

Collaborative Agenda for Environmental Stewardship

I. Our Common Call to Care for God's Creation

A. Biblical Principles

Blessing

"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers." (Ps. 24:1-2)

Every reflection on our care for the world we inhabit must begin with this fundamental principle. The earth is a gift from God, the Sovereign Creator, and we, God's creatures, are called to celebrate and honor its manifold glory. Our Westminster Shorter Catechism begins with the question: "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever" (Book of Confessions, 7.001). There is no more visible way for us to glorify God than in caring for the creation we see all around us, and of which we are a part.

Stewardship & Sustainability

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky."... And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth. ... Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so...And God saw that it was good. ... [And] "let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, ... and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image. ... God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Gen. 1:20-28)

Not only are we called to give thanks for God's glorious creation, we are given the task by God to oversee what God has created. We are, according to scripture, God's overseers and caretakers of the whole creation, which includes ourselves.

Unfortunately, we have too often misconstrued God's call to "subdue" and to "have dominion" as license to exploit the manifold gifts of creation. The sad results of our exploitation are all around us. As God's agents, rather than owners of the created order, we must understand that these two notions of "subduing" and exercising "dominion" derive directly from the sovereignty of God, and therefore must reflect the kind of just, loving oversight that is the very nature of God's "dominion" over us and the creation.

We are, at the most basic level, called to be just, loving stewards of all creation, serving and preserving the earth. (Gen 2:15). Our commitment must be to the sustainability that God has willed for God's creation, which means ensuring that all people and all of creation experience sufficiency in the resources they need to thrive, not only now, but for generations to come.

God's Concern for The Poor

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the

poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor. ... For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight. (Ps. 72:1-4, 12-14)

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (Jas. 2:15-17)

A central theme that runs throughout Scripture is God's concern for the poor, the most vulnerable, the ones Jesus called "*the least of these who are members of my family*" (Mt. 25:40). It is central to God's mandate for earthly rulers and a "bottom line" issue for God's people. We cannot faithfully address environmental concerns without acknowledging the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on those least able to defend themselves from the pollution of our air and water, the impact of many extractive industries, and the unjust distribution of wealth derived from the exploitation of our global resources.

Whatever plans we devise for addressing our environmental concerns, we must begin by asking how our actions will affect the most vulnerable of God's children and maintain our commitment to stand with them in the decisions we make.

Justice & Judgment

Now the Lord is about to lay waste the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants. ...The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and ... the inhabitants of the earth dwindled, and few people are left. (Isa. 24: 1, 4-6)

The Scriptures are clear. There are consequences when we forget our role as God's agents charged with care for the earth and we exploit the riches God has given us. It is no coincidence that the condemnations by the prophets in the face of the unfaithfulness of God's people and their leaders often include God's promise of terrible judgment made visible in the destruction of creation and the created order.

Restoration

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river, is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Rev. 22:1-2)

In contrast to the terms of judgment in the prophetic warnings, God promises both a "new heaven" and a "new earth," indeed a full restoration for all who have sought to be faithful in the stewardship of what God has created. That includes both our care for all sorts of human communities and individuals but also the created order that God declared good at the beginning.

It is this vision of God's future that sustains us and moves us forward in our caring for others and for the whole earth.

Response

As the people of God, we are therefore called to work, in response to God's calling, to see that all of God's creation is protected, nurtured, and enabled to reach the potential for which God has created

it. The concrete implications of that for those of us who are a part of God's family in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) include a call to prayer, education, advocacy, and other forms of direct action to glorify God in our care of creation.

What follows are theological and pragmatic guidelines that have been embraced over many years to guide us in our efforts to be God's faithful stewards. Also included are descriptions of some of the concrete ways that we who represent national agencies of our church have attempted to be faithful to our calling in this regard.

We urge all who are a part of our great church to join us in strengthening our witness to the world and in working for greater change in the care and keeping of the earth we inhabit.

B. Historical Witness

Caring for God's creation, particularly those who are most vulnerable to environmental injustice and climate change because of poverty, hunger, violence, health, or other circumstances, has been a long-time commitment of General Assemblies. General Assembly statements dating back to the 1950s on good stewardship of resources to more recent statements on clean water and sustainable farming are all a part of this long history of caring for all God's world. Particularly we lift up the ongoing witness of the 1990 and 2008 General Assemblies:

1990 Restoring Creation Policy

- God's work in creation is too wonderful, too ancient, too beautiful, too good to be desecrated.
- Restoring creation is God's own work in our time, in which God comes both to judge and to restore.
- The Creator-Redeemer calls faithful people to become engaged with God in keeping and healing the creation, human and non-human.
- Human life and well-being depend upon the flourishing of other life and the integrity of the life-supporting processes that God has ordained.
- The love of neighbor, particularly "the least" of Christ's brothers and sisters, requires action to stop the poisoning, the erosion, the wastefulness that are causing suffering and death.
- The future of our children and their children and all who come after is at stake.
- In this critical time of transition to a new era, God's new doing may be discerned as a call to earth-keeping, to justice and to community.

2008 Power to Change Policy

Energy choices, more than ever, are moral choices. As our planet grows warmer, our Christian witness must become bolder. As individuals, families, congregations, and church administrative bodies, we must become the change we want to see in our nation. We must put our own houses in order even as we call on our nation to accept its moral responsibility with regard to energy policy and climate change. Together we must radically reduce our carbon footprint.

II. Our Common Activities to Care for God's Creation

A. Individuals

Encouragement for individuals and families was included in the 2008 policy "Power to Change" and remains a relevant invitation today:

Excerpt from 2008 Power to Change Policy:

2. Urge individuals and families in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to do the following:

- a. Pray, asking for God's forgiveness and for the power and guidance to enjoy and care for creation in new ways.
- b. Study energy sources, their advantages and disadvantages, and the impacts they have on human communities, all species, and the ecological systems that support life on Earth.
- c. Practice energy conservation as a form of thanksgiving and sharing by adjusting thermostats, walking, biking, carpooling, using mass transit, turning off lights and appliances, recycling, minimizing the use of plastic water bottles and other wasteful packaging, etc.
- d. Purchase energy-efficient appliances and fuel-efficient vehicles for use at home and at work.
- e. Purchase sustainably grown food and other products from local producers in order to reduce the energy associated with producing, and shipping goods.
- f. Reduce consumption of meat because the production of grain fed to most livestock is fossil fuel-intensive and their waste emits methane, which is a potent greenhouse gas.
- g. Purchase Green-e certified energy and/or carbon offsets in the pursuit of a carbon-neutral lifestyle. Green-e certification ensures these payments result in additional installations of renewable energy generation capacity as well as verifiable and permanent environmental benefits.
- h. Invest personal funds in the renewable energy industry and also in companies that demonstrate concern for the well-being of their workers, their communities, and the environment.
- i. Advocate for change and leadership within the church and in all forms of government regarding energy policy and global climate change. (*Minutes*, 2008, Part I, pp. 54, 55, 934)

B. Congregations

PC(USA) congregations are engaged in a multitude of faithful actions to care for God's creation. In education, facilities and grounds, worship life, mission, and community outreach, churches are finding their own way to participate in environmental stewardship as part of daily Christian discipleship.

Earth care ministry in churches include:

- energy-efficiency audits and changes,
- EPA ENERGYSTAR certifications,
- donning solar panels or installing geothermal,
- doing international mission including environmental foci,
- planting community gardens,
- hosting Vacation Bible School,
- signing up for the new Presbyterian Foundation fossil-free investment vehicle,
- celebrating the new PILP loan that will encourage churches to make green changes, and more!

C. Church Agencies

Collectively, church agencies have implemented General Assembly recommendations from 2008 and continue to commit to new projects and collaborative efforts. After the 221st General Assembly (2014), all six agencies of the PC(USA) came together to share, learn, and vision this collaborative agenda and to report on past and current accomplishments, many of which are shared below.

The agencies offer program and resources that can help congregations, mid councils, and other PC(USA)-related entities become better stewards of the environment we share. They also provide models that together we can follow and implement throughout the church. Together, we can work towards the goal of high-efficiency facilities for all of our ministries, strive for carbon neutrality, and

advocate before local, state, and federal governments for public policies that encourage energy efficiency and renewable energy generation.

Presbyterian Investment & Loan Program, Inc.

For a number of years the Presbyterian Investment & Loan Program, Inc., (PILP) has been offering loans for churches to improve their energy efficiency. PILP is pleased to broaden this incentive in 2015, by partnering with churches across the denomination to help collectively reduce our carbon footprint through the new Restoring Creation Loan program. Loans are available to qualifying congregations engaged in projects that purposefully render our churches more energy efficient.

With lower interest rates and equity requirements, congregations will be encouraged to renovate their buildings using energy efficient products and renewable energy sources—saving on energy costs while reducing their carbon footprint. Projects could include: energy efficient lighting systems, solar panel additions, energy efficient heating, and cooling systems, geothermal systems.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation (Foundation) already has a few environmentally friendly options for investment: a positive investment of a solar installation in Jericho, and New Covenant Funds with a positive screen for companies working on sustainability. More recently, the Foundation has created an optional fossil-free investment option for individuals and congregations.

In addition:

- The Foundation's investment committee has allocated an initial investment of at least 1 percent of the Presbyterian Endowment Fund into investments that target climate change solutions.
- The Foundation has directed its investment managers to consider environmental factors in their security selection process. New Covenant Funds (a family of mutual funds created and sponsored by the Foundation) adopted ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) positive screening in 2014.
- The Foundation continues to work with MRTI in dialogue with energy companies to bring about change.
- The Foundation is utilizing a portion of the Church Loan Program, for which the Foundation is the fiduciary, for loans that implement renewable energy or carbon reduction solutions. This effort is in partnership with the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program, Inc., which administers the loans, and the Presbyterian Mission Agency's Mission Development Resource Committee, which sets terms for loans and grants.
- The Presbyterian Foundation subsidiary, New Covenant Trust Company, provides fossil-free managed portfolios to congregations, institutions, and other clients desiring a customized approach.

Office of the General Assembly (OGA)

Since the 1950s, General Assemblies have offered statements about wise use of natural resources, recycling, combatting climate change, curbing carbon emissions, protecting water, and more, and had a presence advocating for social witness policies in Washington D.C. since 1946. OGA has a commitment to negotiate sustainable conferencing spaces with facilities used for General Assemblies and Big Tent conferences, and has worked to increasingly print and use less paper and energy for its meetings.

In addition, OGA will:

- place a high priority on using a conference venue that offers recycling and other sustainability factors,
- ensure some level of recycling and other eco-friendly options even if the conference venue is unable to do so,
- offer optional carbon offset purchase for attendees each assembly and other churchwide gatherings it coordinates, and
- promote in its materials the way attendees can engage in the available earth-friendly options.

Presbyterian Mission Agency

In the Presbyterian Mission Agency, environmental justice ministry has been in effect for decades, including work by the Presbyterian Ministry at the UN, the Office of Public Witness, Mission Responsibility Through Investment, Presbyterian Hunger Program, and Environmental Ministries among others. Through these various offices, programs, and networks, PMA has been working on environmental justice, climate change, and other earth care issues since before the first Earth Day. In addition to public policy, the church has engaged corporations on climate change, attended every United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change “Conference of the Parties” (COP) meeting since their inception, published great worship and educational resources on a host of sustainability concerns, resourced numerous local congregations as well as individual Presbyterians and presbyteries on environmental ministry, worked in cooperation with ecumenical partners (such as National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group, now Creation Justice Ministries), offset carbon emissions of many General Assemblies (prior to attendees purchasing their own offset), and taken environmental study-action trips with Presbyterians.

Currently, with the Presbyterian Hunger Program/Environmental Ministries, the denomination has certified and resourced more than 170 [Earth Care Congregations](#). Through work with MRTI, PC(USA) has obtained commitments from corporations to reduce emissions, advocate for effective public policies, and invest in climate-friendly initiatives. Through the Office of Public Witness, all General Assembly commitments to care for God’s creation are communicated to Congress and the White House. Meanwhile, PMA is primarily housed at the national church office building at 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, Kentucky, which received the ENERGYSTAR designation in 2009.

In addition, PMA will:

- continue the long-held witness of earth care and environmental sustainability,
- update and maintain the ENERGYSTAR designation at 100 Witherspoon St.,
- recycle more, reduce paper use, and green the building and grounds, and
- support a Green Team of volunteer staff to organize various educational events and worship around care for God’s creation at the Center chapel.

Board of Pensions

The Board of Pensions has worked with MRTI for more than thirty years in the areas of sustainability and climate change and remains committed to that work. Specifically, the Board of Pensions supports MRTI with elected members who serve on the committee, with staff support from its investment area, and with direct funding of the staff and ministry of MRTI.

The Board of Pensions also votes more than six hundred proxies of publicly held companies each year, a process that is increasingly focused on environmental and social (E&S) issues. During the first half of 2014 (the last period for which data are available), Institutional Shareholder Services (ISS) reports that “a record number of E&S proposals were submitted at corporations.” According to ISS, more than 460 E&S resolutions were filed in 2014, a 15 percent increase from 2013 and a 25 percent increase from the number filed in 2012. Of those filed in 2014, a record 57 were directly related to

climate change. An additional 25 have already been withdrawn, which ISS notes, includes “some due to constructive engagement between the proponents and issuers.” These constructive engagements are the heart of the many successes MRTI has had in sustainability awareness and corporate care for the environment.

The Board of Pensions is a charter member of the Greater Philadelphia Green Business Program and achieved Silver Member status in 2010.

In addition to continuing these efforts, specifically including the continued funding to MRTI, the Board of Pensions is committed to further shift its business away from paper-based models to electronic communication and administration. An ongoing service delivery model redesign, slated for implementation in 2016, will both improve service to members and employers and dramatically reduce the Board of Pensions’ dependence on paper.

Presbyterian Publishing Corporation (PPC)

PPC has moved to printing most of its title on a print-on-demand basis, only printing books as they are purchased and thereby reducing waste. Contracts are no longer printed and mailed but rather emailed, saving paper and carbon pollution from shipping. Production no longer prints out and mails manuscripts back and forth between editor, copyeditor, and author but uses electronic communication in most all instances, again saving paper and carbon pollution. Cover material for the latest Presbyterian hymnal was partly made of recycled plastic.

From this point forward, PPC will continue to:

- utilize production methods that are as environmentally friendly as possible,
- investigate ways to use digital means of communication, and
- publish books and resources that help readers understand their vital place in the care of God’s gift of creation.

III. Resources for Ongoing Work

A. Bibliography of works from Westminster John Knox Press

Books

[50 Ways to Help Save the Earth](#)—2009

[Darwin, Divinity, and the Dance of the Cosmos](#)—2007

[Renewing The Face Of The Earth: A Theological and Pastoral Response to Climate Change](#)—2008

[Inhabiting Eden: Christians, The Bible, and The Ecological Crisis](#)—2013

Downloadable “Thoughtful Christian” Studies

[The Global Study Pack](#) (six sessions—all available for individual purchase as well)

[What Would Jesus Drive?](#)—2006

[An Inconvenient Truth](#)—2007

[Genesis and the Goodness of Creation](#)—2011

[What the Bible Says About Ecology](#)—2012

Serve, Not Rule—2014

(Above resources linked also from

<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/environment/education/>)

B. PC(USA) Policy Statement Highlights

<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/environment/pcusa-environmental-policy/>

C. Social Witness Policy Compilation

Search the [Social Policy Compilation](#), [GA Minutes](#), or [PCUSA Constitution](#) here.

[http://index.pcusa.org/NXT/gateway.dll/socialpolicy/1?fn=default.htm\\$f=templates\\$vid=pcdocs:10.1048/Enu](http://index.pcusa.org/NXT/gateway.dll/socialpolicy/1?fn=default.htm$f=templates$vid=pcdocs:10.1048/Enu)

Rationale

Noting the deep concern about urgent environmental challenges expressed by many commissioners at the 221st General Assembly (2014), chief executives of the six agencies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) appointed a working group to develop a joint response. The group—consisting of at least one staff member per agency—was asked to craft a positive statement of what each agency, and the agencies together, have done and plan to do regarding environmental stewardship. This document is designed to call attention to ongoing efforts by the PC(USA) to confront the underlying causes of climate change, and to resources available through the six agencies to congregations, mid councils, and other mission and ministry groups wishing to join in the effort. The working group, meeting together regularly over a period of nine months, has produced the following document—“Collaborative Agenda on Environmental Stewardship.” It has been reviewed by each of the agency boards, which have each endorsed the document as a whole and recommended that the General Assembly also endorse it as a helpful resource to the whole denomination. This effort is particularly noteworthy as it is unusual for an item of business to come to the assembly from a collaboration of all six agencies.