

Making Noise for Justice

BY JYUNGIN LEE

A woman came up to me after I had spoken at a Presbyterian Women gathering. Among other things, I had talked about Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD), an event attended by PW and members of the PC(USA) every spring in Washington, DC. I had explained to the group that one of the issues EAD addressed in 2019 was voter suppression. The woman who approached me after my talk asked, "Aren't you being too political? Should we even be getting into politics?" Her question led us into a long conversation during dinner that evening.

Perhaps, when people hear that we are advocating for social issues in DC, their thoughts go directly to the phrase "separation of Church and State." They become uncomfortable and automatically assume that we are marching behind a banner with the PC(USA) seal and "getting into politics." The implication is that if we call ourselves people of faith, we should not be getting into the business that is decided in city halls, statehouses or in DC. But the policies made in these places and the way they are implemented impact our lives and our neighbors.

Jesus commanded that we love one another as he loved us. I often ask myself what loving one another looks like. Activist Cornel West says, "Justice is what love looks like in public."¹ But when we work for justice, we inevitably get into various aspects of the nation's politics. Making noise is often necessary in order to be heard.

For example, the nation's cash bail system allows pretrial freedom only for those who can pay their bail. When the PC(USA) General Assembly went to St. Louis in 2018, a number of Presbyterians protested this system. Presbyterian advocates participated in a march and raised more than \$47,000 to pay bail for



Presbyterians marched in the "Freedom Should Be Free—No Cash Bail" rally held in St. Louis, Missouri, during the 223rd General Assembly (2018).

people accused of misdemeanors who remained imprisoned because they could not afford to pay their bail.² This was a statement to the justice system to reform. We made noise to bring attention to the skewed system that hurts people with lower incomes, particularly Black and Latino sisters and brothers.³ We march and make noise because we love our neighbors as ourselves. We do it because God requires us to do justice.

There are plenty of examples in scripture where faithfully following God leads God's people into the middle of politics. We all know the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery. The Egyptian government subjugated and enslaved the Israelites. The king even ordered Israelite infant boys killed in an effort to control the population of Israelites. Then came the wise and nonviolent protest led by the midwives Shiphrah and Puah. The princess disobeyed the law imposed by the king (her father) and adopted the Hebrew boy whom she named Moses. Called by the Lord, Moses courageously stood and spoke before the Pharaoh, demanding an end

to the enslavement of the Israelites. He took his demand for the freedom of Israelites directly to the "White House"!

Diane Moffett, executive director and president of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, says, "If your faith doesn't inform politics, I wonder why." Our faith requires us to love one another. Our faith requires us to work for justice for all, especially for those who are poor, hungry, sick or marginalized. More than ever, we are called to be relevant in our world today and to apply our faith to policies and politics that make positive changes in people's lives.

JyungIn Lee is PW's 2018–2021 churchwide moderator.

Notes

1. Cornell West speech at Howard University, April 17, 2011; www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGqP7S_WO6o.
2. Rick Jones, "Hundreds of Presbyterians Join March to St. Louis' Justice Center," *General Assembly News*, June 19, 2018; www.pcusa.org/news/2018/6/19/hundreds-presbyterians-join-march-st-louis-justice/.
3. Adureh Onyekwere, "How Cash Bail Works," Brennan Center for Justice, December 10, 2019; www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/how-cash-bail-works.