



Heartland Presbytery
Mission Outreach and Social Justice Division

Overture. _____ overtures the 2XXth General Assembly (2012) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to do the following:

1. Reaffirm the statements of the 183rd, 187th, 192nd, 193rd, 195th, 196th, 199th, 201st, 202nd, 204th, 205th, 206th, 208th, 210th, 211th, 213th, 215, 216th, 218th and 219th General Assemblies (1971, 1975, 1980, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2010) reflecting the determination of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that protection of the environment is an essential part of the Christian faith.

Direct the Executive Director of the General Assembly Mission Council to support the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) by affirming its authority to take action that will protect public health and the environment and by advocating for adequate funding to assure EPA's ability to take this action.

Rationale:

The EPA was established on December 7, 1970 under the Nixon administration. Recently, funding for the EPA has been cut significantly and amendments to various regulations have been proposed to restrict the EPA's authority to protect public health and the environment.

The mission of EPA is to protect human health and the environment. EPA's purpose is to ensure that:

- all Americans are protected from significant risks to human health and the environment where they live, learn and work;
- national efforts to reduce environmental risk are based on the best available scientific information;
- federal laws protecting human health and the environment are enforced fairly and effectively;
- environmental protection is an integral consideration in U.S. policies concerning natural resources, human health, economic growth, energy, transportation, agriculture, industry, and international trade, and these factors are similarly considered in establishing environmental policy;
- all parts of society -- communities, individuals, businesses, and state, local and tribal governments -- have access to accurate information sufficient to effectively participate in managing human health and environmental risks;

- environmental protection contributes to making our communities and ecosystems diverse, sustainable and economically productive; and
- the United States plays a leadership role in working with other nations to protect the global environment. (from the EPA website)

As Christians we are charged with “loving your neighbor as yourself.” Mark 12:31 A tangible way to do this is to prevent sickness by reducing pollution in the air. The EPA passed the Clean Air Act in 1970 which in the year 1990 prevented

- 205,000 premature deaths
- 672,000 cases of chronic bronchitis
- 21,000 cases of heart disease
- 843,000 asthma attacks
- 10.4 million lost I.Q. points in children – from lead reduction
- 18 million child respiratory illnesses

Examples of specific actions taken against the EPA as cited in the Christian Science Monitor (April 5, 2011):

An amendment proposed by Rep. John Carter (R) of Texas would prohibit any federal funds from being used to implement, administer, or enforce the EPA's new clean-air rule to regulate cement-plant emissions. EPA is set to soon begin requiring cuts in hazardous emissions of nearly one-third, or about 90 tons, annually nationwide and cut airborne particulate matter by 5,200 tons, or one-quarter overall.

An amendment sponsored by Rep. David McKinley (R) of West Virginia would prohibit the EPA from using its funds to develop or enforce any regulation that identifies or lists wastes produced by the burning of fossil fuels – such as ash or slag – as hazardous waste. The EPA currently does not define these wastes as hazardous, though some are regulated when used in landfills or to fill mines.

An amendment sponsored by Rep. Ted Poe (R) of Texas would prohibit EPA use of funds to implement or enforce any statutory or regulatory requirement pertaining to emissions of greenhouse gases.

Rep. Morgan Griffith (R) of Virginia proposes an amendment to prohibit the use of funds by the EPA, the Army Corps of Engineers, or the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement to carry out or enforce any policy set forth in a recent water-quality memorandum issued by the EPA. The Obama administration has been withholding permits for surface mining operations – which environmentalists call mountaintop-removal mining – in order to study the effects of the process on streams and wetlands.

Rep. David McKinley (R) of West Virginia proposed an amendment that would prohibit the EPA administrator from using funds to carry out Section 404(c) of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act. If it becomes law, environmentalists say, the EPA would lose oversight authority to revoke or veto permits granted by the Army Corps of Engineers to allow coal-mining companies to put fill and other debris into streams.

On January 31, 2011, John Barrasso of Wyoming introduced a new bill making it impossible for the federal government to do anything about climate change under any of the nation's existing environmental laws. Specifically, the Barrasso's bill, "Defending America's Affordable Energy and Jobs Act," would block federal regulations under the Clean Air Act, the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act.

We in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have of a long history of supporting actions that would protect the environment.

Historical References

In 1954, the Presbyterian Church stated:

We call upon the Christian conscience to recognize that our stewardship of the earth and water involves both a land-use program that recognizes the interdependence of soil, water and man and the development of a responsible public policy which will resist the exploitation of land, water, and other natural resources, including forests, for selfish purposes and maintain intelligent conservation for the sustenance of all living creatures through future generations (PCUSA, 1954, p. 198).

This stewardship commitment has been repeated and reaffirmed by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its predecessors, as follows:

1967 The Confession of 1967 stresses the justice of sharing resources and the interdependence of resources and living creatures.

1971 The 183rd General Assembly accepted the Christian Responsibility for Environmental Renewal statement that calls for a new order of values based on an "eco-ethic" and a Statement on Environmental Renewal. (UPCUSA, 1971, pp. 578-583)

1975 A recommendation is made to the 187th General Assembly to affirm advocacy of the protection of wildlife areas and parklands. (UPCUSA, 1975, p.59)

1980 The 192nd General Assembly votes to (1) develop educational resources on the adverse impact that careless technology has on the environment and health of the unborn; (2) instruct the Board of Investment Committee to review corporate responsibility regarding manufacture of dioxins. (PCUS, 1980, p.56)

1981 The 193rd General Assembly pledges support of the United Nations Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade, 1981-1990, calling upon Presbyterians to develop lifestyles that are consistent with the necessity to conserve water. (UPCUSA, 1981, p. 254)

1983 The 195th General Assembly urges the session of each congregation in the Presbyterian Church (USA) to consider making a "Commitment to Peacemaking" that included "making peace with the earth -- involve the congregation in efforts to protect and restore the environment."

1984 The 196th General Assembly calls upon Congress of the United States to reduce the emissions of sulfur dioxide and the oxides of nitrogen to a level that will protect the most sensitive environment and states that human stewardship is not a "dominion of mastery" and calls us to exercise respect for the integrity of natural systems and for the limits that nature places on economic growth and material consumption. (PC(U.S.A.), 1984, p.349)

1987 The 199th General Assembly votes to urge the United States government to assure acceptable disposal sites for high-level nuclear waste. It also votes to urge each Presbytery and local church to encourage and support alternatives to pesticides and support the victims of pesticide poisoning. (PC(U.S.A.), 1987, p. 796)

1988 The Environmental Justice Office is created to study past environmental policies of the United Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Presbyterian Church in the United States to create a combined report of environmental concerns for Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The Environmental Justice Office is a ministry of the General Assembly Council of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), lodged in the National Ministries Division, Social Justice Program Area, and is now actively involved in creation care and environmental justice issues.

1989 The 201st General Assembly calls for governments to strengthen regulations and enforcement regarding transportation of oil and hazardous substances, in response to the Exxon-Valdez tanker spill in 1989. (PC(U.S.A.), 1989, p. 642)

1990 The 202nd General Assembly passes "Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice" affirming "creation cries out in this time of ecological crises," calling the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to respond to this cry and engage in an effort to make the 1990s the "turnaround decade," providing the foundation for the work of the Environmental Justice Office. Also, the 202nd General Assembly calls attention to the problem of global warming and encourages the United States government to take steps toward incorporating environmental damage and depletion into "full-cost pricing." (PC(U.S.A.), 1990, p.646-670). The Affirmation of Faith from that General Assembly noted that "Restoring Creation is God's own work in our time",...and that "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."

1992 The 204th General Assembly directs all future General Assemblies to print all official reports on recycled and recyclable paper and to direct all related bodies to use recycled and recyclable paper for all reports and publication. (PC(U.S.A.), 1992, p.846)

1993 The 205th General Assembly reaffirms the "Call to Restore Creation", receives the document "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity" as a prophetic word to the church, urges President Clinton to follow new policies from the Earth Summit and directs the Social

Justice and Peacemaking Unit to advocate for policies that will reduce carbon dioxide emissions. (PC(U.S.A.), 1993, pp. 896-897)

1994 The 206th General Assembly, within the context of its "Resolution on the United States in Its Asia-Pacific Relations", listed five basic principles by which past General Assemblies have been guided related to international affairs. One of the principles, and the resolution that follow it, relates specifically to the environment. "The General Assembly has advocated new understanding of the relationship among human life, institutions, and the total stewardship and care for the planet, which is the common heritage of all peoples ."(PC(U.S.A.), 1994, pg. 310)

1996 The 208th General Assembly adopts the paper Hope for a Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development as policy for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Just and sustainable human development is the comprehensive enhancement of the quality of life for all, present and future; it necessarily involves the integration of economic, social, political, cultural, ecological, and spiritual dimensions of being.

1998 The 210th General Assembly calls upon the United States to ratify the protocol negotiated in Kyoto and urges Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregations and institutions to pursue energy efficiency and conservation in their buildings and property.

1999 The 211th General Assembly again calls upon the U.S. to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, urges the United States to go beyond Kyoto targets for carbon dioxide emission reductions, directs the Presbyterian Center in Louisville and all other properties of the General Assembly to minimize fossil fuel energy (along with urging local congregations to do the same), and directs the General Assembly to promote education regarding global warming and other environmental concerns. (PC(U.S.A.), 1999, pp. 669-670)

2001 The 213th General Assembly calls to issue and disseminate the Call to Halt Mass Extinction. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) calls Presbyterians, other citizens, governments, and societal institutions to face the severity of this threat and to take steps to prevent mass extinction and preserve the biodiversity essential to the flourishing of life. (PC(U.S.A.), 2001, pp. 473-475)

2003 The 215th General Assembly calls on the United States government to join the world effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to develop and enact a national emergency response, underwritten by law, with adequate financial support, and economic enforcement mechanism, to be fully functioning by 2005, with targeted reductions by that time. (PC(U.S.A.), 2003, p. 617)

2006. The 216th General Assembly asked its members to "make a bold witness by aspiring to carbon neutral lives". It was noted that "without significant changes in public policy and corporate behavior to complement actions of personal discipleship, massive and irreversible climate changes will only accelerate over the next century." (PC(U.S.A.) Memorandum; Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy Dec 4, 2006)

2008. The 218th General Assembly approved the study and recommendations of "The Power to Change: US Energy Policy and Global Warming" along with urging individuals and

families in the PCUSA to conserve energy and promote energy efficiency through changes in behavior.

2010 The 219th General Assembly approved an overture from the Presbytery of Charlotte entitled "**On Lifting Up the 'Call to Restore' Creation**" reaffirming the Call to Restore Creation from the 1990 policy "Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice"; commends churches that are working to care for God's earth; and encourages churches, members, and institutions to "adopt institutional and individual lifestyles reflecting greater stewardship of resources, particularly in energy consumption." The overture was amended to include the affirmation that "concern for God's creation is, for every Christian, an essential way of living faithfully"; to affirm that the best available science should shape the direction of environmental programming and policy; and that access to potable water is a human right.

Rationale: The overture was drafted by Earthkeepers, a mission unit of MOSJ and Heartland Presbytery's chapter of the national group, Presbyterians for Restoring Creation.