Our fellowship program exists because we believe the church's public witness depends on leaders who are spiritually grounded and prepared to engage the most urgent issues of our time. This summer, the 2025 Fellows embodied that vision. Through mentorship, workshops, and hands-on projects, they developed their gifts and deepened their call to be faithful leaders and passionate advocates.

Their work left a lasting mark:

- Relaunching Holy Discontentment (coming September 2025)
- Contributing to the Advocacy and Worship Manual (coming November 2025), a new resource helping congregations connect worship with action.
- Planning and leading chapel for PC(USA) agency staff, bringing new voices into worship.
- Creating an Israel Palestine Resource Manual to guide faithful engagement.
- Organizing a prayer gathering and webinar to mobilize Presbyterians during the Budget Reconciliation process.
- Producing this year's Fellowship Video to inspire future applicants.
- Participating in the High-Level Political Forum at the United Nations.
- Attending Interfaith and Ecumenical prayer vigils and press events in solidarity with the Apache Stronghold, Repairs of the Breach, and other DC-based partners.

Our young adults this summer reminded us that the Church's witness is not confined to the walls of a church, but rather it is very much alive in our city streets, policy meetings, and global forums. Their energy, creativity, and courage give us hope for the future of our shared ministry.

In the reflections that follow, you'll hear directly from our fellows about the projects and experiences that shaped them. We are deeply grateful for their vision, their hard work, and their commitment to building a more just and compassionate world, and we cannot wait to see what they do next.





Holy Discontentment

Olivia Phelps, 2025 Summer Fellow Co-Lead
Office of Public Witness in Washington, D.C.

When headlines overflow in news of war, famine, natural disasters, and despair, we are left asking: Why this is happening? How did we get here? This questioning and lamenting of the actions around us is not a reflection of a lack of faith, but a holy discipline that we recognize injustice and advocate for our communities to become more like on earth as it is in heaven. We aren't wrong to ask why, but wrong to ask why and do nothing about it.

Holy Discontentment is described as the restlessness that rises in us when we see injustice, inequality, or suffering and sense that God is calling us to respond. It is not just anger or frustration — it is a faithful discomfort, rooted in hope for something better.

When Jesus was confronted with injustice, He did not remain indifferent. He turned over tables in righteous anger. He spoke out against hypocrisy. He grieved over the brokenness of our humanity. His holy discontent was not a lack of faith, but a reflection of it.

So too, our anger in the face of injustice does not diminish our faith; it can be an invitation to witness where the Holy Spirit is moving and participate in caring for creation. From Isaiah 1:17 to Micah 6:8, Luke 11:42 to James 2:14-17, and 1 John 4:19-20, the message calls us again and again to this holy responsibility.

There is a space and way for everyone to be an advocate. God grants us with unique gifts to share with the larger body, and that doesn't have to change when finding which way advocacy fits into your life. You can bring awareness and inspiration to a cause through the gift of art. You can be a hopeful and motivational presence through the gift of hospitality. You can mobilize and educate on policy priorities through the gift of teaching. When God places a priority on your heart, find reassurance that you don't stand alone. There are established organizations mobilized and excited about making change, and you are invited to participate in the happenings. No matter where you are sitting, the table of social justice extends to you.

Through the waters of baptism, we, as the congregation, take on a sacred calling to guide our neighbors to know Christ and to live as the Lord requires of us: to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. May we not grow numb to the pain of the world, but allow our holy discontentment to move us to speak, create, act, and serve. We pray for the courage to not look away, to listen for where the Spirit moves us, and to follow Christ into the work of justice, mercy, and love.

To find more about advocacy and why it is a practice of faith, how to communicate with your elected officials, examples of justice in scripture, and more, go to the PC(USA) Office of Public Website under the resources tab to find the 'Holy Discontentment Advocacy Guide'.



Forgotten Wars and Crises

Madeline Veitch, 2025 Summer Fellow Co-Lead,
Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations in New
York City

The ongoing war in Gaza has received a lot of news coverage in the United States since the current conflict started on October 7th, 2023. The dire humanitarian crisis, complex historical relationship, and regional interests have informed the general public about the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. However, many other ongoing conflicts and crises around the world do not receive the same media attention and public outcry as compared to the war in Gaza. This is not to suggest that the situation in Gaza and the West Bank should receive less media attention, but rather to call for attention to other global conflicts.

The power of the people to protest and lobby the government can cause meaningful change, but that comes from being well informed. As a global superpower, the US influences the outcomes of international conflicts. There are humanitarian crises occurring in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Haiti, Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan, the Sahel region, Yemen, Ethiopia, Ukraine, and others.



As Presbyterians, we must stand with those who suffer around the world and continue to fight for universal human rights, humanitarian aid access, and peace. We can be instruments of implementing God's vision of a world of justice and peace here on Earth by focusing on those people and places suffering most from violence, conflict, hunger, and uncertainty. We should be responsible stewards of the power of the United States and make sure that it is used to promote peaceful resolutions.

To stay informed, look at a variety of news sources, not just from domestic organizations, but also from international papers and from different perspectives. Continue to follow the work of the Presbyterian Ministry at the UN (PMUN) and the Office of Public Witness (OPW) to stay engaged and involved. Consider reading the UN News Service as it provides updates on humanitarian situations around the world. Educate community members about these situations and remain in prayer for the victims of these conflicts. For those areas of human suffering where the US is complicit, contact representatives and urge them to protect the least of these. As followers of Jesus, we care about the lives of those across the world, and remembering Matthew 25, know that what we do unto the least of these, we do unto Him.



Loving God, Our hearts hurt for the people of Gaza impacted by violence, starvation, and lack of access to basic needs. In this time of global unrest, we lift up those around the world whose suffering is hidden from the international spotlight. Help us to find our voices and stand with these people too. We ask for your peaceful presence across the world and especially in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Haiti, Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan, the Sahel region, Yemen, Ethiopia, Ukraine, and with many others. O God, we pray that your healing presence be with those whose fight isn't on our minds that they might find peace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Faithful Action, Local Change: A Young Presbyterian's Reflection

Atticus Gore, 2025 Summer Fellow, Office of Public Witness in Washington D.C.

“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” — Micah 6:8

Growing up in the Presbyterian Church, I have been blessed with a community that has prayed for me, encouraged me, and nurtured my faith. Even while I'm away at school, I continue to feel the strength of that support, for which I'm so grateful.

Now a senior at William & Mary, I study Public Policy and Hispanic Studies, with a focus on dismantling structural barriers in healthcare, education, and housing. Last summer, I interned with Senator Mark Warner, and this year, I'm serving as a Summer Fellow for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness, where I work on domestic policy and help revise the Holy Discontentment advocacy guide.

In a time when national politics often feel overwhelming and divisive, I want to offer a different invitation—one grounded in our shared faith: refocus your energy on your local community.

The most meaningful change I've seen doesn't begin in the halls of Congress—it begins in our congregations, our neighborhoods, and our classrooms. It begins with people who dare to believe that faith and justice are not separate callings.

That's why tools like Holy Discontentment matter. This guide invites individuals and churches alike to take faithful, informed, and practical steps toward justice. Whether you're new to advocacy or deeply involved, it offers a path forward—rooted in God's call to repair the world.

We each carry gifts, and leaning into those strengths while allowing God to strengthen us is a gift in itself. Real change doesn't always require more; it requires deeper: deeper listening, deeper care, deeper courage.

So I offer three practices that have shaped my own journey:

1. Share your story. Speak honestly about what you see around you—not just what's in the news, but what's happening in your community. You may be surprised by how many others are ready to walk alongside you.
2. Listen deeply. Make space for the voices of others. Let their experiences guide your own understanding and shape how you show up for justice.
3. Pray consistently. In the valleys, in the confusion, in the waiting—God is with us. He is working. He is faithful. Even in uncertainty, we are held in unwavering love. As we act, we must also rest. Take breaks when needed. Disconnect from the noise. Tend to your spirit. God gave you gifts not to be depleted but to be stewarded—and from that well, your faithfulness can flourish.

A change in Washington may take years. But a change in our communities can begin today. That kind of holy, rooted, relational change is how we live out the gospel and build a more just world—one prayer, one neighbor, one act of courage at a time. Let us begin. Amen.

A Fellow's Perspective: How to be an Effective Advocate

Thomas Currie, 2025 Summer Fellow, Office of Public Witness in Washington D.C.



At the start of the summer, I had no experience with advocacy. I knew that people called their congresspeople and senators, I did not know what effective advocacy looked like. The PC(USA) Office of Public Witness primarily advocates at the federal level. While the office's work is vital, the reality is that for the average person on their own, attempting to advocate on a national level can be ineffective. One way an individual can make a difference is by advocating for change at the state or local level, and my work this summer has highlighted this for me. For example, the most significant piece of legislation this summer was, of course, the One Big Beautiful Bill. While the Office strongly opposed this legislation, it ultimately passed by a narrow margin. After the Bill passed, a colleague and I, another fellow at the office, decided to host a webinar for PCUSA members, detailing the

next steps in advocacy following the passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill. We agreed that we should have speakers from a red, purple, and blue state, to give attendees a wide range of ways in which they could advocate. In meeting with these potential speakers, I was shocked at how much impact an individual could have when advocating at a smaller level. Of course, when fewer people vote in local elections, something as simple as getting those in your social circle to vote for one candidate or another can swing the outcome of an election—something that is impossible on the national level of course. Additionally, I learned that states can help mitigate the harm caused by legislation such as the One Big Beautiful Bill when meeting with our speaker from North Carolina, Jennifer Copeland. She mentioned that the state could step in and provide funding for Medicare in the wake of the cuts. After the bill was initially passed, many of us felt a great deal of sorrow, and my colleagues expressed hopelessness due to this bill. However, being able to hear about ways to advocate in our states and communities to help our immediate neighbors made me feel so much better about the future. Even when the big picture may look murky, there are always joys to be found in life, and ways in which we can see God and His work being done around us every day.





Seeking Connection in the Conflict: A Peacemaking Fellow's Reflection on Discussing Hard Things

Grace Krokme, 2025 Peacemaking Fellow Office of Public Witness in Washington D.C.

During my interview for the Office of Public Witness Fellowship, I remember being asked something to the effect of: How do you deal with conflict or someone who opposes your opinion? (and I'm sure my response earned me the position of Peacemaking Fellow...)

My mind immediately raced to debates with my father on topics ranging from science to politics to religion—after all, he is a lawyer, and I have always wanted to be one as well. My dad and I sit on opposite sides of the political spectrum. He's not a man of faith, and our views rarely align, but I still love him deeply. Over the years, I've learned how to maintain a meaningful relationship with him despite our differences. He taught me how to have constructive conversations about tough topics while still walking away learning new things and feeling heard and loved.

Throughout the fellowship, I've been ruminating on that question—how do we engage with people who disagree with us?—as I have been communicating with Congressmen and Presbyterians alike in the wake of the passing of the Moral Budget Bill. We are living in a time of deep political division, to say the least. Disagreeing on policy is now synonymous with denying people their human rights, revoking healthcare and food access, and increasing the militarization of our economy and civil society.

How do we begin to find a common ground when talking about politics in many communities feel like walking on eggshells? How do we begin to mend the divides in our communities and find common ground amongst our differences?

What I am here to tell you today is that our differences make us stronger in the end. When we approach conflict with care and open hearts, we can forge a deeper connection that could potentially lead to truth and justice.

There are three core types of disagreements:

- Simple disagreement: when people have differing opinions or understandings, but your core values overlap with theirs
- Imminent Critique: where someone's actions don't align with their stated values
- Practical Contradiction: when someone's actions reveal that their stated beliefs are different than their actual values

...Seeking Connection in the Conflict

Rather than diverting the conversation or refusing to have it all altogether, we are invited to engage in the dissonance with compassion, curiosity, and mindfulness. When someone says they value peace amongst nations but then support increased militarization, you can ask for clarity. Approach the question to genuinely learn what the person's values are, not to prove a point or immediately change their mind. Ask what fuels their belief, how they inherited the belief, and if they've had a personal experience that greatly shaped that belief. Maybe you can find commonality amongst their answers and in sharing your own.

Each core type of disagreement invites a different opportunity to listen, question, challenge, and reframe to potentially find common ground. Not every conflict must be a call to arms; they can be open invitations to clarify and connect. Gently pointing out contradictions can be a learning point for both people in the conversation.

However, for the conversations that do turn hostile quickly or you don't see any potential for connection, know that it is okay to disagree and walk away. I cannot tell you the number of times I've thanked someone for their time and walked away from conversations to avoid further conflict. I approached the conversation openly, but there was no reciprocation, or I was met with hostility, so I walked away. You can show grace for the person in the pews who frustrates you while still having mercy for yourself and your well-being.

As I wrestled with this realization, I turned to 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. It begins:

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."

In a time of polarization, let yourself be reminded that we are one with Christ and one with each other despite our different demographics, beliefs, talents, and shortcomings. We are different, but we are not divided. We honor our shared humanity under God when we speak with love and grace. The conflict itself isn't inherently bad, but it's how we handle it that matters.

In churches, interpersonal conflict can be rooted in misunderstanding, diverging opinions, or hurt pride. Congregational conflict spans wider than that—becoming communal, theological, or systemic. Even wider than that, political and national conflicts are further intertwined with systemic issues of fear, power, and pride. However, no matter the extent of the conflict, we are called to the same: speak the truth in love.

"They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it." – 1 Peter 3:11

I urge you to stay in hard conversations and find common ground. Maybe if you forge a connection based on that, then you could build enough trust to have honest conversations about core values, and maybe even alter perspectives. And if you don't, know that at least you dug into core beliefs and planted a seed of trust and understanding.

So, if you're wondering if I have changed my father's mind after all these years, the answer is no. But I keep reaching out my hand. Not because I expect him to change, but because I believe that connection is sacred and truth-telling is holy, and at the end of the day, I love him all the same. And amongst the citizens of the nation and of the world, we are united under one loving and merciful God, respecting our differences and celebrating our connections.

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals Are In Our Hands

Ivy Coldren, 2025 Summer Fellow, Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations in New York City

During an International Studies course last fall, I asked my professor for examples of when the United Nations has been successful in its peacekeeping interventions. There were none. Many of my class discussions about the UN lead to similar conclusions: the UN is a nice idea, in theory. But in practice, the organization is ineffective in preventing conflicts. After two years of college, my view of the UN has become rather cynical, but my time with the Presbyterian Ministry at the UN (PMUN) office this summer has begun to change that.

I have learned about the UN's many agencies performing crucial humanitarian work, and the UN is also working towards a world where that aid would be unnecessary. In 2015, the member states unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Each year, the UN holds its High Level Political Forum (HLPF), when five of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are reviewed. The goals include No Poverty, Gender Equality, and Climate Action. With five years left, only 35% of the SDG targets show adequate progress.

The U.S. is a key reason for this poor progress. During this year's HLPF, I attended a parallel event hosted by the Commission on Voluntary Service and Action (CVSA), an organization which is running an education and mobilization campaign on the SDGs. The event's message was simple: the U.S. has never worked towards



the goals. Over the years, the U.S. has claimed to support the SDGs by providing aid for other countries' sustainable development efforts. But when it comes to the U.S.'s own implementation of the goals, the work is nonexistent. The U.S. is one of only three member states that has never delivered a Voluntary National Review on its progress.

One of the event participants described their experience visiting Japan. There, they saw posters and billboards about the SDGs all over the cities, and heard that kids were learning about them in school. Here in the U.S., I didn't know about the SDGs until this summer. In March, the U.S. government officially rejected the SDGs, despite agreeing to them along with the rest of the world in 2015. Another participant summed it up perfectly: the SDGs are rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and aim to achieve human rights for all. In rejecting the SDGs, U.S. leadership is rejecting human rights.

Despite this bleak discussion, plenty of hope was found at this event as well. We talked about working towards the SDGs at all levels, especially locally. I invite you to educate yourself about the goals (there are great resources on PMUN's website), and start conversations about them in your daily life. Bring up the goals in your communities, whether it's your congregation, neighborhood, or college campus. Find ways to implement the goals as an individual and as a community. The Sustainable Development Goals are crucial for our path to God's Kingdom, and we must all play our part in getting there.



Healing-Centered Advocacy

Alex Pickell, 2025 Peacemaking Summer Fellow, Office of Public Witness in Washington D.C.

When I began my fellowship with the Office of Public Witness this summer, I didn't know exactly what to expect. I had very little experience doing advocacy, let alone in D.C. Since graduating from seminary, my background has been in chaplaincy. Last year, I completed a clinical pastoral education internship, where I learned how to listen deeply, sit with suffering, and offer presence to people in crisis. What I've discovered over the past few months is that those same pastoral instincts are also needed in the work of advocacy. In fact, this summer has taught me the importance of what I've come to call healing-centered advocacy.

Advocacy, like chaplaincy, is about showing up. It's about bearing witness to people's pain, not just as individuals, but as communities—communities impacted by poverty, climate disaster, violence, war, and unjust systems. It's about making space to lament, to tell the truth about what is broken, and to do so with love and courage. Healing-centered advocacy is advocacy that doesn't ignore suffering, or rush to fix it, but holds it with compassion and hope.

That belief shaped my summer in real ways. On June 14, while military parades and protests stirred up tension in Washington, I felt anxious and isolated. Not wanting to be alone in that fear, I invited a few friends to gather on Zoom. We prayed, read poetry, and shared music. That simple act of choosing to be together reminded me of the sacred space of a hospital room: you ask someone how they're really doing, and you listen. That moment planted the seed for something larger. A couple weeks later, I helped organize a public gathering through the Office of Public Witness during the night of the Senate vote on the federal budget reconciliation bill. We called it "Gathering of Hope," and more than 160 Presbyterians joined in prayer and reflection.

What I think this work demands of us—whether we are full-time advocates, summer fellows, policy staff, or simply passionate church members—is that we take the time to consistently make space for lament, and honestly, for the hopelessness we sometimes feel. Advocacy can be burdensome work, especially if we feel like we're doing it alone. That's why we must approach it with a healing mindset. If we want to see the

peace of Christ manifest in our world, we have to treat ourselves and each other with grace, patience, compassion, and kindness.

God doesn't expect us to be perfect. God knows we are human. We have limits. And yet, even in those limitations, God remains present. My hope is that the Office of Public Witness will continue to offer spaces where Presbyterians, Christians, and all people can gather to feel not only empowered, but connected. As I return to chaplaincy this fall, I carry with me the knowledge that advocacy can be as simple as sharing a worry or lifting up a hope. And because of that, I can't wait to see what comes next.





Advocacy must be motivated by a deep sense of shared humanity

Chloe Snyder, 2025 Summer Fellow, Office of Public Witness in Washington D.C.

I spent this past summer working as a fellow in the Washington Office under the direction of the Associate for International Issues, Catherine Gordon. I worked exclusively on international policy issues with a particular focus on Israel-Palestine and Gaza policy. I assisted Catherine in writing action alerts, attended coalition meetings, and spent weeks creating a comprehensive advocacy resource to educate individuals and congregations on how to faithfully engage in advocacy around the Israel-Palestine issue.

I loved my advocacy work, and found it intellectually fascinating and profoundly energizing. My days were filled with amazing people and projects galore; I did writing projects, sat in on important meetings, attended protests on Capitol Hill, and represented the PC(USA) at a United Nations conference in New York City. No two days were the same.

My amazing experience was juxtaposed with the fact that the depths of the suffering in Gaza are beyond horrific, and I was sometimes uncomfortable with how dissonant my positive experiences of advocacy work were from the lived realities of the people I was advocating for. I was gaining deep personal fulfillment, finding my sense of purpose, and satisfying my intellectual curiosity with work that only exists because 2.1 million people (half of them children) are being intentionally sieged and starved to death while bombs rain down on their heads.

Confronting these difficult realities in my work changed the way I saw myself and my place in the world; as these kinds of experiences always do, it made me cognizant of my own privileges as a Westerner and conscious of my responsibility to use my privilege to help others in desperate situations. Even more than that, however, working on Gaza required me to internalize the universal, inalienable truth that we in the West all need to internalize: the only thing separating any of us from the world's most desperate people, from being a starving child or a grieving parent or a displaced refugee, is chance and the accident of birth. There is nothing innate separating us, and had we been born in a different time and place, we could all be in the same situation as the deeply suffering people of Gaza.

This is the realization that I came to as a result of my advocacy work, and that I will take with me into any future advocacy work. In order to engage in effective advocacy, we must learn to see our own faces, and the face of God, in the people we are advocating for. Advocacy must be motivated by a deep sense of shared humanity.

This fellowship allowed me to meet amazing people, have incredible experiences, and discover the fascinating world of faith-based policy work, but one of the things I am most grateful for is the ways in which it helped me to mature in my own understanding of the world, advocacy, and spirituality.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Advocacy Opportunities



Register Today

**September
26-28, 2025**

**First Presbyterian
Church, Lansing MI**

Presbyterian Advocacy Hour

A Monthly Online Gathering – Fourth Wednesday of Every Month Hosted by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The Presbyterian Advocacy Hour brings together committed people of faith each month to recharge your spirit and empower your advocacy with:

- Spiritual grounding
- In-depth analysis of pressing justice issues
- Practical tools for faithful action

Each session concludes with an optional 30-minute breakout for: Networking · Movement-building · Community connection



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We offer two special giving opportunities that directly fund the public witness of the church and the formation and training of young adult leaders.

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