



Presbyterians for Earth Care 2014 Advent Devotional

*Prepare ye the way of the Lord...make straight in the desert a highway for our God
(Isaiah 40:3b)*

Presbyterians for Earth Care presents our Advent/Christmas devotions based on the work of PEC throughout 2014 as we have joined members and other partners in seeking eco-justice. We have asked members of PEC to weave reflections of their witness in that great work and integrate it with the beauty, hope and mystery that is coming as we anticipate The Gift, The Christ.

Our offerings include the work and wisdom of our indigenous brothers and sisters all over the US, including Alaska; the work of those deeply imbedded in Advocacy (including advocacy of Sacred Water as we have adopted water advocacy as a focus beginning in 2015); and more. They include reflections of our life as a PEC community, including virtual community; our General Assembly relationship including overtures; and some new and exciting ideas for individual and congregational witness in lifestyle integrity and lifestyle simplification. These ways of being integrate beautifully with Christ's humble birth and life as he taught ways of being and living, seeking justice, compassion, and loving-kindness.

Thanks to all who have prepared their devotional reflections from pre-Advent to Epiphany, and to all of you who are sharing in reading and reflecting.

Let us prepare.

Seeking the Christ of all Creation,
Diane Waddell, Moderator
Presbyterians for Earth Care

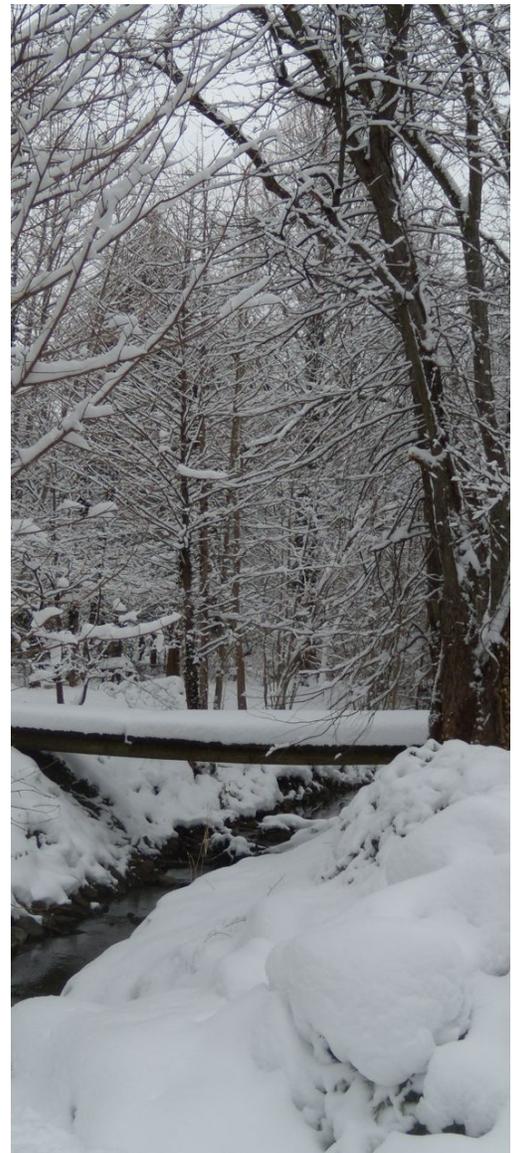


Photo by Jane Laping

Pre-Advent Devotional
Under Our Feet

By Richard Krajeski and Kristina Peterson, Pastors of Bayou Blue Presbyterian Church (LA)

“Teacher I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said, “Foxes have holes and the bird of the air have nests but the HUMAN ONE has no place to lay his head.” (Matthew 8:20)

Sarah and Abraham were promised a new homeland
And we watch our ancestral homeland vanish under our feet
Miriam and Moses were led to the hoped-land, free of oppression
And we watch our holy-land sink under our feet
Jeremiah and Isaiah heard a word of return and renewal-land
And we watch our return-land crumble under our feet
Ruth had the new home welcome of Naomi
And we face unwelcoming-places
We stand and watch our near-place, our know-place,
our liberating-place, our history-place, and our hope-place
disappear under our feet
We cannot return to what is-not
We have no word of promise to our future
We have no word of milk and honey
We have no word of return to what we have loved for generations
We have no guide to a welcoming place
Our named places have been declared no-places*
Kivalina, Leeville, Newtok, Isle de Jean Charles crumbling into
water
Once again we are asked to cast our nets aside and follow
Lord Jesus we know! We know with you what it means to have “no place to lay your head!”



Prayer: Creator God, forgive us our daily greed that has destroyed your creation, the very land beneath our feet. Help us to take off our shoes and realize that we are standing on your Holy Ground and before you. Help us to see that all Creation is yearning to teach us its ways. Open our eyes, our hearts and light our way this Advent that we no longer will stumble in darkness but will be liberated by the light of all Creation. In Christ's Name we pray. Amen.

First Week of Advent
A Report Card: Working to make straight in the desert a highway
By Holly Hallman, PEC Vice Moderator

Prepare ye the way of The Lord...make straight in the desert a highway for our God.. (Isaiah 40:3b)

Two years ago the Presbyterians for Earth Care Steering Committee met at Stony Point for their annual retreat. Rick Ufford-Chase joined us for a day and after reflecting on who PEC is and how we work he made some suggestions. His ideas seemed like good ones! He thought we might bring together many overtures for the General Assembly (GA) in Detroit—enough, in fact, to have a committee just for issues around the environment. Underneath the obvious goodness of such an endeavor was a more subtle idea. He was really inviting the steering committee to be less of an advisory group and more of a team of front-line activists. That was and is a big shift. It started us dreaming!

All sorts of ideas flew on to paper and lined our walls at Stony Point. Our resounding “yes” was followed by “how?” We affirmed our “yes” last year at our Ferncliff retreat. And, it is time to reflect on where we are in that journey! First, we didn’t flood GA with dozens of environmental overtures. We took three that our steering committee members wrote and one that we supported and participated in crafting. All of what we took to Detroit got a great hearing! Two of the four were passed in committee by such a margin that they went on the consent agenda. The third and fourth, got a lot of attention and were argued on the floor of the assembly.

Our booth at GA was well used. We shared our space with Fossil Free PCUSA as a way of supporting their work. Off-site we had a luncheon with Bill McKibben (by video) and Fletcher Harper of Green Faith as our keynoters.

And here is the best part. We **are** growing our advocacy. We have two sub-groups on the west coast. Yukon Presbyterians for Earth Care did a regional conference in September and is looking at the long list of issues that are unique to the polar regions of our globe. Presbyterians for Earth Care Northwest is addressing the Carbon Corridor that is erupting across the shaky rail lines of the area that suddenly are seen as links for coal and oil exports to Asia.

We are still working on the “how” mentioned above. We are few and the issues are many. For most of us we know “meeting” to mean something with eye contact. In a world challenged by the overuse of fossil fuels for travel, that has to change. We are connecting more and more often—we have to because there is such an urgency to what we are about—and we are using free conference calls, lots of them. We are using email groups, list serves and Skype. The indigenous voices that have spoken to us this year have all admonished us to listen! That takes on new meaning as we work hard to hear each other without the eye contact, body language and subtle intonation that are so much a part of our cultural communications.



Prayer: My prayer is that we are “hearing” you, that you are finding groups and issues that you will lend your voice to, and that PEC will be in your heart through this Advent season as we await the gift that is born to us again each Christmas.

Second Week of Advent
The Gifts of Water: A Kiss from God

By Ilarion (Larry) Mercurieff, Aleut
With introduction and prayer by Rev. Dr. Curt Karns

*The whole creation waits with eager longing...groaning in labor pains...awaiting redemption.
(Romans 8:18-25)*

This year PEC is contemplating the blessing that water is to the world, and the necessity for people of faith to join with others in advocating for a stewardship that better cares for water. In this Advent season of waiting and meditation I therefore asked Larry Mercurieff, a Native American elder, to reflect with me on the sacredness of earth's water.

"I was walking along the beach one day and I noticed that the longer I stayed there the better I felt. I realized the ions in the water that were doing this magic. I wondered how this could be and thought that this was a kiss from God. God wanted to remind us humans of the divine, and so he kissed the universe. The universe sent the kiss everywhere until it hit our galaxy and touched everything. The kiss went to the moon, which then sent the kiss to the waters of Earth. The waters of Earth moved in response, creating swells and waves which came ashore in a way that created these ions which then touched me, making me feel inexplicably good. These waters are everywhere: the brooks and streams, the rivers, this ice, the snow, the rains, the seas, and our bodies. A kiss from God.

"The waters of the riverways and the oceans were and are sacred to all our peoples. Let us remember all her sacred aspects. Water cleanses our bodies, heals open wounds and gives us the sustenance our bodies require to live. Water purifies everything it comes into contact with. Water was and is used in our sacred ceremonies for the life-giving force of

Mother Earth. All creatures, including human beings depend on water to survive and thrive.

"Water teaches us many lessons. We are taught: how not to fight the flow of the river of life, but to go with it; how being fluid and soft can even mold and shape the greatest of mountains and boulders; that water reflects our moods and emotions. Walking next to the water raises our spirits, even when we are feeling downtrodden. Being in the water always refreshes us. Our bodies are made mostly of water. We are born in a salty sea of water in the womb...

"Water comes to us in the forms all creatures need at the times they need it, be it snow, rain, ice, or fog. Without the ice we would not have the polar bear or the permafrost. Without snow we would not have creatures like the snowshoe hare, the rivers, and the plants would not have a coat to wear while they sleep through the winter. Without rain, we would not have fresh water or lakes, or fertile lands where berries and all the bounty of the land we depend on grow, including all the healing and food plants, vegetables, and fruits...

"We are nothing without the sacred waters of Mother Earth. And so, our ancestors built craft in ways taught us by the seas, rivers, and oceans...ways to create beauty and function to honor the waters, and ways of respect, reciprocity, reverence, and humility in the face of the awesomeness of the gifts, wisdom, and power of water..."

Prayer: Holy God, teach us "to listen and conduct ourselves correctly to receive the gifts and wisdom of water or we will lose that which we are given, and let the Elders lead us in the ways of the Real Human Being. To forget is to bring about our own destruction."

Third Week of Advent

BOTH-AND

By Mary Porter, Hospice Music Practitioner, Retired Pastor

*The Lord has sent me to comfort all who mourn. . . . I the LORD love justice.. (Isa 61:1-2, 8)
Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing, (1 Thess 5:16-17)*

Preparation for the in-breaking Christ calls for a BOTH-AND orientation: attention to loss AND hope, mourning AND rejoicing, action AND prayer. My recent learning includes:

- PEC eco-tour and climate change conference in Alaska in early September. Beginning and ending each day in worship (*rejoicing*) we focused on Signposts of *Hope* and agreed to immediate concrete *actions*--using refillable water bottles, eating locally grown and low on the food chain (vegetarian).
- September 21, People's Climate March. The exuberant, sometimes boisterous *activists* paused --all 310,000+ of us--for a moment of eerie silence, *mourning* for those affected by climate change.
- Sidelines of the march. One group remained in silence, legs crossed Eastern style, meditating/*praying*--holding the psychic space for protesters.

As we work for justice AND pray without ceasing (individually and communally), I suggest another BOTH-AND; that along with our revealed texts of scripture we read (with the help of contemporary science) the texts of creation, what Michael Dowd and others call *Big History*, the "13.8 billion-year science-based tale of cosmic genesis—from the formation of galaxies and the origin of life to the development of consciousness and culture, and onward..."



Through *Big History* we learn that we are made of stardust and that we're related to everything.* What a profound sense of kinship might overcome us with such a reading! (*Who is my neighbor?*) What awe and reverence might bowl us over! (*Oh God, how majestic is your name in all the earth! What are humans that you are mindful of them!*) I suggest that such dual reading provides a firm basis for dealing with BOTH the challenges of our times (fossil fuels, water, climate change) AND entering into more intimate communion with God and all that God made and loves.

**Dowd, Michael. "Evidential Mysticism and the Future of Earth," in Oneing: An Alternative Orthodoxy, A Publication of the Center for Action and Contemplation, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2014), 18.*

Prayer: God, who never ceases to awe and amaze, heal us, guide us, use us.

Use our failures as compost for the new Earth you are creating. In the name of the Christ in whom all things are created and through whom all things hold together. Amen.

Fourth Week of Advent
Permaculture Principles: A natural path in the desert
By Cindee Karns

*A voice cries out, "In the wilderness clear a way for the LORD;
construct in the desert a road for our God." (Isaiah 40:3) (NET)*

Finding your way in the desert is hard enough, but building a road? Seriously? And then once it's built, how do we, as Christians, prepare the way for others to follow? It may be the most important question of our time!

Western culture often has a "we'll get her done" attitude. The bigger the machine, the faster we can work and we will all be amazed at the result. A road can be built pretty fast, but we never stop and ask if that is the best way to do it. So let's ask! How do we make ready a path in the desert?



Source: Off-road.com

We certainly have enough stuff to get her done. But sometimes it feels like we are all alone--- wandering lost in a desert of STUFF without knowing where to start. This stuff has been mass-produced, is toxic, has a high-embodied energy (both in manufacture and in transport) and is bound for the landfill. What if we ignored our stuff to make a natural path in the desert? What if we used permaculture principles?

Permaculture, formed from the words permanent and culture, is most simply, "a philosophy of working with, rather than against nature." It's a much more earth-friendly, indigenous view.

It's truly amazing what happens to us when we interact with nature and take our place as stewards of the planet.

" – we come into right relationship ...by taking our rightful place and answering the endless questions human beings have been asking for hundreds of years about the meaning of our lives....we thrive by helping everything around us thrive. By coming into right relationship with the world, we find inner peace..."
[\(Tippett, 1994\)](#)

There are already many people traversing the permaculture path, who are creating truly interdependent relationships with nature. The path starts with these ethics: Earth Care; People Care; and Fair Shares. There is also a set of principles to guide us. We will need many people to help us make this path smooth. The ability to get on this new permaculture path may ultimately prove to be the key to our survival on the planet. Here is an amazing [example](#) of using permaculture in the desert.



Source:
travelswithoutpants.com

Prayer: Creator God, we know you want us to thrive in abundance. Help us begin today by walking the path and inviting others to walk with us so that we take our places as stewards of the planet and make ready the way, even as we pray "thy kingdom come."

Christmas Day The Word Spoken

By Bryce Wiebe, Mission Associate, Presbyterian Hunger Program

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-14)

John's Gospel begins with a prologue befitting a great legend or epic. They are lines heard best in the dim light of a Christmas Eve service and intentionally stir up images of the first creation story in Genesis, where the Spirit hovers over the deep and speaks all that there is into being; "Let there be...light". In the Gospel's telling, the ignored character of the first creation drama, was the Word itself; the *logos*, but the *logos* is God as well. In other words, God is what God speaks. *Logos* has a depth of meaning beyond "word", beyond the atom of language. It was a wisdom and a harmony. It was the reason and order present in the universe. It had form and sound and function.

In the drama of our life together, we have much to learn from this text. Starting with our own words. The translators of scripture have

beautifully rendered *logos* as "Word". It reminds us of two things: First, we are reminded that words are an important part of bringing about a new creation. Our own words can be generative and uplifting, filling the world with more light and more life, or they can tear down and destroy. Second, the Word spoken by God does not stop at language and does not stop when it is not received or heard. The Word of God materializes; becomes the stuff of creation, and is lived out. As we speak the words of care and compassion for God's creation entrusted to our care, we cannot do so without embodying that care and compassion ourselves. We should never speak our words about climate change and the need for Christian simplicity without becoming them. We should have them become flesh. They should be our life, and that life is a light to all people.

Prayer: God, who speaks to us and is spoken to us, bring about new life. Speak to us a creating Word that will live in our bodies, in our communities and your world. Grant us wisdom and strength to speak up for the marginalized earth and her people. May we follow the Christ, given to us this day, following along the way he leads. Amen.

Epiphany
Light Shining in the Darkness
By Sue Smith, PEC Treasurer and GreenFaith Fellow

*Arise, shine; for your light has come, and
the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
² For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.
³ Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
(Isaiah 60:1-3)*

We have ended our season of expectation – the anticipation of the birth of Jesus Christ. His is the light now shining on our world. This year, as we enter this season of Epiphany, darkness is covering the earth. We continue to experience environmental degradation while the countries of the world do not negotiate a strong climate agreement. Greenhouse gases continue to be released into the air; the rivers are polluted; the seas are rising; there is drought; there are floods.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we need to shine his light. We need nations to come to our light and kings to the brightness of our dawn. This season of Epiphany is the season Jesus did his ministry. Our ministry is needed to bring nations and kings together and take climate change seriously. We started with the People's Climate March in September. It was an exciting day in New York City. The faith community was shining a light and lending a voice. But our ministry does not end with the Climate March. We need to hold vigils; we need to worship; we need to provide education; we need to pray. We need to take action.

As individuals we can pray, we can write letters and we can sign the ourvoices.net petition addressed to the world leaders. We can be in community with others to urge our leaders to develop a strong climate change treaty, and most importantly to take action on behalf of God's creation.

Rulers and kings need to hear our moral voice. We need to use that voice to call out for the health and well-being of the creation. We need to use that voice in worship and in song. As this season of Epiphany begins, shine your light on the darkness.



Presbyterians at the People's Climate March in New York City on September 13, 2014

Prayer: Dear Lord, Give us strength to shine our light on your creation. Give kings and rulers ears to hear and wisdom to work together to negotiate a strong climate treaty. You created creation good. Help us to keep creation good. Be in our midst as we worship and minister in your name. Amen.

Contributor Biographies



Richard Krajeski and Kristina Peterson, pastors of Bayou Blue Presbyterian Church (LA), are active in environmental and social justice ministries and write in areas of sustainable development, and ethics deriving from their long pastorates in the mountains of Appalachia. They helped develop the Wetlands Theological Education Project, a project of the Presbytery of South Louisiana, and are fellows in the Society for Applied Anthropology.



Holly Hallman lives on the Puget Sound in the Northwest. She spends a lot of time “listening” to the voices there that human ears find it hard to hear. She is so grateful for the teachers who found her and her husband this year. Their nations include the Lummi, Yupik, Yuchi and Aleut.



Larry Mercurieff has almost four decades of experience serving his people, the Aleuts of the Pribilof Islands and other indigenous peoples locally, statewide, nationally and internationally. For his entire career, Mercurieff has been a passionate advocate for indigenous rights/wisdom, and harmonious relationship with the Earth Mother. Currently, Mercurieff is an independent consultant, working on projects related to the resilience of rural Alaskan communities and assessing academic needs of Alaska-based wildlife co-management organizations.



The Rev. Dr. Curt Karns is a stalwart steward of creation. He and his wife live in Alaska’s only bioshelter, are teacher and host for the Alaska Permaculture Learning Center, and were the primary founders of the Yukon Presbyterians for Earth Care. Curt is the executive presbyter of the Presbytery of Yukon, which oversees 21 PC(USA) congregations, including eight that are not on any road system. Curt is a son, sibling, cousin, husband, father and grandfather. His family hunts, fishes, gathers, gardens, and otherwise finds every excuse to celebrate and live-out a thriving relationship with God’s beautiful, beloved creation.



Mary McQueen Porter is a retired pastor and a former director/chaplain of Ruth and Naomi Senior Outreach, the non-profit in Birmingham, Alabama, she co-founded. Grandmother, poet, Certified Sage-ing Leader and Certified Music Practitioner, she leads workshops in Conscious Aging and works part-time for VITAS Hospice, playing Celtic harp at the bedside.



Cindee Karns is a permaculture designer/instructor in Alaska and the owner/operator of Alaska's only [Bioshelter](#).



Bryce Wiebe serves as the Associate for Enough for Everyone within the Presbyterian Hunger Program. Before moving to Louisville, Bryce served as Christian Educator at First Presbyterian church in New Haven, Connecticut, where he wrote children's plays, developed educational materials, created worship experiences, and led Bible studies that engaged issues of economic justice. Bryce holds an MDiv from Yale Divinity School and BA degrees in Music and Business Administration from Hastings College and retains part-ownership of a small, sourdough bread bakery in Nebraska.



Sue Smith is a member of First Presbyterian of Rumson, NJ. She is the Treasurer of Presbyterians for Earth Care and a GreenFaith Fellow. She is currently a student at New Brunswick Theological Seminary.